

spheres

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Media and
Migration

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EDITORIAL COLLECTIVE

#4 MEDIA AND MIGRATION

We are witnessing an acceleration of the deployment of digital technologies in border regimes as well as in migratory practices. This does not necessarily make borders ‘smarter’, but it points to spiraling dynamics between border and migration practices to which digital technologies prove central. Technologies deployed by European countries to manage the so-called “refugee crisis” – from fences to the Eurosur drone system – have their reverse side. While digital networks facilitate surveillance systems, they also foster mobility and challenge border regimes at the same time. Persisting migration in defiance of ever more sophisticated border technologies demonstrate the possible detour of control systems. In our fourth issue of *spheres*, we investigate the significance of digital technologies for migration and the relation between migratory regimes and practices on the one hand, and digital cultures and infrastructures on the other.

In which ways do systems of big data and border regimes interact? What kind of devices and actors cooperate to guarantee the functioning of the complex socio-technical networks of surveillance and control? And what kinds of processes of orchestration, translation and coordination do they necessitate? Helle Stenum looks at how a global biometric system of border control and surveillance is developed in close cooperation between IT and security industries, academic engineering and social scientists, and governments around the world. She discusses both recent technological developments in EU migration management, as well as the historical context of biometric technology to explore the apparent biometric divide between citizens and migrants. Brigitta Kuster’s contribution illustrates that biometric applications are part of ongoing research into smart border solutions in Europe. Her ethnographic approach to the The Research Projects Conference of the European Association for Biometrics, sheds light on a whole arrangement of contexts, which can be identified as information and

control continuums, in relation to the techno-social formations of the European Border.

Still, this increasingly digitalized and securitized border regime does not prevent migration – it does not prevent people from migrating. And migrants also use technologies to encounter and subvert this regime. How do refugees and migrants use and appropriate technologies of mobility, such as smart phones, maps and Facebook, and develop strategies of counter-surveillance to cross borders? To what extent do migrant individuals and communities participate in the production and transformation of transnational digital networks? Maria Ullrich's contribution explores new forms of media use by migrants and refugees focusing on the so-called Balkan route, during and after the "summer of migration" in 2015. As Sandro Mezzadra points out in his comment on Ullrich's article, there is already some research on the "connected migrant"¹, on how migrants use digital technologies to create and sustain transnational networks and spaces, to counter isolation in the diaspora and in detention centres. Ullrich's article concentrates on the passage of migration itself and highlights the contested process of the formation of "mobile commons" and "migrant digitalities"² that support and facilitate border crossings and geographical mobility. In his comment to her article, Mezzadra situates the growing digitalisation of border regimes as well as of migratory practices in processes of "logistification". This logistification refers to the reorganisation of global supply chains or of urban spaces, with a "mobility paradigm" as the main feature of capitalist globalisation.

Manuela Bojadžijev and Moritz Altenried also address processes that organise, capture and control the movement of goods, capital and people, like shipping software, enterprise resource planning (ERP) systems, Global Positioning System (GPS), Radio Frequency Identification (RFID), and other digital technologies. But unlike the other articles in this issue, they focus on the notion of "virtual migration" and relate it to forms of digital labour. They discuss the so-called "gold farmers", Chinese gaming workers as a particular form of labour in the gaming industry, also evoking questions concerning the implicit processes of racialisation in such forms of mobile digital labour that legitimise new forms of exploitation. Implicit processes of racialisation are also at the heart of a border regime that treats humans that migrate as if they were goods supposed to be transported and organised through 'hotspots', 'corridors', 'platforms', and 'hubs'. This relates to the question of how

1 Dana Diminescu, "Digital Methods for the Exploration, Analysis, and Mapping of e-Diasporas", *Social Science Information*, 51 (4), 2012, pp. 451-458.

2 Dimitris Parsanoglou, Nicos Trimikliniotis and Vassilis Tsianos, *Mobile Commons. Migrant Digitalities and the Right to the City*, London, Palgrave MacMillan, 2015.

border regimes are interconnected with specific representations of migrants in mainstream media that saturate the discussion around migration, framing refugees as symbols of extreme suffering or threat.

The filmmaker Morteza Jafari addresses this question in his work and especially in his film, *Dreaming of Life*. Jafari himself came to Greece as a refugee from Iran and in his contribution he explains how, with his film, he tried to create a more realistic representation of what migrants experience at the border of Europe. As Donya Alinejad analyses in her comment on Jafari's film, by focusing on the spaces inside Europe's formal borders as the open-ended continuation of a punishing passage, *Dreaming of Life* lays bare the reality of the harsh habitability of contemporary Europe, itself. In his own explanations of his work, Jafari stresses the fact that migrants and refugees can nowadays represent themselves with greater ease through digital media, for example by uploading their filmed experiences directly to YouTube. He refers to the idea that the experiences, histories and everyday practices of migrants moving between geographical areas and digital spaces reproduce and challenge cultural forms and identities in their environments at home, in their host country and in-between.

But to what extent do digital technologies that allow migrants to document their experiences really foster forms of empowerment? Donya Alinejad picks up on this but points to the complex ways in which online content circulates and produces audiences in the process. Not everyone with access to a digital video device and an internet connection has access to the same audiences. Referring to her own ethnographic research on Iranian migrants' use of digital media for self-representation and expression in Los Angeles, she raises the issue of how self-representational (media) style matters. She specifically considers whether Jafari's particular mode of inhabiting the migrant-filmmaker identity portends the film's politics and its consequent claim to realism.

Beyond all the different actors that produce and sustain border regimes on the one hand, and migrants that challenge them on the other, there is a third group of people using digital technologies to try to support the struggles and the movements of migrants. In their contribution, Maurice Stierl, Charles Heller and Lorenzo Pezzani discuss the work of *Watch the Med* as a permanent fight to give the impersonal masses of migrants unique faces and voices as to subvert the European border regime by using the same technologies. Thus, they show how their practice of critical observations and counter-mapping practices of the sea are situated in a topological continuum of visibility and invisibility. Claiming and enacting the right to look at the hidden violence of the border, like *Watch the Med* does, and to listen to it, like *AlarmPhone* does,

is like “turning surveillance against itself”, as Maribel Casas Cortes writes in her comment.

Current political developments call for those acts of disobedience in order to ensure movement and access.

HELLE STENUM

THE BODY-BORDER – GOVERNING IRREGULAR MIGRATION THROUGH BIOMETRIC TECHNOLOGY

TECHNOLOGICAL CROSS-OVER

Biometric technology is booming and is being developed in close cooperation between the IT and security industries, academics, engineers and social scientists, and governments around the world investing large sums of public funds to be part of the global biometric system of border control and surveillance. The market analysis company “6Wresearch” announced in 2016 that the global biometrics market was “one of the key growing electronic security markets in the global landscape” and was projected to reach \$ 21,9 billion by 2020. Increasing government spending, national ID projects, e-passports and visas, rising crime rates, growing terrorist activities, cyber crime, and data theft are seen as reasons for spurring the market for various biometric technologies globally.¹

Biometric identifiers (finger prints, facial and iris scans etc.) have increasingly become a key element in technology of EU border and migration management. Proposed by the EU Commission in 2011 and aimed at separating the ‘bona-fide’ traveller in the mobility flow from the ‘risk’ traveller, and facilitating identification and deportation of ir-

¹ Tech in Asia: According to 6Wresearch, Global Biometrics Market is projected to reach \$ 21,9 billion by 2020. Cp. 6Wresearch, “Global Biometrics Market is Projected to Touch \$21.9 Billion by 2020”, *LinkedIn*, Mai 31, 2016. Available at: <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/global-biometrics-market-projected-touch-219-billion-2020-> [accessed June 27, 2017]. Another market research company projects Biometric System Market worth \$ 32,73 Billion by 2022: “The biometric system market size is expected to increase from USD 10.74 Billion in 2015 to USD 32.73 Billion by 2022, at a CAGR of 16.79% between 2016 and 2022”. Markets and Markets, “Biometric System Market worth 32.73 Billion USD by 2022”, *Press Releases*, n.d. Available at: <http://www.marketsandmarkets.com/PressReleases/biometric-technologies.asp> [accessed November 30, 2016].

regular migrants, “Smart Borders” based on biometric technology have become central in EU management of migration. This development takes place against a backdrop of a booming biometric industry preoccupied with technical solutions on government technology such as national ID, passports and “mobility-access-devices”.

Biometric technology is radically invading commercial² as well as governmental forms of surveillance and the governing of people as consumers and as citizens or anti-citizens.³ A remarkable technological overlap between private marketing and governmental securitization is currently taking place. In the private market for example, the use of a fingerprint to unlock your iPhone is being pushed by Apple, and Facebook has developed a face recognition mechanism alongside their huge database of facial images.

However, public investment in private corporation-based biometrics in migration control has been a significant element in both paving the way for normalising biometric surveillance and establishing the databases and technology that are now praised as securitized access control in all kinds of societal areas.

This paper discusses both recent technological developments in EU migration management, as well as the historical context of biometric technology to explore the apparent biometric divide between citizens and migrants, the latter positioned and managed as risks, through surveillance and data collection, while citizens are managed as hold of access to privileges. The technique of both circuits, however, involves bodily coded information, emphasises the general tendency of “securitization of identity”⁴.

SEEING LIKE A (N IRREGULAR) MIGRANT

A starting point for analysing the effects of biometric technology in migration management is the perspective of the irregular migrant. Documented ‘identity’ is and has always been important for crossing borders,

² Cp. Kartikay Mehrota, “Retailers Experiment With Surveillance Tools Used by Police”, *Bloomberg Businessweek*, March 3, 2016. Available at: <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2016-03-03/retail-stores-experiment-with-surveillance-tools-used-by-police> [accessed November 29, 2016].

³ Anti-citizen is someone portrayed as a risk to the wellbeing, virtue, norms and values of society – for example criminals and undocumented migrants. Cp. Jonathan Xavier Inda, *Targeting immigrants: Government, technology, and ethics*, Oxford, Wiley-Blackwell, 2005; Sharam Koshravi, *The ‘Illegal’ traveller: an auto-ethnography of borders*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2010.

⁴ Nikolas Rose, “Government and control”, *British Journal of Criminology*, 40, 2000, pp. 321–339; Nikolas Rose, *Powers of freedom. Reframing political thought*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1999.

and migrants cross borders with various types of forged documents or without documents every day. However, for the majority of illegalized migrants in the EU, ‘border crossing’ at the external borders took place as a legalized act with their own passports, visa, temporary residence permits etc. and afterwards they overstayed for various reasons or they acted in non-compliance with the residency permits.⁵

Documented ‘identity’ and identification become crucial in the everyday life of illegalized migrants (non-status residents) in order to cope with the condition of *deportability*⁶ and to avoid deportation. To construct, buy or borrow a suitable identity, for a health insurance card for example, can protect you against deportation if you are caught in a police check. However, a “passing identity” can also give you access to gated and privileged communities or member clubs⁷ for legalized residents only – for example in workplaces, hospitals, education etc. One can say that these irregular migrants practice a strategy of ‘flexible identities’.

Flexible Identities and De-identification

Utilising flexible identities during migration is one of many strategies developed to counter or circumvent barriers and state-produced obstacles. Such strategies reflect the current rules and restrictions of the management of migration. Flexible identities can also work as an emigration-strategy to overcome restrictions of transnational management of migration, such as time-limited residence permits, entry bans, or not qualifying for immigration. Buying or borrowing the identity of a resident in the country of origin, for example of a family member or neighbour, can facilitate migration. Obviously this can have unintended consequences for both the migrant travelling as well as for the resident staying in the country of origin. For example, the resident could lose their social rights temporarily because they are documented as having left the country.

Another strategy is “de-identification”⁸, which conceptualises the

⁵ Cp. Martin Ruhs, and Bridget Anderson, “Semi-compliance in the migrant labour market”, *COMPAS Working Paper*, 30, 2006.

⁶ Cp. Nicholas de Genova, “Migrant ‘Illegality’ and deportability in everyday life”, *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 31, 2002, pp. 419–447; Nicholas de Genova, *Working the boundaries: Race, space, and “Illegality” in Mexican Chicago*, Durham, Duke University Press Books, 2005.

⁷ Cp. Dennis Broeders, “Return to sender? Administrative detention of irregular migrants in Germany and the Netherlands?”, *Punishment & Society*, 12 (2), 2010, pp. 169–186, here: p. 47; John Torpey, *The invention of the passport surveillance, citizenship and the state*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000, p. 33.

⁸ Kim Rygiel, “Bordering solidarities: Migrant activism and the politics of movement and camps at Calais”, *Citizenship Studies*, 15 (1), 2011, pp. 1–19.

strategy used by irregular migrants in a “return position”. If for example an illegalized migrant is caught by the police with no papers and is not willing to cooperate on his/her return to a country of origin, it can be difficult or impossible to deport the person. According to international regulations based upon the “national order of things”⁹, deportation of a foreign citizen requires that the deportee is identified and recognized by the country of origin. Without papers to identify citizenship, the migrant achieves a condition of de-facto “non-deportability”¹⁰.

The precondition for the flexible identity strategy is that you can attain the (forged or original) proper papers. The precondition for the de-identification strategy is that you get rid of proper documents. In both cases, the migrant operates and strategizes in a space between a bodily and self-identified existence and a governmental representation/identification of a migrant or resident.

To speak in database terminology, she as herself can in principle be linked to more than one state identity, for example, working in different workplaces under different identities or going to hospital under a different identity. From the perspective of the migrant, this can be said to be a *one-to-many relation* between the individual and the representation of the individual by the state, whereas from the perspective of the state, each identity is supposed to match only one individual, bodily existence.

For the resident using the de-identification strategy, the state is not able to produce an identity linked to citizenship and therefore it can be defined as a *one-to-none relation* between resident and nation states.

One-to-many and one-to-none relations both represent counter-conduct towards the dominant governmentality of migration management and more broadly, disorder in the context of nation state government of populations and identity. However, the idea of one-to-one relations between an individual and an identifiable state-based identity, is fundamental in constructing and developing biometric management of migration.

PURPOSE AND FUNCTION CREEPS

To understand the current developments in EU migration management we will look into the proposal to alter the Eurodac Regulation.¹¹ Bio-

⁹ Liisa H. Malkki, “Refugees and exile: From ‘refugee studies’ to the national order of things”, *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 24, 1995, pp. 495–523.

¹⁰ Broeders 2010.

¹¹ Cp. European Commission, “on the establishment of ‘Eurodac’ for the comparison of fingerprints for the effective application of [Regulation (EU) No 604/2013 establishing the criteria and mechanisms for determining the Member State responsible for ex-

metric identifiers have increasingly become a key element of EU border and migration management,¹² especially in technology aimed at governing irregular migration and facilitating return and deportation of illegalized migrants. Biometric identifiers have primarily involved fingerprints and facial recognition, but also DNA.¹³

In the EU Prüm system,¹⁴ which builds on an agreement to step up cooperation in the “fight against terrorism, cross-border crime and irregular migration”, fingerprints and DNA are exchanged between member states of charged and convicted persons. SIS II, Eurodac and VIS¹⁵ are centralized systems that contain fingerprints of different groups of non-EU citizens: SIS II stores fingerprints of third country nationals with entry bans for three years; Eurodac has since 2000 stored fingerprints of asylum seekers for 10 years and fingerprints of migrants apprehended at border crossing for two years; VIS contains fingerprints

aming an application for international protection lodged in one of the Member States by a third-country national or a stateless person], for identifying an illegally staying third-country national or stateless person and on requests for the comparison with Eurodac data by Member States’ law enforcement authorities and Europol for law enforcement purposes (recast)”, *Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council*, COM(2016), 272 final, May 4, 2016. Available at: <https://ec.europa.eu/transparency/regdoc/rep/1/2016/EN/1-2016-272-EN-F1-1.PDF> [accessed June 20, 2017]; “Eurodac is a computerised system consisting of a central unit, which operates the central database of biometric data, and of a communication infrastructure for transmitting the data between the Member States and the central unit. [...] Member States are required to record the fingerprint data of all persons who are seeking asylum or who have been apprehended crossing the external border irregularly.” EPRS, “Recast EUrodac regulation”, October 2016, not accessible anymore.

¹² Cp. Didier Bigo, Sergio Carrera, Ben Hayes, Nicholas Hernanz, and Julien Jeandesboz, “Justice and home affairs databases and a smart borders system at EU external borders. An evaluation of current and forthcoming proposals”, *CEPS paper in Liberty and Security*, 52, 2012.

¹³ The term Biometrics covers a range of different physical and behavioural elements linked to the body: e.g. fingerprints, face recognition, iris scan, DNA, vein analysis, gait, and heart rhythm.

¹⁴ Based on the Prüm Convention: Convention between the Kingdom of Belgium, the Federal Republic of Germany, the Kingdom of Spain, the French Republic, the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg, the Kingdom of the Netherlands and the Republic of Austria on the stepping up of cross-border cooperation, particularly in combating terrorism, cross-border crime and illegal migration. Cp. Auswärtiges Amt, “Convention between the Kingdom of Belgium, the Federal Republic of Germany, the Kingdom of Spain, the French Republic, the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg, the Kingdom of the Netherlands and the Republic of Austria on the stepping up of cross-border cooperation, particularly in combating terrorism, cross-border crime and illegal migration, Prüm/Eifel, 27 May 2005”, *Auswärtiges Amt*, 2015. Available at: <http://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/cae/servlet/contentblob/607270/publicationFile/165214/Statusliste-EN.pdf> [accessed June 27, 2017].

¹⁵ The Schengen Information System (SIS) is a large-scale information system that supports external border control and law enforcement cooperation in the Schengen States. The Visa Information System (VIS) allows [Schengen States](#) to exchange visa data. It consists of a central IT system and of a communication infrastructure that links this central system to national systems. Cp. European Commission, “Schengen Area”, *Migration and Home Affairs*, 2017. Available at: http://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/borders-and-visas/schengen_en [accessed June 20, 2017].

of all visa holders for five years.¹⁶

These systems aim to govern both a large group of third country nationals and EU citizens considered to be criminals by the state or anti-citizens. The biometric identifier is stored in order to link a specific body to specific information related to status (asylum seeker, entry banned, convicted etc.). In the digitization or “Information” strategy of the EU Commission on “Stronger and Smarter Borders”,¹⁷ biometric technology is celebrated and characterised by a number of qualities, one of which is: “Biometric technology can reduce the risk of mistaken identities, and of discrimination and of racial profiling”¹⁸.

Recast Eurodac Regulation

The so-called refugee crisis¹⁹ in 2015-16 in Europe has intensified the development of biometric technology aimed at managing populations and the mobility of migrants. In the spring of 2016, the EU Commission proposed to change the criteria for capturing data in Eurodac as one of the measures to regain control of migration to the EU.²⁰ Changing the use of data for a different goal than it was collected for can be characterized as purpose creep.²¹

But the so-called migration and refugee crisis was not the only argument. Two further issues are behind the purpose creep.

The first one aims to govern undocumented migrants in general on EU territory:

“During the same period, those Member States that are not situated at the external borders began to see an increasing need to be able to store and compare information on irregular migrants that were found illegally staying on their territo-

¹⁶ Cp. European Commission, “Overview of information management in the area of freedom, security and justice”, *Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council*, COM(2010) 385 final, July 20, 2010. Available at: <http://ec.europa.eu/transparency/regdoc/rep/1/2010/EN/1-2010-385-EN-F1-1.Pdf> [accessed June 20, 2017].

¹⁷ Cp. European Commission, “Stronger and Smarter Information Systems for Borders and Security”, *Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council*, COM(2016) 205 final, June 4, 2016. Available at: <http://ec.europa.eu/transparency/regdoc/rep/1/2016/EN/1-2016-205-EN-F1-1.PDF> [accessed June 20, 2017].

¹⁸ Cp. European Commission, COM(2016) 205 final, p. 4.

¹⁹ Cp. Peter Nyers, *Rethinking refugees. Beyond states of emergency*, London/New York, Routledge, 2006.

²⁰ Cp. European Commission, COM(2016), 272 final.

²¹ Terms often used to describe development of databases containing personal information, here Wisman (2013): “The use of technology to perform a function it was not originally intended for constitutes function creep. [...] The use of data for a different goal than it was collected for results in purpose creep.” Tijmen Wisman, “Purpose and function creep by design: Transforming the face of surveillance through the internet of things”, *European Journal of Law and Technology*, 4 (2), 2013.

ry, particularly where they did not seek asylum. As a consequence, thousands of migrants remain invisible in Europe”²².

The presence of undocumented or irregular migrants is not a new phenomenon and not necessarily linked to the so-called refugee crisis. But the seeing-like-a-state approach²³ tends to encourage efforts to seek an increasing legibility from the perspective of the state – reducing ‘invisibility’ of the subjects and making them governable. Biometric identifiers are a key to legibility.

The second creep aims to facilitate the return or deportation of undocumented migrants in general:

“Facilitating the identification of illegally staying third-country nationals or stateless persons through the use of biometrics would contribute to improving the effectiveness of the EU return policy, notably in relation to irregular migrants who use deceptive means to avoid their identification and to frustrate re-documentation.”²⁴

In maintaining the “national order of things”²⁵, illegalized migrants must be removed from the national territory. Legibility through biometrics will facilitate deportation and order, which emphasise “the gradual hardening of the control tools”²⁶.

The original purpose of the Eurodac in 2000 was to facilitate the Dublin regulation in order to check fingerprints if an asylum seeker has applied for asylum in another EU Member State and the first purpose creep in 2013 gave law enforcement authorities access to EURODAC for anti-terror and anti-serious-crime purpose.²⁷ Another major creep in the purpose and scope of the Eurodac regulation is now on the horizon with the proposed extension of registration to not only include registered data of asylum seekers and persons illegally crossing borders, but now also to facilitate “identifying illegally staying third-country nationals and those who have entered the European Union irregularly at the external borders, with a view to using this information to assist a Member State to re-document a third-country national for return purposes”²⁸. The purpose has crept into a more general technology of governing

²² European Commission, COM(2016) 272 final, p. 2.

²³ Cp. James C. Scott, *Seeing like a state: How certain schemes to improve the human condition have failed*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1998; Helle Stenum, “Making migrants governable: counting and defining the ‘illegal migrant’”, *Nordic Journal of Migration Research*, 2 (4), 2012, pp. 280–288.

²⁴ European Commission, COM(2016) 272 final, p. 3.

²⁵ Cp. Malkki 1995.

²⁶ Sergio Carrera, and Nicholas Hernanz, “Re-framing mobility and identity controls: The next generation of the EU migration management”, *Journal of Borderlands Studies*, 30 (1), 2015, pp. 69–84, here: p. 71.

²⁷ Cp. European Commission, COM(2016) 272 final.

²⁸ European Commission, COM(2016) 272 final, p. 3.

anti-citizens defined as asylum seekers, potential criminals and terrorists, and non-citizens defined as illegalized non-EU migrants.²⁹

But not only has the purpose crept, functions are also creeping. The proposal suggests a new type of biometric data (facial image) captured from an extended group (irregular migrants and children). Furthermore, the retention period for storing data of irregular migrants has been proposed to be extended from 18 months to five years, and opening up the transfer of Eurodac data to third country authorities is also proposed, in order to:

“use EURODAC data for identifying and re-documenting an illegally staying third-country national for return and re-admission purposes will necessarily entail sharing that data in some circumstances, with a third country”.³⁰

It is proposed that facial images are to be collected and stored in the database together with fingerprints. Reasons for the extension and for using this particular biometric identifier are formulated in terms of efficiency and facilitation of transnational communication between EU member states – and also with non-EU nation states. The argument for lowering the age of biometric identification from 14 to six years is that it could help families in the case of separation.³¹ Finally, it is emphasised that member states are obliged to take fingerprints and capture facial images, and that detention can be used as sanction in case of refusal by the migrants.³²

The use of facial images as stored identifier of a person is different from a fingerprint in various ways; from the ‘gaze of the governor’ it is easier to obtain a facial image (what the industry refers to as “less intrusive”), it facilitates a unique key to surveillance in public and other places, it supports state of the art global biometric identification efforts by governments, such as biometric passports, visa-systems, national ID cards etc., to maintain “the national order of things”³³ where every human being is identified as belonging to a nation state. A facial biometric identifier is much more difficult to spoof or alter than fingerprints and furthermore, as the EDPS (European Data Protection Supervisor) has noted “the unique identifier might be used for other purposes, for example for identifying the individuals in other databases, making the

²⁹ Cp. Inda 2005; William Walters, “Reflections on migration and governmentality”, *Movements. Journal für Kritische Migrations- und Grenzregimeforschung*, 1 (1), 2015, pp. 1–25; Rose, *Powers of freedom. Reframing political thought*.

³⁰ European Commission, COM(2016) 272 final, p. 14.

³¹ European Parliament, “Briefing EU Legislation in Progress”, October 2016, not accessible anymore.

³² Cp. European Commission, COM(2016) 272 final.

³³ Malkki 1995.

comparison of databases easy and simple”³⁴.

BIOMETRIC CITIZENSHIP AND FLEXIBLE ZONES AND GATES

The proposal to creep purpose and function in the Eurodac however, is part of a larger EU agenda on migration management in general, and reforming the Common European Asylum System more specifically.³⁵ Hence, also a proposed Entry/Exit system is designed with a similar logic – especially when it comes to the specific biometric facial identifier.³⁶

The EU Commission proposed in October 2011, the development of new biometric systems that will facilitate management of especially irregular migration through monitoring when an ‘entry’ of a traveller does not match an ‘exit’, alert the authorities about overstayers, help to identify and apprehended an irregular migrant and facilitate deportation.³⁷

In 2013 the proposal was revised and pilot studies, public hearings etc. have been carried out. In April 2016, the EU Commission put forward a new proposal on smart borders. Compared to the 2013 version, the new proposal includes more biometrics, including facial recognition, and extending the retention period from 181 days to five years. Furthermore, the proposal emphasises the importance of “interoperability”, implying the integration of the smart border system Entry/Exit with other anti-citizen systems of the EU. Last but not least, the proposal enables law enforcement to use the border control system and the

³⁴ European Data Protection Supervisor, “EDPS: Opinion on the First reform package on the Common European Asylum System (Eurodac, EASO and Dublin regulations)”, *Opinion 07/2016*, September 21, 2016. Available at: https://edps.europa.eu/sites/edp/files/publication/16-09-21_ceas_opinion_en.pdf [accessed June 20, 2017], p. 18.

³⁵ Cp. European Commission, “Towards a Reform of the Common European Asylum System and Enhancing Legal Avenues to Europe”, *Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council*, COM(2016) 197 final, April 6, 2016. Available at: http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/european-agenda-migration/proposal-implementation-package/docs/20160406/towards_a_reform_of_the_common_european_asylum_system_and_enhancing_legal_avenues_to_europe_-_20160406_en.pdf [accessed June 20, 2017].

³⁶ “The collection of facial images will be the pre-cursor to introducing facial recognition software in the future and will bring EURODAC in line with the other systems such as the Entry/Exit System. Eu-LISA should first conduct a study on facial recognition software that evaluates its accuracy and reliability prior to this software being added to the Central System”. European Commission, COM(2016) 272 final, p. 4f.

³⁷ Cp. European Commission, “Smart borders – options and the way ahead”, *Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council*, COM(2011) 680 final, October 25, 2011. Available at: <http://ec.europa.eu/transparency/regdoc/rep/1/2011/EN/1-2011-680-EN-F1-1.Pdf> [accessed June 20, 2017].

individual profiling data in the system.³⁸

In addition, a “Registered Traveler’s Program” has also been proposed by the EU Commission, that privileged and “bona-fide travelers” are exempt from waiting in lines at the borders with other more ‘risky’ third country nationals, but subject to the same large scale biometric identifier. This system will result in the EU thereby “extending its capacity to control mobility far beyond its jurisdiction, gathering up personal data from ever more countries in the world”³⁹. In accordance with the tendency to use biometrics in border management, fingerprints and facial images are also integrated in passports in the EU, but the use of this biometric information is for now restricted to simply establishing the link between the body and the passport. Fingerprints are not stored in a central database and linked to other kinds of information.

The vision of the EU Commission can be regarded as an attempt to produce *non-flexible identifiers* in the relationship between mobile individuals and the member states in order to create flexibility at the border and in the territory in order to create *flexible zones and gates*.⁴⁰

The one-to-one state-produced identifier provides the security-focused state with the possibility of using the same identifier to access/deny access to different spaces/zones, and the state can furthermore dynamically change decisions on access simultaneously with changes in status – for both migrants and citizens.

From the perspective of the EU commission the capacity of enforcing a unique one-to-one relation between the body and status will add new elements to the existing technology of governing mobility and migration. It will improve the border-zone control – the pre-departure control, the control on arrival at the border and after arrival in the EU. It improves the possibility of immediate and reliable body-identity checks – in the country of origin, at the border, in the streets of the EU, in the detention centre, at the workplace etc. Scanning of the biometric identifier can take place anywhere – within, between and outside nation states of the EU. Within the EU territory, technological gatekeepers can

³⁸ Cost-benefit is also calculated by the Commission regarding the entry/exit and Frequent Travellers system, predicting that member states “could have a net cost savings already after the second year of operation” stemming from reduction in border control resources by around 40% (equivalent to EUR 500 million/year). Development cost for the first three years and with some of the biometrics added later is estimated to around EUR 390 million, and yearly operational costs in a period of 5 years of operation is estimated to be 189 million EUR. In this 8 year span costs are estimated to be EUR 1,335 million). Cp. European Commission, COM(2011) 680 final.

³⁹ Marie Martin, “Extension of mobility partnerships with euro-mediterranean partners”, *Panorama*, 2012, pp. 279–283, here: p. 281.

⁴⁰ Cp. Walters 2015; Didier Bigo, “Freedom and speed in enlarged borderzones”, in: Vicki Squire (ed.), *The contested politics of mobility: Borderzones and irregularity*, Abingdon, Routledge, 2011, pp. 31–50.

appear in public and private spaces randomly, arbitrarily, planned or fixed to determine the status of individuals and patrol the borders of a zone that may be physical (a building, a workplace, a hospital, a school, a shelter, an ATM) or abstract (access to social benefits, unemployment benefits, application for residence permit, voting etc.).

Biometric identifiers are constructed as non-flexible in order to create the preconditions for flexible borders, zones, channels and gates that can facilitate both the celebrated global, fast-tracked, smooth mobility of humans⁴¹ and the reproduction of the geo-political division of individuals into national populations and the social sorting of residents within and between nation states.⁴² This is a new disturbing infrastructure, which has been characterised as irreversible.⁴³

BIOMETRIC ALIENAGE⁴⁴

In a nation state context, biometric identifiers have primarily been reserved for criminal residents and unwanted foreigners, with the fingerprinting of rejected asylum seekers, deported aliens and illegalized migrants. During the last decade, the EU has however, as we have seen, implemented technological mechanisms to ‘combat’ the possibility of *de-identification* and *flexible identities* through the use of forged documents at the border.

Fraud, false documents, low penalties and corruption are often cited when linking irregular migration to criminal activities.⁴⁵ Within a control regime based on unique identification, a centralised state authority for issuing the required identifications, and a high degree of state access to unique, identifiable data, creates conditions for borders being patrolled, regardless of if these borders are placed at the perimeter of the nation state or if the patrolling and control takes place through individual profiling and random inspections at bus stations or public parks.

The suggestion and implementation of biometric identifiers reflects a move away from the principle of rights applied to human beings as an abstract of the universal idea that all individuals are equal, to a trouble-

⁴¹ Cp. Zygmunt Bauman, *Globalization*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1998.

⁴² Cp. David Lyon (ed.), *Surveillance as social sorting: Privacy, risk, and automated discrimination*, London, Routledge, 2005.

⁴³ Cp. Bigo et al. 2012.

⁴⁴ “Alienage” as defined by Bosniak: “the position of the marginalized non-citizen or the degree of ‘alienage’ are produced by nation-states exercising sovereignty and ‘managing migration’, and framing conditions for mobility and residence of migrants. ‘Alienage entails the introjection of borders’”. Linda Bosniak, *The citizen and the alien*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2008, p. 5.

⁴⁵ See for example Frontex, “Smarter, Faster, Safer?”, *Feature Stories*, 2011. Available at: <http://frontex.europa.eu/feature-stories/smarter-faster-safer--KfKGq2> [accessed June 21, 2017].

some concept of rights being engraved in the body, and the body is not neutral, but socially constructed and contextualised in the place of birth, kinship, geography, etc. The use of biometric identifiers in migration management seems to be increasingly important to separate citizens from anti-citizens and non-citizens.

Even though biometric 'body'-borders can be characterized as a new kind of surveillance, Maguire and Amoore emphasise that biometric data in the process of governing mobility is hardly a new phenomenon.⁴⁶ Amoore points to "the historical emergence of body counts to enumerate and account for colonial subjects"⁴⁷. She refers to Appadurai's discussion of systems of classification in colonial India,⁴⁸ where the enumeration and accounting disciplines the "unruly body", bringing it back into a zone of calculation and manageability, recuperating it and accounting for it within 'normal' ranges of acceptability.

"Contemporary biometric body counts bare out much of what Appadurai signals for the creation of 'boundaries around homogeneous bodies' that 'performatively limits their extent', flattening differences and idiosyncrasies into calculable categories. New forms of biometric technology extend this categorisation and enumeration of the body via processes of risk profiling, such that they have themselves come to perform and represent a border that approves or denies access"⁴⁹.

Biometric technology is the materialization of a political thought mutated from practices of government linked to the panoptical perspective of government and to colonial forms of governing through bodily control and identities. One of the current biometric identifiers is fingerprinting, which has been a social technology to measure and identify the criminal body, developed in colonial India and technologized in the era of IT into databases of criminals and suspects.⁵⁰ Another biometric identifier – facial recognition - also has historical links to Bertillon's anthropometry and standardization of mug shots as well as anthropological use of Bertillonage to identify the criminal body in late 1800s.⁵¹ Today biometric passports or databases contain extended and new possibilities of governing through the body and not through representations

⁴⁶ Cp. Mark Maguire, "The birth of biometric security", *Anthropology Today*, 25, 2009, pp. 9–14; Louise Amoore, "Biometric borders: Governing mobilities in the war on terror", *Political Geography*, 25, 2006, pp. 336–351.

⁴⁷ Amoore 2006, p. 342.

⁴⁸ Cp. Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at large*, Minneapolis/London, University of Minnesota Press, 1996.

⁴⁹ Amoore 2006, p. 342.

⁵⁰ Cp. Simon A. Cole, *Suspect identities: A history of fingerprinting and criminal identification*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2002.

⁵¹ Cp. Cole 2002.

such as ID cards, personal registration numbers, names, etc.

Large scale databases, such as SIS II and Eurodac, containing data of the expelled, the penalized, the overstaying etc. – offers the possibility to select and separate legals from illegals, the deserving from the non-deserving, citizens from unwanted migrants. The “biometric passport” or identifier merges several mutated key technologies of the colonial nation-states such as fingerprints, mug shots and passports into a technical, depoliticised instrument targeting ‘the Others’.⁵² However, with biometric passports, national ID cards, access codes to mobile phones, credit cards using the same standards and technology, the ‘Selves’ are now also included as objects for biometric surveillance and scanning.

FICTIONS OF FREEDOM AND NON-DISCRIMINATION

The primary underlying argument for biometric smart borders is the need for “securitization of identity”⁵³ which is constructed as enhancing “freedom of movement” through “speeding up travel flows” as analysed by Bigo: “[...] under liberal government mobility is translated into a discourse of freedom of circulation, which reframes freedom as moving without being stopped and confuses the speed of well-channeled movement with freedom”⁵⁴.

Biometric identifiers are furthermore falsely constructed as neutral, objective, unforgeable, unique, true identifications of human beings. Several scholars have criticized the fabric of biometric identification for transforming socially-constructed categorizations as technological, neutral data.⁵⁵ Analysing the science that constructs biometrics and failures in biometric identifications, Magnet shows how the technologies rely on culturally-coded constructs of the gendered, racialized, classed and disabled body.

“Biometrics are marketed as able to eliminate systemic forms of discrimination at the same time they are produced in a

⁵² Cp. Cole 2002; John Torpey, *The invention of the passport surveillance, citizenship and the state*, Cambridge, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000.

⁵³ Rose 1999; 2000.

⁵⁴ Bigo 2011, p. 33.

⁵⁵ Cp. Shoshana Amielle Magnet, *When biometrics fail: Gender, race, and the technology of identity*, Durham/London, Duke University Press, 2011; Joseph Pugliese, *Biometrics: Bodies, technologies, biopolitics*, London/New York, Routledge, 2010; Rygiel 2011; Irma van der Ploeg, “Biometrics and the body as information: Normative issues in the socio-technical coding of the body”, in: David Lyon (ed.), *Surveillance as social sorting: Privacy, risk, and automated discrimination*, London, Routledge, 2002, pp. 57–73; Btihaj Ajana, *Governing through biometrics: The biopolitics of identity*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2013; Keith Breckenridge, *Biometric State. The global politics of identification and surveillance in South Africa, 1850 to the Present*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2014; and others.

context marked by the persistence of problematic assumptions about difference. [...] Given the context for which they were developed, it is unsurprising that biometric technologies are imagined as able to definitively identify suspect bodies.”⁵⁶

As a 2003 report by the SANS Institute⁵⁷ on biometric scanning technologies pointed out, that technology is developed with a white Western body in mind and that this built-in whiteness causes difficulties for “darker skinned” people to be enrolled and verified in the system:

“Lighting conditions, which cause an image to be underexposed or overexposed, can cause challenges. Additionally, users with a darker skin tone can be difficult to acquire. Select Hispanic, black and Asian individuals can be more difficult to enroll and verify in some facial-scan systems because acquisition devices are not always optimized to acquire darker faces.”⁵⁸

Pugliese examined the intersection between biometric technology, bodies and race and found that biometric technologies are “infrastructurally calibrated to whiteness – that is, whiteness is configured as the universal gauge that determines the technical settings and parameters for the visual imaging and capture of a project”⁵⁹. As Richard Dyer analysed in his book *White* in 1997: “The apparatus (photographic media) was developed with white people in mind and habitual use and instruction continue in the same vein, so much so that photographing non-white people is typically constructed as a problem”⁶⁰. Unacknowledged, racialized and gendered coordinates “determine the discursive infrastructure of particular biometric systems”⁶¹.

An effect of the built-in ‘whiteness’ of the technology⁶² is that non-white people will bear a disproportional share of ‘failures’ in the system, which activates manual and/or extra control, for example, at the border. This is a situation that will perhaps mimic the current situation of manual profiling by border guards, when non-white persons seem to be selected disproportionately for extra checks. However, in continuation of

⁵⁶ Magnet 2011, p. 50.

⁵⁷ SANS Institute presents itself as a cooperative research and education organization, providing computer security training and information security research.

⁵⁸ SANS Institute, “Biometric Scanning Technologies: Finger, Facial and Retinal Scanning”, *SANS Institute. InfoSec Reading Room*, 2003. Available at: <https://www.sans.org/reading-room/whitepapers/authentication/biometric-scanning-technologies-finger-facial-retinal-scanning-1177> [accessed June 21, 2017].

⁵⁹ Pugliese 2010, p. 62.

⁶⁰ Richard Dyer, *White: Essays on race and culture*, London/New York, Routledge, 1997, p. 89.

⁶¹ Pugliese 2010, p. 114.

⁶² Facial recognition can be understood in continuation of Dyer’s analysis of on camera and photo technology analysed by Dyer for the built-in white bias.

the widespread imagined technological neutrality, the profiling and targeting of non-white persons will now appear disguised through technology as objective and non-discriminatory. This contradicts the EU Commission's claim that biometric technology will reduce discrimination and racial profiling and also highlights the significance of "automated decision-making" in biometric systems.⁶³ The lack of transparency behind the algorithms which determine decisions underpins the fiction of objectivity and a lack of discrimination in the systems. It also blurs the effect of producing 'statistical discrimination' through data mining.

The focus on the particular kind of governmental technology is exactly this; the technified "gaze of the governor"⁶⁴, tracking and scanning through enormous amounts of data to identify the specific, bodily differences that single you out as an object for surveillance and control, and at the same time subjectify the human being as a container of a physical, essential and unique identity. Essential identities are constructed in the fabric of the biometric systems through technique, algorithms, data-mining, profiling etc. as materialised social categorisations of gender, class, ethnicity, sexuality etc. You could say that the paradigm of the biometric system is more of a "scan-opticon"⁶⁵ with the capacity to manage populations through bodily identification and with a spatial flexibility to create zones, gates and borders anywhere.

CONCLUSION

Tightening up controls will likely increase the number of migrants being detained and deported, making residence more difficult. Biometric surveillance and profiling, separate the privileged from the unprivileged, the desired from the unwanted, the non-deportable from the deportable. It is an ongoing development, which is also linked to the ambition of enumeration and surveying irregular migrants.

We can trace a development going from governing humans with documents to governing bodies captured by birth and geography and having the global geometry of power laid down in fingerprints, facial and iris scans, DNA. This also indicates a possible transformation of the political rationality of problematising 'illegal migrants' to problema-

⁶³ Cp. Bigo et al. 2012.

⁶⁴ Rose 1999.

⁶⁵ Helle Stenum, "Biometric citizenship and alienage: new and re-structuring technology of government of mobility?" Paper presented at the conference: Reconfiguring borders and mobility in times of crisis, September, 26-28, Danish Institute for International Studies, 2012. Available at: [http://forskning.ruc.dk/site/da/publications/biometric-citizenship-and-alienage\(1c5b48bf-2510-412e-bf56-5164c4b4f89a\).html](http://forskning.ruc.dk/site/da/publications/biometric-citizenship-and-alienage(1c5b48bf-2510-412e-bf56-5164c4b4f89a).html) [accessed June 20, 2017].

tising 'illegal bodies'. Migrants will, however, likely strategise to overcome the new technological regime.

Despite significant differences in the way biometrics is used as a technology to govern non-citizens and anti-citizens on the one side, and citizens on the other, biometric technology is an invasive device of government. It is now also the foundation for governing citizens by means of what Agamben has called the "bio-political tattoo"⁶⁶. In 2004, he cancelled a guest lecture in the US because he did not want to submit himself to having his fingerprints taken at the border:

"The bio-political tattoo imposed upon us today when we want to travel into the United States is the baton of what we might accept tomorrow as the normal way of registering into the mechanism and the transmission of the state if we want to be identified as good citizens"⁶⁷.

While Agamben had the capacity to control his fingerprints being taken back in 2004, who has the capacity to control who takes, or tags our facial images now?

⁶⁶ Giorgio Agamben, "Bodies without words: Against the biopolitical tattoo", *German Law Journal*, 5 (2), 2004, pp. 168–169.

⁶⁷ Agamben 2004, p. 169.

BRIGITTA KUSTER

VENTURE SCIENCES IN ACTU! – A VISIT AT THE EAB RESEARCH PROJECTS CONFERENCE (EAB-RPC) 2016¹

Up to now, knowledge about societal contexts in which border technologies are being developed, have rarely been examined as part of a critical border-regime-analysis. The present contribution can therefore be regarded as a praxeological approach to a comparatively new field of study. It consists of an ethnographic sketch, focussing on research and development of biometric applications as part of ongoing research to smart border solutions in Europe. The aim is to conflate migration and border studies with science and technology studies, so as to investigate the development of digital borders in Europe. Contrary to Helle Sternum's text about European databases for migration control, most projects presented and discussed at the annual EAB Research Projects Conference this year did not concentrate on migration, but thematically covered travellers and beneficiaries to mobility. It is only from a broader perspective that the biometric solutions to border management, which were at the core of the conference, can communicate to the knowledge-societal contexts of migration, such as migration control, but also controlling the population on European territory and their privacy interests, and not least including the infrapolitics and dissidences of transit-migrants. Therefore, the following sketch represents a mere episode within a whole arrangement of contexts, which I have identified as information and control continuums, in relation to the techno-social formations of the European Border.²

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- 1 Special thanks to the Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung for making this research possible.
 - 2 Cp. Brigitta Kuster and Vassilis Tsianos, "How to Liquefy a Body on the Move: Eurodac and the Making of the European Digital Border", in: Raphael Bossong and Helena Carrapico (eds.), *EU Borders and Shifting Internal Security. Technology, Externalization and Accountability*, Heidelberg, Springer International Publishing, 2016, pp. 45–63.

I.

Growth impulses and security requirements – late August 2016 sees Angela Merkel touring through Europe. She is armed with a Franco-German action pack on security, migration management and terror defense (title: “A contribution to heighten internal security in Europe”³). Amongst other things, she is advocating for standardized European identity management strategies, for more cross-border collaborations or, to be precise, for enhanced networks and the development of existing border and security systems. The four-page long paper, signed off by de Mazière and Cazeneuve, states:

“This year we must strike a political agreement regarding the cornerstones of an Entry-Exit-System (EES) and we should consider the inclusion of EU-citizens. Furthermore, this year requires for us to settle on the establishment of a European travel information and authorisation system (ETIAS).”⁴

What migration studies are investigating under the technical terminus of a “security-migration-nexus”, seems to have become almost natural law in European politics. Border security and counterterrorism are named in one breath. Connecting European security agencies, developing data-infrastructures for border security and collecting information on travellers seem to respond to the need of the hour. Managing the mobility and residency of humans through their identities is a form of governance, which does not necessarily guarantee nationally awarded human rights, as David Lyon, sociologist and director of the surveillance studies centre at Queens University in Kingston (Ontario), points out.⁵ Conversely, it seems relevant to note that biometric technologies continue to be deemed the largest growing market in Europe, increasingly expanding onto the African continent. At stake are the various utilizations of data patterns, which relate to the singular body features of every human being. At present, the focus lies particularly on exploring areas such as multi-biometry, the combination of a number of biometric features, such as fingerprint and iris, but also behavioural biometrics, vein recognition or contactless biometrics, as well as mobile applications.

3 “Ein Beitrag zur Erhöhung der inneren Sicherheit in Europa” (transl. S.M.).

4 “Dieses Jahr müssen wir zu einer politischen Einigung über die Eckpunkte eines Ein- und Ausreiseregisters (Entry-Exit-System, EES) kommen und wir sollten eine Einbeziehung von EU-Bürgern prüfen. Wir brauchen zudem noch in diesem Jahr eine Einigung über die Einrichtung eines Europäischen Reiseinformations- und Genehmigungssystems (ETIAS).” (transl. S.M.)

5 Cp. David Lyon, “Identification, colonialism, and control: surveillant sorting in Israel/Palestine”, in: Elia Zureik, David Lyon and Yasmineen Abu-Laban (eds.), *Surveillance and Control in Israel/Palestine. Population, Territory and Power*, London/New York, Routledge, 2011, pp. 49–64.

The securization of discourses on migration is paralleled by the militarisation and technologisation of border controls, whereas border security and border management rely increasingly on markets for electronic border protection facilities,⁶ as well as for virtual or intelligent borders: Tracking is the main paradigm of contemporary border security, where technologies such as biometrics, thermographic cameras and other sensor-technologies, radars and drones are employed. This leads to some authors referring to a “EU security-industrial complex”⁷. A complex, which assures “internal security” to also be executed through the external EU borders, and addresses the relationship between military and police actors, security agencies, governments and the mostly transnational industries of advanced technology, security and defence (important European players are e.g. the Thales Group, Finmeccanica, Sagem, Accenture and Morpho, both part of Safran S.A., Airbus Group, Indra Sistemas S.A., BAE Systems and last but not least Siemens), which operate within the global border security technology market. This networked security-industrial-complex horizontally connects political and private enterprise elites throughout Europe.

At the level of *security policies*, the entangled processes of institutionalisation of politics and economy have already largely been conflated. Bastiaan van Apeldoorn and Laura Horn describe these reciprocal integrations and entanglements as a process of “marketization of European corporate control”⁸, which implies a social and political constitution of markets. However, it seems important to also consider those new forms of politics especially present in the area of border management, which is increasingly mediated by expanding agencies and their projects, operations (e.g. Mare Nostrum or the Frontex-Operation Triton respectively), missions (e.g. EUNAVFOR Med to suppress trafficking networks) or programs.⁹ Formally assigned

6 Examples for this include the Sistema Integrado de Vigilancia Exterior, the integrated electronic system for outdoor surveillance SIVE in Spain, or the EU-wide border surveillance system called EUROSUR.

7 Ben Hayes, *NeoConOpticon –The EU Security-Industrial Complex*, Transnational Institute in association with Statewatch, 2009. Available at: <http://www.statewatch.org/analyses/neoconopticon-report.pdf> [accessed May 30, 2017].

8 Bastiaan van Apeldoorn and Laura Horn, “The Marketisation of European Corporate Control: A Critical Political Economy Perspective”, *New Political Economy*, 12(2), 2007, pp. 211–235. According to these authors, the process of European integration, which has been driven by a project of neoliberal marketization since the late 1980s, has played a leading role in the emergence of European shareholder capitalism. Entering new markets is important in terms of the competition European industries face through the USA and China. On a global scale, the security industry is expanding powerfully, and has seen a growth of almost tenfold in the last ten years. 2011 it amounted to a market size of 100 billion.

9 The authors of a paper published by the German Institute for International and Security Affairs, SWP titled “Border Security, Camps, Quotas: The Future of

to technical, economic and administrative tasks, agencies like Frontex or eu-LISA increasingly direct their working structure towards networks and partners from within the private sector.¹⁰

Technoscience & Venture Science

The analytical concept of technoscience describes a dispositif, in which science appears as cosmoplastic, expedited and constituted through technologies and their instruments/devices. Science creates *technofacts*. In addition to this concept, the role of science and research can be considered as *Venture Science*. Kaushik Sunder Rajan coins this terminology through his research on the symbiosis of venture capital and biotechnology.¹¹ It is meant to emphasize the futurity, the hype and the promise of a scientific knowledge production – including the contingency of whether or not a certain prediction will apply. *Venture Science Capitalism*, or the projects ascribing to this prognostic type of knowledge, do not require fundamental research in a traditional sense. As knowledge is ‘produced’ directly by corporations, knowledge bases generate themselves straight from a user perspective. This is of vital importance for critical corporate control, or for technological impact assessment informed by social sciences. For if science is user generated instead of user oriented, the boundaries between provider and user or consumer blur and become impulsive factors of knowledge production – such is the case here with security research by governmental or EU-institutions. *Venture Science* creates technofacts through research financed collectively by the public sector, private investors and large industrial syndicates.¹²

European Refugee Policy?” highlight that Frontex has ten times as many employees as when the agency was founded, while their annual budget has risen from six to 245 million Euros. Cp. Steffen Angenendt, David Kipp and Anne Koch, “Border Security, Camps, Quotas: The Future of European Refugee Policy?”, SWP Comments 2016/C 32, June 2016. Available at: <https://www.swp-berlin.org/en/publication/border-security-camps-quotas-the-future-of-european-refugee-policy/> [accessed June 24, 2017].

10 Frontex for example made headlines on the 27th and 28th of January 2016 through a pitch on Lesbos. Securiport LLC, Crossmatch, Unisys, Thales and 3M were invited to present suggestions for a design of smartphone apps and databases to track refugees arriving in Europe. For a more detailed discussion see: Diane Taylor and Emma Graham-Harrison, “EU asks tech firms to pitch refugee-tracking systems”, in *The Guardian*, February 18, 2016. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/feb/18/eu-asks-tech-firms-to-pitch-refugee-tracking-systems> [accessed June 24, 2017].

11 Cp. Kaushik Sunder Rajan, *Biokapitalismus. Werte im postgenomischen Zeitalter*, Frankfurt a. M., Suhrkamp, 2009, p. 122.

12 Central to this, especially when considered as switch points or points of intersections of the EU-network between the private sector and the EU-administration, as well as the legislative, are above all the EU research framework programmes, such as Horizon 2020, which concern the “research and innovation” programmes. For example, the Seventh Framework Programme FP7, initiated in 2007, focuses heavily on security.

II.

In Darmstadt, directly opposite the research and congress centrum Darmstadtium, the Fraunhofer IGD¹³ is situated in immediate proximity of the technical university. This is the site for the European Association for Biometrics (EAB) to organize a two-day conference, taking place in September 2016, the EAB Research Projects Conference 2016. The EAB is listed as a non-profit organisation whose aim is to advance the use of biometrics in Europe, taking into account the interests of European citizens, industry, academia and governments. The conference – this being the third of its kind – serves to present research results within areas of border control, speaker verification and “template protection” – a procedure to secure characteristic data within biometric person recognition – and discuss the benefits “for our European societies”. The goal of EAB-RPC 2016 was to present and discuss all larger European research projects on biometrics and identity management. In the conference announcement it reads as follows:

“This will contribute to a stronger research community at European level and a stronger position for European R&D in an international context.”

The main topic of 2016 was “identity management” at borders. Within the European Union, this still primarily means a focus on external borders, which naturally includes migration, but also goes beyond. Currently, identity management primarily looks for innovative solutions for safe and secure biometrics according to data protection requirements, as for example in a federated ID management (FidM), where the respective information remains at its exact location and can be shared on demand, instead of collecting it in a large centralized database, which would be more prone to attacks. This is a contradiction to tendencies of centralization, as within eu-LISA managed databases,

The commission has provided the programme with 1,4 billion Euros with a run-time until 2013. The follow-up project Horizon 2020 categorizes the subject of border management under “societal challenges” and collectively frames these under the heading “secure societies – Protecting freedom and security of Europe and its citizens”. Horizon 2020 has received a budget of around 80 billion Euros for a run-time of seven years (2014-2020). This comes in addition to any private investments it can draw on. Cp. Chris Jones, “Analysis. The visible hand: the European Union’s Security Industrial Policy”, *Statewatch*, August 2016. Available at: <http://www.statewatch.org/analyses/no-297-security-industrial-policy.pdf> [accessed June 24, 2017].

¹³ The Fraunhofer IGD (Institute for graphic data processing) broadly speaking engages with the problems and possibilities in operating with computer data within hard- and software. Founded in 1992, it upholds a total of twelve research and development divisions located in Darmstadt, Rostock, Graz and Singapur, which work closely with the respective technical universities, as well as with clients and partners from industrial and economic sectors. The Fraunhofer IGD is internationally recognized as a leader in applied research of visual computing and is a part of the “Fraunhofer Gesellschaft”, the biggest research organisation for application-oriented research in Europe.

which are picked up on later, at the conference's conclusion.

The conference kicked off with Alexander Nouak, CEO of the Fraunhofer IGD and president of the EAB, who provides insight into the history of the organisation. He is followed by Christoph Busch, a member of the EAB board and professor at the Fraunhofer IGD, who speaks on the “evolution” of research conferences such as this one. His talk is accompanied by graphics showing the course of movement from ape to the human upright walk (fig. 1).

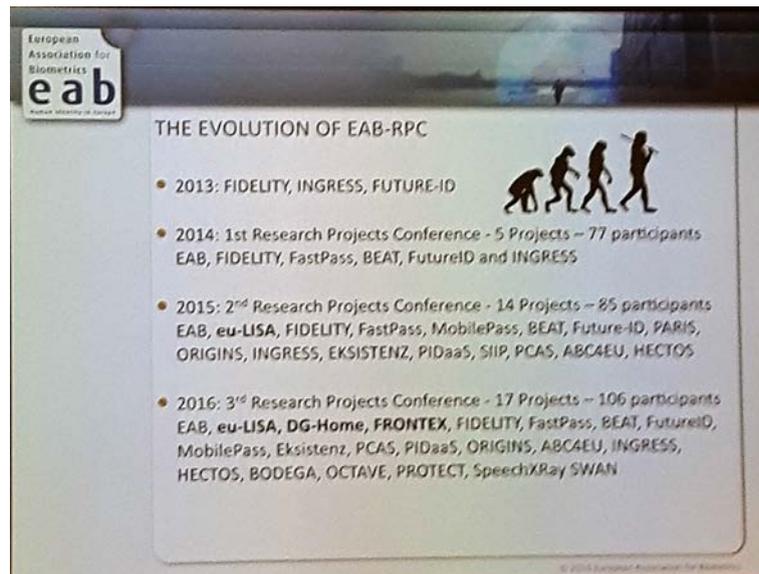


Figure 1: The Evolution of EAB-RPC, Brigitta Kuster

In addition to presented research projects, this year's conference includes presentations by the Joint Research Center, a so-called EU Science Hub¹⁴ operated by the European Commission, as well as by representatives of the general directorate of migration and internal affairs of the European Commission (namely Richard Rinkens), the European agency eu-LISA (European agency for the operational management of large-scale IT systems in the area of freedom, security and justice, namely Ciaran Carolan), as well as Frontex (namely Rasa Karbauskaite). The conference's 2016 track record shows 17 projects and 106 participants.

The boundaries of public research and research according to public interest are blurring into private sector research and development. This is spelled out by the implemented terminology, which the author requires some time to get used to: border guards, travellers or so-called third-country citizens are all referred to as “users”. No matter, whether

¹⁴ The main slogan “We are doing science for policy” designates the core tasks of the research center, which was founded in 1957, to provide current EU politics with independent information and evidencing.

they appear as clients, research partners or possibly aggrieved parties, wishing not to undergo a border check, they are all operators, or – as stated – users of the presented new systems and technical tools – products that are here advertised as “solutions”. Meanwhile, private corporations are referred to as “organizations”. The contributors, and the respectively presented problems and research projects within the Seventh Framework Programme FP7, or its continuation as a EU work programme for research and innovation Horizon 2020, also contribute to this feeling of vagueness. For example Javier Galbally, who, after his short presentation as a scientist representing JRC and as future chair of the EAB Research Conference,¹⁵ follows up with a second presentation, where he deputes Paolo Salieri of the EU commission and gives an overview over all EU security research projects. One can’t help but get the impression that the community meeting here is doing so for the sake of promoting each other. Galbally identifies border management to be the core focus of security research, applauding EU research programmes for recognizing the outstanding significance of biometrics as a key role. In his impression, Galbally continues, this area is assigned a growing budget each year, especially since the terror attacks in France. Indeed, the Secure Societies work programme of Horizon 2020 fosters a large part of the research presented at the conference.

After the opening, the programme continues with project presentations. Amongst them, [Fidelity](#), a research project (which is now concluded) coordinated by Safran Security and promoted through FP7 where solutions were developed for “people who work on multiple identities”. The project website, concentrating on quality management and standardising breeder documents¹⁶ and thereby supposedly providing the eponymous confidence, encompasses so-called “white papers” – an umbrella term in the IT sector for standards and technical outline reports. Fidelity, however, generates a “white paper” on privacy, for example, and another on ePassport acceptance. This brings us to a highly important subject, which is also continuously brought up throughout the conference, so-called “privacy by design”. The

15 Javier Galbally, who is a volunteer at the conference in 2016, is supposed to be the chairperson of the EAB conference in 2017. Galbally is engaged as an expert on “reverse biometrics”, “spoofing”, “anti-spoofing” and “biometric vulnerabilities” at the JRC’s department of “E-Space, Security and Migration”, third division for “Cyber & Digital Citizens’ Security”. Currently, the third division is compiling a feasibility report on SIS II, by proxy of the commission, for instance. The division also has an advisory function to the DG Justice with regards to the fingerprint-identification system of the European Criminal Records Information System (ECRIS). Galbally himself is currently working on the integration of AFIS for SIS II and on a mobile app for third-country nationals to download, so they can be registered within the Entry-Exit-System in advance.

16 A breeder document is a real or forged document, which serves as a basis for other identification documents, which can also be fraudulently attained.

advantage here lies within the ability to abstain from storing personal biometric data, as the templates can be secured, or transformed into pseudonymous identifiers, e.g. through *bloom filter based pseudonymous identifiers*, without this process being irrevocable. Another project within FP7 is up next: [Fast Pass](#) is continued until March 2017 and incorporates 27 partners. *Smooth, fast*, automatic, obstacle-free and unopposed, totally *trouble-free*, that is how this project imagines borders, an image that is projected in great plasticity within the video presentation consistent mostly of simulations. These do show human-human, human-machine and machine-machine interactions, but get by completely without voiceovers. Instead, typical Muzak or elevator music aimed at immobilizing the viewers accompanies them. These sounds are so overly frivolous that I wonder whether the engineers within these projects might not have a certain dystopian relationship to the worlds they are working on. FastPass itself implements a user-focused approach so as to automatize border controls and harmonious architectures, with which they mean border-control-scenarios. The project has expanded the classic setting at the airport (Vienna) to include case studies involving gates (*mantraps*) or stalls for the Registered Traveller Program (RTP)¹⁷ at harbours (Piraeus) and country borders (Moravita, Romania). FastPass is working on “next generation sensors”, for “on the move face verification” or a “person separation algorithm”, which is supposed to verify that only one person is located within the gate at a time. Furthermore, FastPass is attempting “document reader interoperability”, developing algorithms to support multimodal biometrics, which is supposed to undermine so-called spoofing – biometric deception. However, it is obvious: FastPass is thought of first and foremost for “Exit Schengen” – or as a conference participant put it:

“I was just wondering, if the project could also be used for Entry Schengen, because you could also hide people in the trunk of your car.”¹⁸

[MobilePass](#), a follow-up project to FastPass was conducted in cooperation with the Rumanian and Spanish border patrol for “secure, modular and distributed mobile border control solution for European

17 The RTP was conceptualized since 2008 and 2013 respectively as part of the so-called Smart Border Package proposed by the commission. After repeated criticism by the European council and parliament with regards to the cost, technological feasibility and implementation, as well as a critical public consultation in 2015, the commission presented a re-worked legislative proposal for smart borders on the 6th of April 2016, which now entailed only the Entry-Exit-System. The realisation of the RTP is therefore left to the single member states.

18 “Ich habe mich nur gefragt, ob das Projekt auch auf Entry Schengen ausgerichtet ist, weil man ja auch Leute im Kofferraum verstecken könnte.” (transl. S.M.)

land border crossing points”. Just as FastPass, it is represented by a spokesperson from the AIT Austrian Institute of Technology. It is the last project before lunch, which takes place at the foyer of the Fraunhofer IGD. Here, we eat standing at whitely shrouded aluminium bar tables, while the surrounding walls stage a comical improvisation of charger cables sticking out of rows of bags and providing invisible gadgets with power. The afternoon continues with the [BODEGA project](#), which is presented by representatives of the VTT Technical Research Centre of Finland, the Greek police, or rather the Center for Security Studies (KEMEA) of the University of Namur, and Thales, each highlighting a different facet of the project. The first contribution conveys a general overview and addresses the “human factor” at borders as central to this type of research.

This translates directly into the position of the border guard subject, for whom the project will provide a “toolbox”. The summary of the project description is formulated in more figurative language, as the “ethical societal dimension” and “proactive enhancement of human performance in border control” is discussed. In contrast to pilot and feasibility studies, BODEGA attaches utmost importance to the field and relies on field research to generate data – just as is usually the case within ethnographically inspired qualitative social research. “Smarter borders change the way border control is performed”, says the presenter, Blagovesta Nikolova. She is implying that an increasingly automated border will change the attention economy of border guards, thereby altering the interaction between the “end users”, travellers and border police (fig. 2, fig. 3).

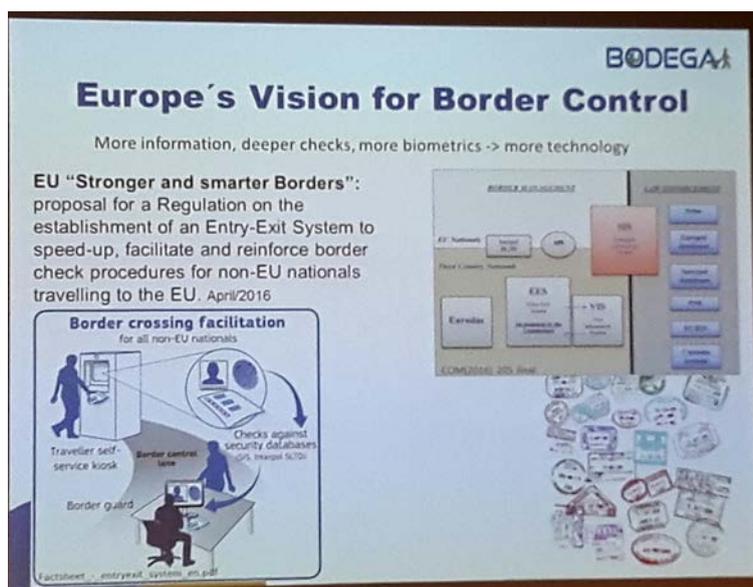


Figure 2: Europe's Vision for Border Control

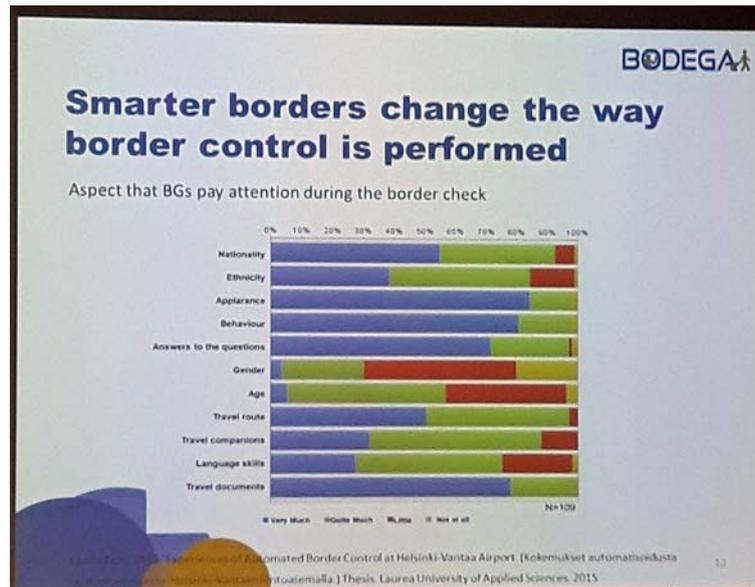


Figure 3: Smarter Borders

The project, I begin to realize, aims at improving the performance of border guards in the time after the implementation of programmes, such as the RTP and other variants of an intelligent border through increasing mechanisation, computerisation and automation. If nothing else, the point is to flank EU policy initiatives such as the Smart Border package with research already going well beyond it. Nikolova, who is employed by the Laboratory for Ethical Governance of Information technology at the university of Namur and has taken two projects to the conference in Darmstadt, highlights the ethical dimensions of border management contexts in her presentation. Her emphasis is that the proposed work package does not simply evolve around technology acceptance and questions of ethical research, but includes an attempt to establish “research reflexivity” framed by Responsible Research and Innovation (RRI), and annexed with transversality. As this sounds promising, I approach her in the break to ask about publications regarding the matter, as I could find none online, even after months into the project term. Unfortunately, these “deliveries” are solely internal and not available to the public, “due to safety reasons”, says Nikolova. The analysed “deep implications” of the technologisation discussed here, which are meant to advance security and velocity at borders are again a safety risk? An interesting aspect of this could be the noted functional transition of the border from a dividing line, or scene of separation, to a place of information retrieval. Fourth and last up to speak about the BODEGA research project is the psychologist Elise Le Guellec from Thales. She complements the demonstration of BODEGA as multi-disciplinary. Self-proclaimed “human factors

expert”, she presents first results of the field research. The main aspect in the field, she underlines, was to accompany the border guards for an entire shift. It is notable that these ethical, social or psychological “zooms on soft skills” are mostly conveyed by women, while the technological aspects are all portrayed by men: “Humans are part of your system, so do not forget about them when you design a system”, Le Guellec recites.

The following presentations cover the project [Origins](#), which concentrates on verifying and standardising birth certificates as the traditional document most prone to forgery,¹⁹ [Ekzistenz](#), which develops strategies against identity theft and wants to guarantee one safe identity for every EU citizen,²⁰ and [HECTOS](#), a project going beyond biometrics and focusing on physical attacks as well as certifying and harmonising evaluation processes. Numerous projects represented at the conference focus on the biometrically anchored enforcement of a unique identity within a single breeder. These projects are compliant to building European standards. In direct contrast are of course migrant tactics and quotidian practices Helle Stenum describes in her article as “strategies of flexible identities”²¹: obtaining papers and handing off registrations make up equal parts and are met with a response that Dennis Broeder accurately formulates as a modulation between “exclusion from registration and documentation” and “exclusion through registration and documentation”²².

The day ends with Joseph Cannataci, a well-known data specialist, moderating a panel titled “How will biometric systems change – with the new EU regulation on Data Privacy”. The focus lies on the EU’s most recent data security policies, the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), which advocates “privacy by design and by default”. Evgeni Moyakine, Claudia Colonnello and Catherine

19 One of the slides on the projected power point presentation states, 2009 saw almost 13900 cases of document fraud in France. 6.300 of those were uncovered by the border police, in 4011 of these cases, French documents were affected: 1.640 birth certificates, 1.070 identity cards, 1.035 passports and 266 drivers’ licenses.

20 One example, with which the speaker illustrated the virulence of the project, was also telling the case of a French woman, married to an Algerian on paper, who claimed that the document was fraudulent. This confronted her with an extremely complicated burden of proof.

21 “Strategien einer flexiblen Identität” (trans. S.M.).

22 Dennis Broeders, “A European ‘Border’ Surveillance System under Construction”, in: Huub Dijkstra and Albert Meijer (eds.), *Migration and the New Technological Borders of Europe*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2011, pp. 40–67. It shall be explicitly stated here, that the modulation of exclusion described by Broeder, does not end with citizenship, as most cases of “reversible citizenship” in Europe show, cf. hic: Vassilis Tsianos and Marianne Pieper, “Postliberale Assemblagen: Rassismus in Zeiten der Gleichheit”, in Sebastian Friedrich (ed.), *Rassismus in der Leistungsgesellschaft*, Münster, Ed. Assemblage, 2011, pp. 114–132.

Jasserand-Breeman are on the panel talking about the rights of data subjects, such as the “right of consent to the data collection” and the “right of erasure of data” by example of the Speaker Identification Integrated Project (SIIP). The question is, how these rights can be implemented into the respective systems. I begin to grasp an important point of “privacy by design”, which is the possibility of bridging the gap between various disciplines. Interdisciplinary knowledge and knowledge mediation are all rage. On top of that, “privacy by default”, the standardized data-security-friendly setting of products and services, opens up questions of the social, as products and services are developed and constructed in the age of “big data” and “open data”. Data security was thought as “impact assessment” to date, claims Claudia Colonnello of the Italian Laboratoria di Scienze della Cittadinanza (LSC). The new paradigms of rights and liberties of natural people as put forth through article 25 of the new EU data security regulations (EU-DSGVO) “data security through technical design and privacy friendly default settings”²³ and others, clarify that a form of “societal impact assessment” is necessary today. Joseph Cannataci’s arguments go in a similar direction, as he describes a cultural change in thinking about what “privacy” means today.

The conference continues on the subject of identity management infrastructure in Europe (Future ID), identity theft (SWAN, Secure Access Control Over Wide Area Network), enhanced fingerprint live-scan technology (INGRESS) and a platform for standard operational evaluations for biometric technologies (BEAT). Subsequently, a representative of Indra Sistemas presents ABC4EU, research that engages with sorting processes at borders. Purpose of the project is to develop Automated Border Control Gates for Europe, so that “manual intervention” or “operator involvement” is necessary only on rare occasions. This project, too, clearly anticipates the implementation of the Registered Traveller Program (RTP) and the Entry-Exit-Systems (EES). The prototypes and pilot projects are presented in expectance of an implementation of the most recent smart border regulation plans from April 2016.²⁴ Nonetheless, the actual test series needs to be

23 “Datenschutz durch Technikgestaltung und durch datenschutzfreundliche Voreinstellungen” (trans. S.M.).

24 Cp. European Commission, “establishing an Entry/Exit System (EES) to register entry and exit data and refusal of entry data of third country nationals crossing the external borders of the Member States of the European Union and determining the conditions for access to the EES for law enforcement purposes and amending Regulation (EC) No 767/2008 and Regulation (EU) No 1077/2011”, *Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council*, COM(2016) 194 final, April 6, 2016. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/policies/securing-eu-borders/legal-documents/docs/20160406/regulation_proposal_entryexit_system_borders_package_en.pdf [accessed April 6, 2016].

conducted in “real scenarios” and also respond to the then valid legal situation. The Spanish company Eticas Research & Consulting works most centrally at gaining acceptance from the general public for the integration of the projects. This concerns the approval of integrating whole-body scanners at airports, for example. A crucial point would be expanding privacy protection “from legal to desirable and acceptable to privacy-enhancing”, says presenter Gemma Galdón Clavell, accompanying her talk with a graphic display of the methodology that Eticas Research & Consulting has been implementing successfully for five years (fig. 4).



Figure 4: Eticas' Societal Impact Strategy

According to her, an application-oriented understanding and implementation of the ABC Gates would be fundamental. Therein, she is yet another speaker underlining the changed role of border guards, whose function is gradually altered to “helping one to pass through a system” – in her example, someone with mobility restrictions. The next speaker, Cristina Conde of the University Rey Juan Carlos, counts as a distinguished expert in the field of face recognition biometrics. I, too,

am fascinated by the way in which she narrates the attack on a biometric system – facial recognition. She reports on the interaction of artefacts as if it was natural. While there may somewhere be a “hurtful purpose”, this seems rather irrelevant for “biometric vulnerability”, the vulnerability of the system through spoofing. While the scientist assesses the technological quality of the artefact, with which an attack is made, to be very high, she deems the reason, motivation or intention of surpassing biometric control barriers to be barely notable. Her focus is on the self-defence mechanisms of the system. Therefore, the plot concentrates on sensors (hardware), characteristics (software), or fusion strategies (score-level). The next speaker of the Università degli Studi di Milano engages with multi-biometric systems and “information fusion”, where the “match score level fusion” technique offers the best results, or at least better than the fusion of sensors and characteristics. **Vision Box**, ABC4EU’s industrial partner, offers the last speaker of the segment. The Vision Box website speaks of “happy flow”, and of an “ultimate passenger experience”, which is becoming “easier, faster and safer”. “eMRTD’s” are mentioned ceaselessly, a shorthand for “Electronic machine-readable travel documents”. I notice first signs of fatigue, and my eyes and thoughts begin to wander. Panayiotis Mertis of the Hellenic police/KEMEA is seated a couple of rows before me and on his computer screen I can see him gazing at the same pictures as me, the burning refugee camp Moria on the island of Lesbos. The news of the fire and subsequent flight of over 3000 inhabitants had been flying in from there since late evening of the lecture. The so-called hotspot holds the data of all arrivals from the border until establishing identification for registration. As conditions are miserable and delays immense, migrants are demanding to be allowed to travel to Athens.²⁵

Subsequent to this, representatives of Veridos identity solutions GmbH/Bundersdruckerei, Intrepid minds and the Laboratory for Ethical Governance of Information Technology of the University of Namur present **PROTECT**. The project, fully titled “Pervasive and UseR Focused BiomeTrics BordEr ProjeCT”, kicked off recently and has a run-time of three years. It’s all about “breaking the limits” and “really innovative scenarios”, and about “remote biometrics”. Instead of border gates or stalls, where border control is more or less automated, PROTECT proposes passages and corridors, through

25 On the fire, cp. e.g.: Die Welt, “Tausende Flüchtlinge irren nach Brand auf Insel umher”, September 20, 2016. Available at: <https://www.welt.de/politik/ausland/article158262874/Tausende-Fluechtlinge-irren-nach-Brand-auf-Insel-umher.html> [accessed September 20, 2016]. On the hotspot Moria cp e.g.: Brigitta Kuster and Vassilis S. Tsianos, *Hotspot Lesbos. Eine Publikation der Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung*, Heinrich Böll Stiftung, August 2016. Available at: https://www.boell.de/sites/default/files/160802_e-paper_kuster_tsianos_hotspotlesbos_v103.pdf [accessed June 24, 2017].

which travellers must pass. Based on the observation that this border scenario is not compatible with the Schengen code, where data-storage of EU citizens is not allowed, someone from the audience asks, whether PROTECT is intended only for third-country citizens. The response proclaims that the project first and foremost proposes a technological vision. Indeed, the vision goes far beyond the Entry-Exit-System already in place (fig. 5, fig. 6, fig. 7).

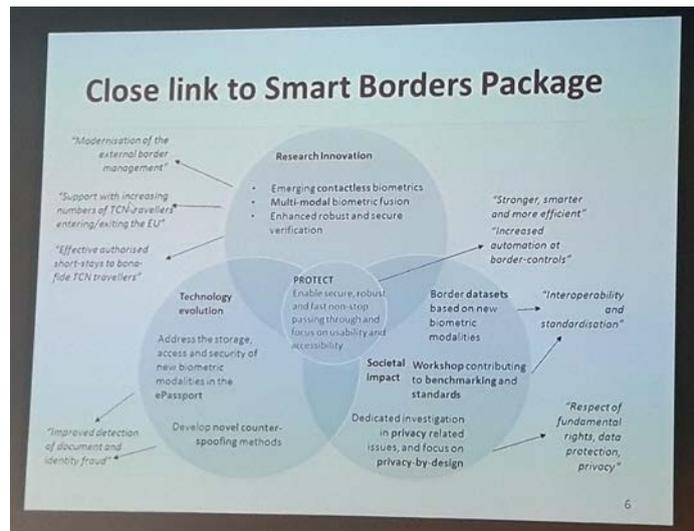


Figure 5: Smart Borders Package



Figure 6: Legal Analysis (1)

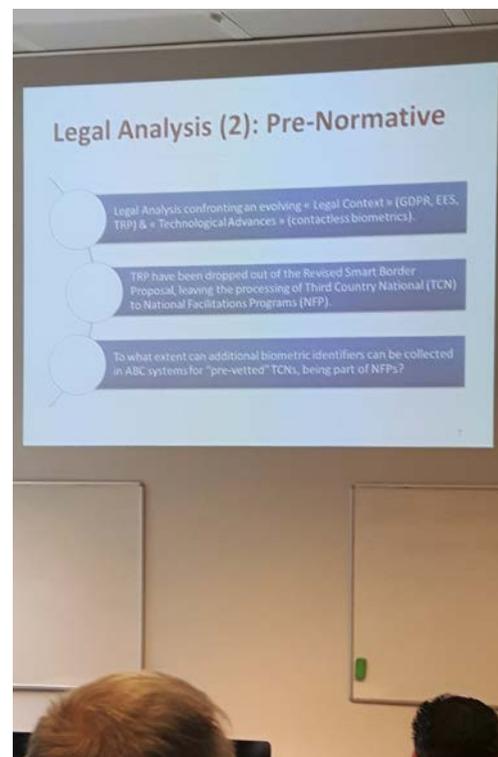


Figure 7: Legal Analysis (2)

However, such futurism is exactly what is needed to reengage exhausted listeners such as myself. Intrepid Minds, a company specialized on producing events in the area of financial markets, rights and governance, has its speaker emphasise the research character of PROTECT will go beyond the visionary, to learn from past failures. The call for projects reads “explore”, not “answer”. And:

“my vision is that someone activates the function on their mobile, crosses the corridor, and then disables the function again”²⁶.

Quietly, and in a deliberately casual manner he adds, he hopes not only that travellers consent to the corridors, but that they will also prefer them. The aim is not just acceptance, but a free decision. And even the usual procedure of questions regarding the project is turned on its head, as the speaker rhetorically states the questions he wants to research through PROTECT:

“Can we? May we? Should we?”

Within the realm of “legal, ethical and social issues”, “privacy enhancing” on the one, and the mantra-like emphasis on “trust building” on the other side are routinely presented throughout the PROTECT presentations. The innovation, says the speaker from Namur, lies within producing suggestions, not commands for engineers. The engineers should themselves be motivated to develop ethical questions, and work them into the systems. PROTECT, too, aims at creating interdisciplinary collaborations between social sciences, engineers and juristic specialists. Nonetheless, it seems to me, as if jurisprudence and the humanities are engaged to moderate meaning, rather than critically accompanying the development of new practices.

All projects share a motivation, a self-legitimization even, through a constantly growing number of travellers within the EU: An estimate of the European Commission is referenced again and again, which states that 2025 will bring 302 million border passages into Europe, and 76 million third-country nationals (TCN). Calculating with numbers from 2014 that would mean an increase of 55%. It is therefore logically consistent that all research projects have a common focus on “pervasive, minimally-intrusive, rapid and usable identity confirmation systems”. A delay in mobility fluxes at borders should be prevented at all costs – as the set phrase astoundingly reveals:

“Crowding should be avoided ‘for many reasons’.”

Finally, an own contribution on the Entry-Exit System, or rather, on

²⁶ “Meine Vision ist, dass jemand die Funktion aktiviert auf seinem Handy, durchgeht durch den Korridor, und die Funktion dann wieder ausschaltet.” (transl. S.M.)

the existing and scheduled “EU Large Scale Systems” within the EU agency by eu-LISA marks the conclusion. Speakers from the European commission, the private sector, academics, Frontex and eu-LISA itself present within this panel. Ciaran Carolan gives a first, quite technical keynote. He presents the biggest “operational biometric testing” ever conducted in Europe to date, the Smart Border pilot study (fig. 8).

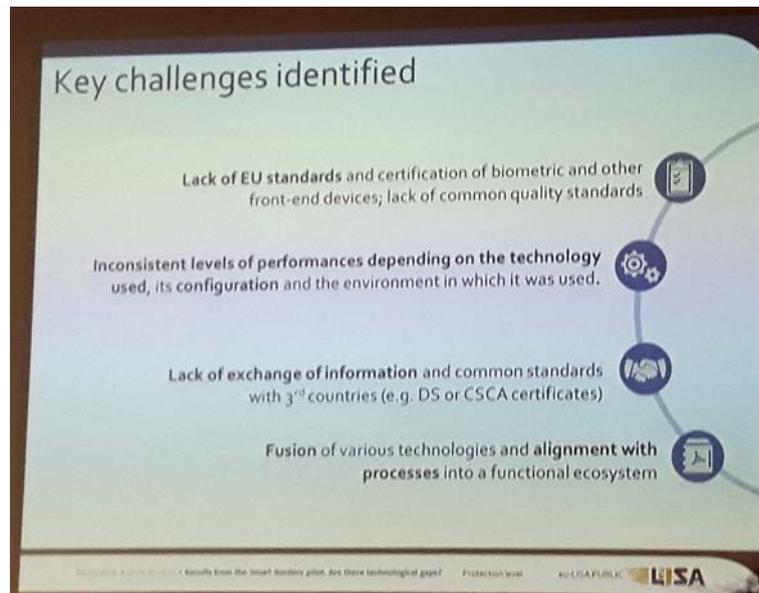


Figure 8: Key challenges

Carolan seems happy to share the relevant results of the study, as:

“this is why meetings such as this one are so important. So that we can tell you, what research is needed”²⁷

Richard Rinkens, project manager for biometrics at DG Home Affairs, picks up on this line of impact in his contribution titled “Requirements for research derived from the Smart Border Concepts”. So does the final panel “Mind the gap – what research is needed for current and future operational biometric systems”²⁸. The bouquet of results and assessments of technological gaps within the EES presented here translate into a direct work assignment for the EAB Research Projects Conference’s audience. The EES clearly aims at surveying the group of *overstayers*. This is by no means disguised, but directly addressed. As things are now, the survey made easily possible through EES, would

²⁷ “Deshalb sind Treffen wie dieses so wichtig, damit wir euch sagen, welche Forschung gebraucht wird.” (transl. S.M.)

²⁸ The subject of cryptotechnology and the area of behavioural biometrics were also mentioned here, although Rasa Karbauskaite of Frontex spoke of “nervous behaviour” at the border and stated that Rumania had conducted “respective test series”. Jean-Christophe Fondeur of Safran Identity & Security stated in following that behavioural biometrics were an “immature technology”.

theoretically be calculated from each stamped passport in an arduous process without it – an almost unfeasible task according to Rinkens, whose presentation style is lively, popular and humorous (fig. 9).



Figure 9: Rinkens and the EES

His contribution also addresses the buzzword “interconnectivity”. In connection to eu-LISA, interconnectivity calls privacy advocates and human rights actors into action, but also ill-informed politicians, susceptible to conspiracy theories, says Rinkens. However, it is necessary to strictly distinguish interconnectivity from interoperability. The difference between the two is illustrated through a diagram. According to the current situation, which he terms the “EU’s silo approach”, there are one planned and three large existing EU datatypes: EES, VIS, SIS, and the oldest, Eurodac (fig. 10).

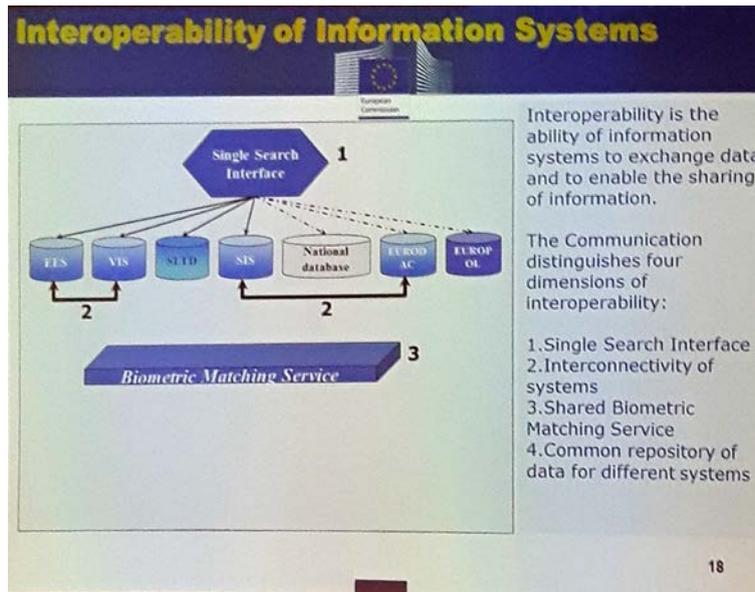


Figure 10: Interoperability

These systems are merely partially connected, even though a single matching platform secures their interoperability (fig. 11).

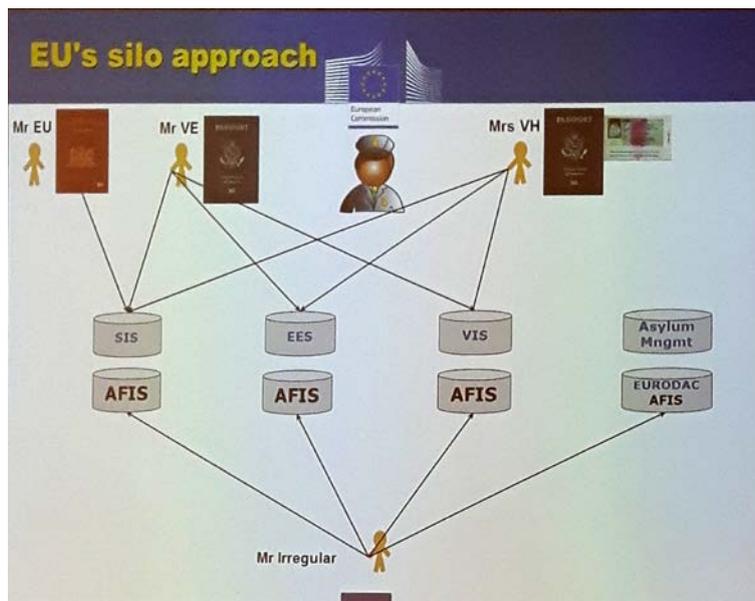


Figure 11: EU's silo approach

The conclusion Rinkens draws from this is a EU-wide “identity repository” as a long-term goal.

“A common repository of data at EU level for different systems is the most ambitious long-term approach to interoperability. This core module would contain basic identity data while specific data (e.g. visa data, entry/exit records, ETIAS records) would be stored in specific

modules. This would overcome the current fragmentation of the EU's data architecture.”

The DG Home Affairs, just as the police force, seem strained by all the different databases. The following discussion evolving around “large databases” vs. “centralized databases” suggests that from a technological point of view it is highly debatable, whether centralised or decentralised databases and possibly federated identity-management-systems are more vulnerable and prone to attacks. However, consensus within the conference does exist on the technological and governmental aspects, which should most likely go hand in hand, while “policy makers” are known to go against that grain. All participants of the EAB Research Project Conference hope that the developments of large European biometric data systems follow a technological decision process, instead of a political one.

Before departure, the final panel is opened to the public for questions. At the beginning of the session, Christoph Busch had already drawn up a whiteboard, where he shows what the EU and the EAB represent in equal measure. The terms “innovation”, “peace”, “friends”, “standards”, “diversity” and “democracy” are arranged in a star-shaped formation. However, as far as “democracy” in connection with the EAB is rather questionable, he proposes a system, within which all conference participants can equally upload questions to a server anonymously. It is also possible to rate the already registered and uploaded questions posed by others. Hence, the end of the conference is made up by a prioritized list of questions. This installed q-rate system is evidence of a cybernetic adjustment to the diagnosed deficit of democracy (fig. 12, fig 13).

Translated by Sara Morais.



Figure 12: EAB and the public

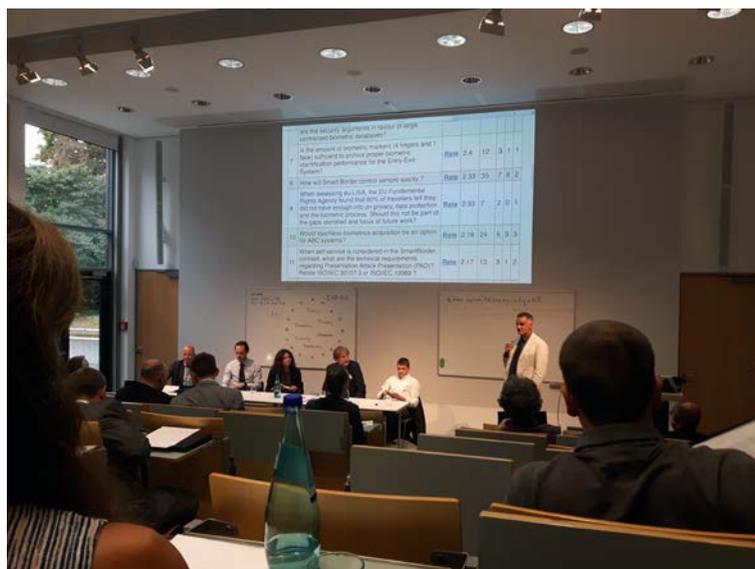


Figure 13: Final panel

MARIA ULLRICH

MEDIA USE DURING ESCAPE – A CONTRIBUTION TO REFUGEES’ COLLECTIVE AGENCY¹

1 INTRODUCTION

According to the popular² German boulevard newspaper *The BILD*, it was a historical tweet of 140 characters from August 2015 that resulted in Germany becoming the primary country to receive Syrian refugees via the Balkan route.³ The tweet by the German National Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF) stated that from that moment, the Dublin Regulation should not apply to Syrian refugees, meaning they would not be sent back to the country they first entered in the Schengen Area.

The BILD blamed Merkel for the tweet in their article. There was a widely shared belief that the spread of ‘welcoming’ information through social media was one of the main reasons why many Syrian refugees considered Germany as their preferred country of arrival.⁴ The access to social media and the welcoming messages spread using these platforms, were cited as significant pull factors for Syrian refugees to continue walking towards Western Europe from Hungary at the beginning of

1 Warm thanks to Magdalena Freudenschuss, Franziska Mönnich and Javier Contesse for their constructive feedback and support.

2 BILD is the German newspaper with the highest circulation.

3 Cp. n.n., “Historische 140 Zeichen. Der Tweet, der Deutschland zum Zufluchtsort machte”, *Bild Online*, September 19, 2015. Available at: <http://www.bild.de/politik/inland/twitter/kurznachricht-die-deutschland-zum-zufluchtsort-machte-42642974.bild.html> [accessed November 4, 2016].

4 Although research results suggest that a lot of the welcoming information might not even have been received by refugees before their arrival. Cp. Martin Emmer, Carola Richter, Marlene Kunst, *Flucht 2.0. Mediennutzung durch Flüchtlinge vor, während und nach der Flucht*, Research Report, Freie Universität Berlin, 2016. Available at: http://www.polsoz.fu-berlin.de/kommwiss/arbeitsstellen/internationale_kommunikation/Media/Flucht-2_0.pdf [accessed February 5, 2017].

September 2015.⁵

According to the assumption that communication through social media directly leads to action, the refugees' behaviour is described as deterministic.

“[...] as if the new technologies themselves with no human agency, no sociality and no social struggles are automatically revolutionizing the world”⁶.

On the contrary, the idea of this paper is to take a closer look at the nexus of media usage and refugee movements with an actor-centred perspective following the thesis that it is the refugees that do move and make use of media for their own sake. Following this perspective the refugees do not follow social media information blindly, but rather use different forms of media actively and in a self-determined manner to organize their escape. How do the refugees use media during their flight and how does that contribute to their agency?

To answer these questions, this paper analyses and summarises data collected through fieldwork in Italy in 2015, volunteering experience in Athens in 2016, as well as information from newspapers, relevant grey literature and specialist publications. The significant use of media by refugees along the Balkan route is presented as it raised more awareness for the migration-media nexus. While this is not a completely new issue, it made media scholars and migration researchers especially interested in the phenomenon of digital media use.⁷ However, different routes of escape and the media used by refugees will be analysed to compare media usage of refugees and to gain a broader view of the issue.

I argue that media use supports different forms of refugees' agency, because it helps to build up and maintain strong networks. That refugees organise themselves through networking is not a new phenomenon. As the Autonomy of Migration argued in the 1990s, migrants and refugees are highly self-determined actors, mainly due to a collective agency.

5 This idea was later shared by other leading newspapers see for example Nicola Abé et al., “Herzdame”, *Spiegel Online*, September 19, 2015. Available at: <http://www.spiegel.de/spiegel/print/d-138749214.html> [accessed November 1, 2016].

6 Dimitris Parsanoglou, Nicos Trimikliniotis, and Vassilis S. Tsianos, *Mobile Commons, Migrant Digitalities and the Right to the City*, Basingstoke/Hampshire, Palgrave Macmillan, 2015, p. 9.

7 See several field studies that were undertaken since the expansion of the Balkan route, for example Marie Gillespie et al., *Mapping Refugee Media Journeys. Smartphones and Social Media Networks*, Research Report, The Open University/France Médias Monde, 2016. Available at: http://www.open.ac.uk/ccig/sites/www.open.ac.uk/ccig/files/Mapping%20Refugee%20Media%20Journeys%2016%20May%20FIN%20MG_0.pdf [accessed May 2, 2017; Emmer et al. 2016; Media in Cooperation and Transition – MiCT, “Information to go”, *Migration Media Usage Survey*, June 1, 2016. Available at: http://www.mict-international.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/mictbrief_en_20160623.pdf [accessed November 9, 2016].

2 THE AUTONOMY OF MIGRATION: IT IS ALL ABOUT NETWORKING!

The Autonomy of Migration introduced an agency-centred view of migration.⁸ Moulier Boutang regarded refugees and migrants as subjects that reveal the limited capacity of political measures to control migration routes or to seal off borders.⁹ His interpretation encourages us to understand migration as a political practice,¹⁰ to interpret it as a process of deep creative power.¹¹ The Autonomy of Migration can be seen as a perspective on migration focusing on the process itself and not on the border control mechanisms that are merely considered a reaction to these processes. The Autonomy of Migration underlines the collective character of migrant and refugees' agency, when Moulier Boutang describes migration as a movement that possesses its own knowledge, follows its own rules and organises its practice collectively.¹²

The refugees' movements can be assigned to different types of collective agency.¹³ I distinguish between an invisible and a visible type of refugees' agency.¹⁴ Both forms can be observed during escape depending on the respective strategy refugees draw on, as well as on the challenges they are confronted with. The visible type presents the kind of agency refugees possess when they use public space to raise awareness of their situation and to demand freedom of movement. The invisible

8 Including processes of escape.

9 Cp. Yann Moulier Boutang, "Interview", in: Materialien für einen neuen Antimperialismus (ed.), *Strategien der Unterwerfung, Strategien der Befreiung – Thesen zur Rassismusdebatte*, Berlin/Göttingen: Schwarze Risse, pp. 29–56.

10 Cp. Stephan Scheel, "Das Konzept der Autonomie der Migration überdenken", in *Movements. Journal für kritische Migrations- und Grenzregimeforschung*, 1(2), 2015. Available at: <http://movements-journal.org/issues/02.kaempfe/14.scheel--autonomie-der-migration.html> [accessed January 25, 2016].

11 Cp. Dimitris Papadopoulos, Niamh Stephenson, and Vassilis Tsianos, *Escape Routes. Control and Subversion in the Twenty-first Century*, London/Ann Arbor, Pluto Press, 2008, p. 202.

12 Cp. Yann Moulier Boutang, "Thesen zur Autonomie der Migration und zum notwendigen Ende des Regimes der Arbeitsmigration", *Jungle World*, 15, April 3, 2002. Available at: <http://jungle-world.com/artikel/2002/14/24171.html> [accessed January 24, 2016].

13 I prefer the term "agency" instead of "autonomy" because it does not suggest an independence towards structures as "autonomy" does and leaves room for how this agency can be explained. However I speak about the "Autonomy of Migration" when I refer to the approach going back to Moulier Boutang.

14 This distinction derives from research by Wilcke and Lambert who in turn derived the invisible character of agency from Rancière's notion of politics (u.a.: 2002) conception of politics and the visible one from reflections on Imperceptible Politics by Papadopoulos et al. Cp. Holger Wilcke, and Laura Lambert, "Die Politik des O-Platzes. (Un-)Sichtbare Kämpfe einer Geflüchtetenbewegung", in *Movements. Journal für kritische Migrations- und Grenzregimeforschung*, 1(2), 2015. Available at: <http://movements-journal.org/issues/02.kaempfe/06.wilcke,lambert--oplatz-k%C3%A4mpfe-gefl%C3%BChtete-bewegung.html> [accessed January 25, 2016]; Jacques Rancière, *Das Unternehmen. Politik und Philosophie*, Frankfurt a.M., Suhrkamp, 2002; Papadopoulos et al. 2008.

type, by contrast, manages his route very effectively so that she/he will not be detected by powers that could hinder him.

Visible	Invisible
The Political: “We have rights”	The Tactical: “The collective makes us invisible”

Table 1: Types of collective refugees’ agency

Communication processes between the refugees are central. That networks are the key for understanding processes of migration and escape, is a commonly shared view within new theories of migration research.^{15, 16} The movements appear as social processes that are made possible through exchange and networking between groups. The decisions on the followed route depend on the networks a person belongs to. From this perspective, refugees’ behaviour can only be understood by considering them as members of groups with shared interests going beyond personal connections. It is not primarily an individual process.¹⁷ Consequently, Papadopoulos and Tsianos describe migration as

“a constitutive moment of the current social transformation; a moment which is primarily sustained by cooperation, solidarity, the use of broad networks and resources, shared knowledge, collective anticipation”¹⁸.

Using this theoretical background as well as the distinction between invisible and visible forms of refugees’ agency, I will analyse empirical data on media usage of refugees and show how media contributes to collective refugees’ agency.

3 MEDIA (USE) FOR REFUGEES’ NETWORKS

Refugees use a variety of media for networking, ranging from traditional ones to digital technologies. These are also used in different ways. People might, for example, use social media or online platforms, although not

15 Cp. Sonja Haug, *Klassische und neuere Theorien der Migration*, Working Paper 30, Mannheim, Mannheimer Zentrum für Europäische Sozialforschung, 2000.

16 This includes research on forced migration or refugee studies.

17 There is an individual type of refugees’ agency based on pragmatism, self-esteem and purposefulness I explored during field research in Italy about movements of refugees, illegals and asylum seekers within Schengen. But considering media which are basically used for networking the individual type is not relevant here.

18 Dimitris Papadopoulos, and Vassilis Tsianos, “The Autonomy of Migration. The Animals of Undocumented Mobility”, in: Anna Hickey-Moody, and Peta Malins (eds.), *Deleuzian Encounters. Studies in Contemporary Social Issues*, Basingstoke/Hampshire, Palgrave Macmillan, 2007, pp. 223–235, here: 230f.

via mobile internet. At the same time, physical technologies like mobile phones are not only used for communication, but might also serve as investment-instruments during migration processes. They could be exchanged for money or they could function as a pledge for part of their journey. Different forms of media can also be combined. Tsianos cites the case of Syrian refugees who researched their route on Google Maps and printed it before starting their journey.¹⁹ Accordingly, the general term ‘media’ also refers to printing, text-messaging and phone calls, which are important instruments for refugees to organise their route.

Recent research has focused on how refugees have used digital media. Dekker and Engbersen, who were already highly aware about refugees using new technologies well before the expansion of the Balkan route in 2015, conducted interviews with migrants about their reasons for migration to the Netherlands.²⁰ According to their results, digital technology facilitates migration. It helps to be in contact with friends and family, to mobilise weak ties, but also to create latent ties.²¹ However, it has to be taken into account that – because of the easy access to social media – platforms and forums can be exploited by other interest groups, like traffickers or the police. For instance, Frontex operated on social media with fake profiles.²²

For Tsianos, it is not a surprise that refugees are familiar with new technologies and – despite certain risks – use them during their escape. According to him, one needs to recognise that it is not the poorest people who move. As such, these people have the economic background to afford technical devices. Additionally, refugees – like many people on the move – are adapters of new technologies. Of course digital technologies which facilitate communication in a globalized world are especially useful for those acting transnationally.²³

Nevertheless, different preferences and migration routes lead to varied outcomes. Due to inherently irregular processes, escape is often accompanied by great adversity. This also implies to the Balkan route where refugees’ “digital nativity” was restricted when the police confiscated mobile phones from refugees crossing the Greek and

19 Cp. Vassilis Tsianos, “Smartphones sind für Flüchtlinge überlebenswichtig”, *Wired Deutschland*, August 23, 2015. Available at: <https://www.wired.de/collection/life/ohne-smartphones-hatten-fluchtlinge-kaum-eine-chance-sagt-der-migrationsforscher> [accessed November 9, 2016].

20 Cp. Rianne Dekker, and Godfried Engbersen, *How social media transform migrant networks and facilitate migration*, Working Paper 64, Oxford, University of Oxford, 2012.

21 Cp. Dekker and Engbersen, *How social media transform migrant networks and facilitate migration*, p. 1.

22 Cp. Tsianos, “Smartphone sind für Flüchtlinge überlebenswichtig”.

23 Cp. Tsianos, “Smartphone sind für Flüchtlinge überlebenswichtig”.

Bulgarian borders.²⁴ Still, the Balkan route is hardly comparable to the Mediterranean route and the Sub-Saharan sub-routes connected to it, for example, where people pass politically fragile states, where they confront adverse environmental conditions, where they are at the mercy of traffickers, and where the infrastructure is lacking for uninterrupted use of mobile internet. Of course this varies across the route, but considering the crossing of the Sahara and in many cases, the detention of refugees in Libya, the circumstances of escape can be much harder than those that shape the Balkan route. Furthermore, the background of the refugees plays a role in how they utilise media during escape. An interview participant from the Ivory Coast who made his way to Europe via the Mediterranean route, assigned little meaning to social media during transit because in his opinion many refugees from Sub Sahara could not afford new communication technologies:

“The refugees come from different countries and two thirds from developing countries and countries where politics control the media. Communication technologies are not reachable for them, especially for those from the countryside. Poverty also plays a role. Electricity is luxury.”

Consequently, refugees’ economic background has an influence on which media they use as Tsianos also suggests above. But any media basically helps to communicate with others. Though, different forms of media usage suggest that they also contribute differently to refugees’ agency. They might contribute to invisible collective agency as well as to visible collective agency. On the one hand information is spread via media that gives refugees the opportunity to bypass border controls.

3.1 Media Usage and Invisible Migrant Agency

Utilising media can help refugees to remain invisible under the radar of the bureaucratic state, for instance because they organise themselves independently during the movement without the support of public services. As a survey of Media in Cooperation and Transition – MiCT based on interviews with Syrian and Iraqi²⁵ refugees showed, firstly route relevant information and secondly information to satisfy basic needs such as food, security or housing was considered as most crucial during escape by the interviewees.²⁶ Both kinds of data were preferably gathered from social networks, WhatsApp, Viber, Skype and/or other VoIP

24 Cp. Tsianos, “Smartphone sind für Flüchtlinge überlebenswichtig”.

25 Most likely those must have fled along the Balkan region.

26 Cp. Media in Cooperation and Transition – MiCT, “Information to go”. Interviews were conducted in Germany with refugees that at the most had been living two years there.

services; especially Facebook was named during the interviews.²⁷ To have access to this information was the most important need during escape.

“The survival of individuals and families was dependent upon their access to, and membership of, the aforementioned cycle of relevant information. This is why the provision of communications equipment and ongoing access to information during transit was described as a ‘meta-need’ and one that was prioritised above other needs.”²⁸

The refugees mainly learned about data to satisfy basic needs from other refugees whom they trusted more than European official media. They shared their experience during transit and after arriving to some country of arrival.²⁹ When I was in Pireus, Athens a Syrian refugee for instance invited me to get to know his family living in Germany via a Whatsapp call with his phone. This cheap and practical way of communication was for him crucial to be in contact with those that had already arrived in Western Europe and to organise his escape by communicating with them. The circumstances of escape are changed profoundly through these permanent communication processes. In the presented examples the refugees in transit gave and took information on their own initiative without any form of superior management and organised themselves independently. In other words:

“Digitality and the new knowledge forms contained and transmitted are a vital organizing force. This force generates and shapes various mobile commons which are an essential acquisition resulting from the collective power to reshape the world of people on the move.”³⁰

The information spread along the routes contained for example the price of taxis, recommendable hotels, where to charge phones, where to buy equipment to sleep outdoors, what traffickers to trust and how to avoid the police.³¹ Through a permanent sharing of information refugees on the Balkans were able to organise themselves in solidarity between the continents, as the results from the MiCT survey show.³²

Refugees also share almost real-time information about the border situations. Individuals document their routes for example through video sharing in social media. Due to the real-time exchange refugee

27 Cp. Media in Cooperation and Transition – MiCT, “Information to go”, p. 5.

28 Cp. Media in Cooperation and Transition – MiCT, “Information to go”, p. 7.

29 Cp. Morten Freidel, “Schlag nach bei Facebook”, in *FAZ Online*, September 20, 2015. Available at: <http://www.faz.net/aktuell/politik/fluechtlingskrise/auf-dem-fluechtlingsstreck-schlag-nach-bei-Facebook-13812602.html> [accessed November 10, 2016], p. 2.

30 Trimikliniotis et al., *Mobile Commons, Migrant Digitalities and the Right to the City*, p. 8.

31 Cp. Trimikliniotis et al., *Mobile Commons, Migrant Digitalities and the Right to the City*, p. 1.

32 Cp. Media in Cooperation and Transition – MiCT, “Information to go”, p. 7.

movements are able to react flexibly to new challenges during escape. Their digital mobility through smartphones contributes to their geographical mobility. This became obvious when the border to Hungary was closed at the end of September 2015 and new routes via Croatia were rapidly spread on the internet, many on social media.³³ Accordingly the refugee movements changed immediately and could continue their movement towards Central and Western Europe. The real-time data also contributes to refugees avoiding border controlling like the registration through fingerprints because they have the latest information about uncontrolled routes. Interview partner Luigi from an international aid organisation working in a refugee camp in Rome that was mainly occupied by Eritreans on transit described these refugees as very effective in avoiding controls. Following him they were networking a lot through phones and internet and could plan their route through Europe avoiding Dublin law because they had the actual information about the border situations. Consequently they could take routes where they stayed invisible and avoid to be stopped, sent back or controlled.

To draw attention to the various forms of media usage by refugees and how it relates to their invisible agency I would like to reflect furthermore upon a case from the border between Mexico and the United States. Newell and Gomey conducted interviews on information seeking and technology use with recently deported or other migrants³⁴ in the border region of Mexico.³⁵ Within their investigation they found out that the migrants primarily gathered information through word of mouth. They exchanged information within intricate networks that have little representation in traditional or digital media.³⁶ Certainly, the interviewees used mobile phones, but mainly for calls with their families. This is because the phones pose a danger to them and their friends and families in the border region:

“At the border the use of phones, and especially the disclosure of one’s contacts’ phone numbers, are a window to extortion and abuse. At the border, the cell phone that was a lifeline and a useful tool becomes a liability, and the comfort of having a

33 Cp. Stephan Dörner et al. “WhatsApp und Facebook machen Flucht erst möglich”, in *Die Welt Online*, September 23, 2015. Available at: <https://www.welt.de/wirtschaft/article146756198/WhatsApp-und-Facebook-machen-Flucht-erst-moeglich.html> [accessed November 10, 2016].

34 Newell and Gomey used the term “migrants” which I adopt here. Cp. Bryce C. Newell, and Ricardo Gomez, “Informal Networks, Phones and Facebook. Information Seeking and Technology Use by Undocumented Migrants at the U.S.-Mexico Border”, *iConference Proceedings*, 2015.

35 Cp. Newell and Gomey, “Informal Networks, Phones and Facebook. Information Seeking and Technology Use by Undocumented Migrants at the U.S.-Mexico Border”.

36 Cp. Newell and Gomey, “Informal Networks, Phones and Facebook. Information Seeking and Technology Use by Undocumented Migrants at the U.S.-Mexico Border”, p. 6.

list of phone numbers of friends or family to call becomes a risk.”³⁷

This draws attention to the adversities this particular migration route is accompanied by. At the Mexican-U.S. border it is common for migrants to be robbed by gangs, mafia, or crooked police officers. And the phones pose a special danger to them and their families as it is increasingly common for their abusers to call the migrants’ relatives to coerce or extort payments for the release of their relative.³⁸ However, the research found out that the non-mobile use of social media presents a mean of contact for the migrants during border crossing. Half of the interviewees had a Facebook account and drew on it during transit. Following them the use of Facebook is less risky than that of mobile phones and protects not only them but also their families from abuse and crime.³⁹ This example shows that refugees select between certain media and forms of media usage with the objective of staying invisible. Carrying a mobile phone with them during border crossing could have made them visible because somebody could abuse the information about her/him on the phone. They, by contrast, wanted to stay invisible, not only for state actors but also for human traffickers, and consequently selected the appropriate media.

3.2 Media Usage and Visible Migrant Agency

Several examples also suggest that the utilisation of media contributes to a visible migrant agency. Accordingly gaining visibility is a strategy to get access to rights. Social media like Facebook and Twitter for instance are suitable media because information spread through the networks can have a huge range of coverage. Trimikliniotis et al. mention Guantanamo Italia, a protest of Tunisian refugees that were detained in Lampedusa and later sent back to their country of origin. There, they organised a six-months hunger strike to protest against their deportation. Videos and information about their situation were then uploaded on a Facebook page specifically established by a friend. That is how their demand for rights in the end even reached Al Jazeera and France 24 and was consequently spread globally.⁴⁰

Social media use also contributed to the visible agency of refugees

37 Newell and Gomey, “Informal Networks, Phones and Facebook. Information Seeking and Technology Use by Undocumented Migrants at the U.S.-Mexico Border”.

38 Cp. Newell and Gomey, “Informal Networks, Phones and Facebook. Information Seeking and Technology Use by Undocumented Migrants at the U.S.-Mexico Border”, pp. 7–8.

39 Cp. Newell and Gomey 2015, “Informal Networks, Phones and Facebook. Information Seeking and Technology Use by Undocumented Migrants at the U.S.-Mexico Border”, p. 8.

40 Cp. Trimikliniotis et al., *Mobile Commons, Migrant Digitalities and the Right to the City*, p. 13.

fleeing through the Balkan region when at the beginning of September the hashtag #marchofhope was spread all over the world. The photos of their collective movement marching with banners from Budapest via the motorways towards Western Europe recall a demonstration, a political act, refugees standing up for mobility. The term “March of Hope” expresses this political character of the migrant collective that had a certain impact on some destination countries. Germany’s and Austria’s decision to receive refugees was at least influenced by visual impressions of the March of Hope.

“The march toward the West, which quickly became known under the hashtag #marchofhope, progressed relatively fast and soon reached a two-lane motorway. The images of this march will surely find their place in the iconography of this long summer of migration: a line of people formed who, after a week of waiting, reappropriated their own mobility to collectively and defiantly leave Budapest. [...] Under the pressure of these images and with the knowledge that a repressive strategy had failed, Germany and Austria announced that they would open their borders and admit the migrants.”⁴¹

Following this quotation the use of social media and their contribution to the visibility of the refugees was highly successful. Nevertheless also other media than social networks can help to make migrant agency visible. Phones, for example. Boat refugees crossing the Mediterranean set up alarms with their mobile phones when they have naval accidents. Accordingly, the *WatchTheMed-Alarmphone*, an independent hotline for boat people in distress, had been contacted several hundred times since its launch in autumn 2014.⁴² This shows that refugees use mobile phones for their rescue. They might organise themselves in groups and share mobile phones⁴³ – especially when they have little money – or they act within an exchange system. Using a phone in this case and setting an emergency makes the refugees visible for the rescue services and allows them to be brought safely to the European borders where they can demand asylum.

41 Bernd Kasperek, “Routes, Corridors, and Spaces of Exception. Governing Migration and Europe”, *Near Futures Online*, 1: Europe at a Crossroads, March 2016. Available at: <http://nearfuturesonline.org/routes-corridors-and-spaces-of-exception-governing-migration-and-europe> [accessed February 5, 2017], p. 5.

42 Cp. Maruice Stierl, “The WatchTheMed alarm phone. A disobedient border intervention”, in *Movements. Journal für kritische Migrations- und Grenzregimeforschung*, 1(2), 2015. Available at: <http://movements-journal.org/issues/02.kaempfe/13.stierl-watchthemed-alarmphone.html> [accessed November 13, 2016].

43 Cp. Tsianos, “Smartphone sind für Flüchtlinge überlebenswichtig”.

CONCLUSION

The examples presented highlight the types of media used by refugees, how they use them and how networking through them contributes to their collective agency. Social media provide easy access to various information and can contribute to spreading information to the public, to raise awareness for the situation of refugees and therefore to support or rescue them or to put pressure to politics. The above described case of media usage on the Balkan route presents convincing arguments in favour of considering social media as significantly important for visible collective migrant agency. However, also traditional media, like phones can contribute to refugees' visibility as the case from the Mediterranean Sea and *WatchTheMed-Alarmphone* showed.

The Mexican border with the U.S. gives more insights into the relationship between migrant media usage and route circumstances as well as consequent invisible agency strategies of refugees. Mobile media is exactly not used to stay invisible. Smartphones are desired objects for robbers or traffickers because of their value and their personal-contacts information. On the other hand examples from the Balkan route draws attention to the use of mobile media with the same intention: to stay invisible because real-time information allows to have knowledge about the actual border situation and consequently to bypass controls.

The different forms of media usage and the respective migrant strategy shows the variety of refugee movements. Refugees have different backgrounds and ideas, they take different routes and they have access to different communication tools which they use for different strategies. However, all forms of media use can contribute to their collective agency. That refugees organise themselves on the move through networks is certainly not a new phenomenon, but it is clear that these social processes are facilitated through the use of media. The examples from the Balkan route make explicit that new media are important for refugees. Their use helps them to organise themselves as highly independent subjects. But also the other examples made one thing clear: the migration-media nexus draws attention to the collective power refugees can develop.

SANDRO MEZZADRA

DIGITAL MOBILITY, LOGISTICS, AND THE POLITICS OF MIGRATION

Mohammad Khalefeh, a 17-year-old boy from Syria, spoke on behalf of many refugees when interviewed about his journey across ten European countries in 2015, on foot, by boat, bus, car, and train: “without Facebook and Google Maps I really do not think I would have made it to Germany.” And he was keen to emphasise that this was only possible with a strong network of relatives and friends, constantly exchanging information and knowledge. Maria Ullrich’s article in this issue of *spheres* explores these new forms of media use by migrants and refugees focusing on the so-called Balkan route, during and after the “summer of migration” in 2015. And she makes a remarkable contribution to the understanding of this incorporation of logistical technologies and infrastructures (within the very fabric) of migration. Taking an “actor-centered” perspective of the “autonomy of migration approach”, she sheds light on the uneven and contested process of the formation of “mobile commons” and “migrant digitalities”¹ that support and facilitate border crossings and geographical mobility.

Migrants’ use of digital technologies is a relatively well-researched topic by now. To take a couple of examples, for several years now, Dana Diminescu has investigated how new digital communication technologies (DCTs) have resulted in the emergence of the “connected migrant”, with deep implications for the experience of diaspora, as well as for the structure of transnational networks and spaces.² The use of smartphones and social media by refugees and migrants to counter isolation and to negotiate effects of distance, has been also explored in several sites, including the city of Naples and detention centres on islands in the Indian

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- 1 Dimitris Parsanoglou, Nicos Trimikliniotis and Vassilis Tsianos, *Mobile Commons. Migrant Digitalities and the Right to the City*, London, Palgrave MacMillan, 2015.
 - 2 Cp. Dana Diminescu, “Digital Methods for the Exploration, Analysis, and Mapping of e-Diasporas”, *Social Science Information*, 51(4), 2012, pp. 451–458.

Ocean.³ Maria Ullrich’s intervention connects to recent scholarly work on the topic and uses the experiences across the Balkan route to study the ways in which digital and geographical mobility intersect to foster the ‘collective power’ of migrants and refugees. This is what makes up the unconventional nature of her study. I will briefly discuss her study by raising some questions that seem particularly important to me in order to pursue further research in the direction foreshadowed by Ullrich.

I spoke above of *logistical* technologies and infrastructures with respect to smartphones and social media used by migrants. One has only to think of the roles they play in the working of so-called “platform capitalism”⁴ to intuitively understand the meaning of the reference to logistics. More generally, it is necessary to stress that the new developments in logistics, be it in the reorganisation of global supply chains or of urban spaces, prompted the emergence of a new “mobility paradigm”, which lies at the heart of contemporary processes of capitalist globalisation.⁵ We are now starting to realize that this new mobility paradigm also has deep implications for human mobility and its management. Just think of the prominence within policy debates and experimentations of the “just-in-time” and “to-the-point” labour migration recruitment schemes. Are we not confronted here with a logistical fantasy, with a kind of delivery model implemented within the field of human mobility? Processes of “logistification” are also reshaping border regimes, as the European instance demonstrates in a particularly clear way. Again, just think of the relevance of terms such as ‘hotspots’, ‘corridors’, ‘platforms’, and ‘hubs’ in recent attempts to reorganise border regimes after the challenges and disruptions of the “summer of migration”.⁶

We know that what is presented as a smooth process of selection and management of human mobility, in reality has unbearable human costs, produces stranded populations, and harshly targets and punishes any form of ‘unruly’ mobility. But while it is crucial to continue to politically denounce all this, there is also a need to investigate the contours of the

3 Cp. Nicholas Harney, “Precarity, Affect and Problem Solving with Mobile Phones by Asylum Seekers, Refugees and Migrants in Naples, Italy”, *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 26(4), 2013, pp. 541–557; Kate Coddington and Alison Mountz, “Countering isolation with the use of technology: how asylum-seeking detainees on islands in the Indian Ocean use social media to transcend their confinement”, *Journal of the Indian Ocean Region*, 10(1), 2014, pp. 97–112.

4 Nick Srnicek, *Platform Capitalism*, London, Polity, 2016.

5 Deborah Cowen, *The Deadly Life of Logistics: Mapping Violence in Global Trade*, Minneapolis, MI, University of Minnesota Press, 2014.

6 See for instance Bernd Kasperek, “Routes, Corridors, and Spaces of Exception: Governing Migration and Europe”, *Near Futures Online*, 1, 2016. Available at: <http://nearfuturesonline.org/routes-corridors-and-spaces-of-exception-governing-migration-and-europe/> [accessed May 22, 2017].

new logistical rationality that is concurring to reshape border regimes. To situate refugees and migrants' media use in this framework highlights the tensions and contradictions that criss-cross that rationality. And it once again positions migration as a challenge to border regimes.

In her analysis of migrants' agency, Ullrich proposes to distinguish between "visible" and "invisible" forms, respectively characterised by a "political" and a "tactical" dimension. Again, the economy and politics of migrants' visibility has been often discussed in recent years.⁷ Practices aimed at making themselves invisible in front of the state and other control agents are part and parcel of migrants' agency, both en route and where they eventually settle – particularly when they confront processes of illegalization. Social media and smartphones, Ullrich shows, have important roles to play in supporting such practices. Firstly, I think it would be important for further research in this area to take into consideration migrants' relations with the booming "migration industry".⁸ This notion includes both actors that provide migrants with the expertise and infrastructural resources needed for border crossing and economic actors engaged in the control and limitation of mobility. Importantly, therefore, it blurs the boundary between legality and illegality, including smugglers and traffickers. How does social media use influence migrants' negotiations with these actors? What kind of economy and politics of visibility is deployed here to foster migrants' collective power? These questions seem particularly relevant to me in order to get a wider vista of the whole process of migration and of the incorporation of logistical technologies and infrastructures within it.

The second remark has to do with the distinction between the "political" and "tactical" dimension of migrants' agency, the former attributed to "visible" and the latter to "invisible" practices. It is not to deny, of course, that several forms of political agency imply a high degree of visibility. The so-called "march of hope" from Keleti station in Budapest toward the Austrian-Hungarian border in early September 2015 is a particularly impressive instance of that.⁹ At the same time, I think there is a need to carefully investigate the relations between such forms of political engagement and the wide fabric of practices that either

7 See for instance Martina Tazzioli and William Walters, "The Sight of Migration. Governmentality, Visibility and Europe's Contested Borders", *Global Society*, 30(3), 2016, pp. 445–464.

8 See for instance Ninna Nyberg Sørensen and Thomas Gammeltoft-Hansen (eds.), *The Migration Industry and the Commercialization of International Migration*, London/New York, Routledge, 2013.

9 Cp. Bernd Kasperek and Marc Speer, "Of Hope. Ungarn und der lange Sommer der Migration", *Bordermonitoring.eu*, 2015. Available at: <http://bordermonitoring.eu/ungarn/2015/09/of-hope/> [accessed May 22, 2017].

remain invisible or work the boundary between visibility and invisibility. What is a “tactic”, after all? We can hark back here to Michel de Certeau’s definition. While strategy, he writes, “assumes a place that can be circumscribed as proper and thus serve as the basis for generating relations with an exterior distinct from it”, a tactic is “a calculus which cannot count on a ‘proper’ (a spatial or institutional localisation), nor thus on a borderline distinguishing the other as a visible totality”.¹⁰ The absence of a “proper” is something that shapes the condition of refugees and migrants, particularly while they are on the move, attempt to cross borders and as they traverse stretches of sea or land trying to eschew interception. The “tactics” they invent and deploy in such situations are also part of a specific politics of mobility and they shape in multiple ways the explicitly political forms of migrant agency. In the persistent and stubborn chant “Freedom” that characterises migrants’ and refugees’ demonstrations in many European cities, one can hear the resonance of such “tactics” and of the experience of mobility they enabled under the most violent forms of border control.

The autonomy of migration finds its expressions at this juncture between invisible and visible and political and tactical forms of agency. The investigation of these expressions requires an awareness of the structural framework within which they take shape. The use of smartphones, digital resources, and social media by migrants and refugees takes place within and against a border regime that is increasingly “logistified”, digitalised, and securitized. The growing entanglement of technological devices with human mobility and its management is of course something that resonates with wider social developments. This entanglement, as Ullrich demonstrates, is also a field of contestation and struggle, where “mobile commons” are continually produced and reproduced, laying the basis for the circulation of knowledge and providing the resources for crossing borders. With an experience like “Alarmphone/WatchTheMed”, also discussed by Ullrich, activists inspired by the militant tradition of abolitionism and by the project of building up a transnational “underground railroad”, use the phone as a “thing” through which “migration struggles at sea become politicized”.¹¹ The forging and multiplication of such devices of politicisation, combining technology, localised knowledges, and militant engagement, figure among the most important tasks we are confronted with today.

10 Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Berkeley/Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1984, p. xix.

11 Maurice Stierl, “A Sea of Struggle – Activist Border Interventions in the Mediterranean Sea”, *Citizenship Studies*, 20(5), 2016, pp. 561–578.

MORITZ ALTENRIED AND MANUELA BOJADŽIJEV¹

VIRTUAL MIGRATION, RACISM AND THE MULTIPLICATION OF LABOUR

Digitisation has profoundly changed the spatial constitution and economic geography of contemporary capitalism, from the micro-architecture of production in a single office or factory, to the ways we buy, sell and consume goods and services up to global circulatory systems. Concerning the latter, digital computing has revolutionised and accelerated the logistics industry in a way that can be compared to the impact of the standard shipping container in the 1960s.² Shipping software, enterprise resource planning (ERP) systems, Global Positioning System (GPS), Radio Frequency Identification (RFID), and other digital technologies which organise, capture and control the movement of things, finance and people, are at the heart of contemporary logistics.³ Digitised logistics transform the spatial ordering of circulation and production; ports, harbours, corridors, special economic zones and other forms of logistical space are created and rearranged, new value chains emerge, others cease to exist. The digitised logistics of circulation accordingly constitute the space of global capitalism as relational, infrastructural, and changing dynamically.

This space is far from smooth and uniform, even if digital

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- 1 The article is based on a talk we gave during the conference “Diversity encounters”, held at Humboldt-University in May 2016, and organised by Humboldt-University in Berlin and the National University of Singapore. We would like to especially thank Sabrina Apicella for many discussions concerning the digitisation and mobility of labour.
 - 2 Cp. Moritz Altenried, “Le container et l’algorithme: la logistique dans le capitalisme global”, *Période*, 2016. Available at: <http://revueperiode.net/le-container-et-lalgorithme-la-logistique-dans-le-capitalisme-global/> [accessed February 20, 2017]; Rob Kitchin and Martin Dodge, *Code/Space: Software and Everyday Life*, Cambridge, MIT Press, 2011.
 - 3 Cp. Ned Rossiter, *Software, Infrastructure, Labor – A Media Theory of Logistical Nightmares*, New York, Routledge, 2016; Christoph Rosol, *RFID: Vom Ursprung einer (all)gegenwärtigen Kulturtechnologie*, Berlin, Kulturverlag Kadmos, 2007.

technology does create new connections and proximities. The metaphor of the 'digital divide' has served to mark the differing access to the internet by various vectors, especially in the Global South. However, internet coverage continues to include more and more people. In particular, through the growing speed and coverage area of mobile internet infrastructure along with the proliferation of smartphones and tablets. From the viewpoint of capital, these people are not only – in many cases not even primarily – attractive as consumers, but also as a huge pool of digital labour. The forms and strategies of tapping into this workforce range from mobile phone users in Kenya who collect and supply little pieces of data in exchange for air time, Venezuelan crowdworkers tagging photos, an army of content moderators in the Philippines deleting violence and pornography from social media, to Indian IT professionals carrying out remote maintenance of BMW factory software.

These processes change both the global geography and division of labour, as well as the patterns of mobility and migration. What we seek to understand, is how not only the mobility of things, but also the mobility of labour, is subject to deep transformations given the ubiquity of digital technology. While inherently connected to the mobility of things, labour power is a commodity unlike any other and its mobility has special qualities. Digitisation is an important factor of the contemporary transformation of labour and its mobility. Digital technology and infrastructure has changed existing jobs and created new ones and these changes come with spatial and temporal transformations, impacting the mobility of labour.

Two ethnographies have investigated the digitisation of labour in relation to the mobility of Indian IT workers. The practice of 'body shopping', described by anthropologist Xiang Biao, is one such important example of new mobility patterns due to digital labour. 'Body shops' are companies that recruit Indian IT workers and hire them out to Western corporations that can fill their (temporary) labour shortages with the help of this hypermobile and hyperflexible group. In his ethnography of those IT workers, Xiang maps the routes and connections between spaces such as Hyderabad, Kuala Lumpur, Singapore, Sydney, Berlin or the Silicon Valley, and the crucial role of migrant labour for the IT industry.⁴ Here, we do not only see a dynamically changing geography of mobile labour and digital circulation, but we can also understand how it impacts local social relations, in this case namely the traditional institution of dowry and

4 Cp. Xiang Biao, *Global 'Body Shopping'. An Indian Labor System in the Information Technology Industry*, Princeton/Oxford, Princeton University Press, 2007.

related gender relations.

Another important ethnography by Aneesh Aneesh investigates the circulation of data and labour power, including the Indian IT workers who stay in India but work for Western companies. In addition to the 'body shops' there is a variety of flexible and temporary models trying to match the factors of labour and infrastructure costs with demands of being on-site with the customers. Many Indian corporations have developed what is known as the 75-25 model, with a small office and some 25 per cent of the workers abroad and the rest of the workforce staying in India. These processes connect the Indian IT hot spots (and their own specific patterns of local and national mobility) with various other global sites in multiple and complex ways, adding another dimension to common outsourcing practices. As a result, it is sometimes difficult to determine what is actually moving: data, labour or both? Aneesh speaks in this context of "virtual migration". In his argument that seeks to "free the discussion of labor mobility from the confines of the body".⁵ he claims that the Indian digital workers who work for Western companies without leaving India "migrate without migration".⁶

Today, ten years later, the patterns described by Xiang and Aneesh continue to be important while the global geography of digital labour continues to be dynamic and changing. For example, the increasing importance of digital labour via crowdwork platforms and apps for mobile phones, allows the immediate outsourcing of digital labour directly to an increasing number of workers from all over the world. This is a factor in the further diversification of the structure and geography of outsourced digital labour and the emergence of new hot spots beyond the well-known locations in South East Asia.

The nature of IT labour, or the nature of its product, has a certain quality that complicates the demarcation between the categories of mobility of labour and the mobility of goods. By means of the internet, (a certain form of) data can be sent almost instantaneously, at a small cost and other friction over great distances. Networked infrastructures and software allow the global transmission of data in milliseconds so that, for example, different labourers can work simultaneously on the same project while being on two different continents. This of course concerns mobility patterns and challenges our understanding of migration and racism.

Far from striving for a comprehensive picture of these

5 Aneesh Aneesh, *Virtual Migration. The Programming of Globalization*, Durham/London, Duke University Press, 2006, p. 3.

6 Aneesh Aneesh, *Virtual Migration*, p. 2.

developments, we want to trace a few of these tendencies and emerging geographies and connect some existing analytical tools in order to better understand them. First, we take up the notion of ‘virtual migration’ and relate it to forms of digital labour beyond the case of Indian IT workers, namely to Chinese gaming workers, the so-called ‘gold farmers’. We discuss this as a particular form of labour in the gaming industry, also evoking questions about the implicit processes of racialisation in such forms of mobile digital labour. Moving on, we connect the entailed challenges to the concept of migration to the idea of the *multiplication of labour* as developed by Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson,⁷ who offer a helpful approach to understand the complex and heterogeneous spatiality of global, not only digitally mediated, labour.

FROM OFFSHORING TO VIRTUAL MIGRATION?

The term ‘virtual migration’ and the developments it seeks to describe, once again challenge our notion and description of migration as a concept. We could argue that migration as a trans-border practice has somehow always conceptually challenged nationalist framings of research and theory, and since at least the debates on transnationalism in the early 1990s forced us to think beyond methodological nationalism. As Xiang has argued, “the subject of ‘migrant’ is to a great extent an invention by modern researchers and regulators created in order to understand migration from the perspective of nation-states, and particularly from the migrant-receiving countries’ point of view.”⁸ Of course, this notion of migration gets out of hand, when the “regulatory gaze moves away from the assemblages of activities that made the journey of migration possible to the single individual – the ‘migrant’”. This tendency becomes even more complex once mobile labour is dis-embedded from the actual movement across borders, as we argue here. Based on this understanding, we need to account for the heterogeneity of migration processes and go beyond the inclusion/exclusion binary. As Mezzadra and Neilson have so convincingly demonstrated, it calls for an understanding of the border as not (only) a concrete line between two nations, but as a productive and manifold machine that exists on multiple levels and produces variegated zones of mobility and immobility. Finally, the process we describe as virtual or digital migration, requires us to tie labour and mobility closer together when thinking about migration.

7 Cp. Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson, *Border as Method, Or, the Multiplication of Labor*, Durham/London, Duke University Press, 2013.

8 Xiang Biao, “The Would-Be Migrant: Post-Socialist Primitive Accumulation, Potential Transnational Mobility, and the Displacement of the Present in Northeast China”, *TRaNS: Trans -Regional and -National Studies of Southeast Asia*, 2(2), 2014, pp. 183-199.

An obvious (and valid) question to the idea of virtual migration concerns the conceptual difference to outsourcing and offshoring. Aneesh anchors his claim of the difference of virtual migration to outsourcing and offshoring first and foremost in the new possibilities of spatial and temporal integration provided by digital technologies. While digital media technologies allow for a certain form of spatio-temporal integration and connection, we do not intend to construct a clear break between outsourcing or offshoring and virtual migration. In fact, the spatio-temporal integration and distance of globally-dispersed sites of labour and consumption have always been a question of infrastructures of circulation, which is why we opened the text with the recent interest in critical studies of logistics. From a certain point of view, there is little difference between airports, harbours and logistical corridors and internet infrastructure. Both infrastructures work towards a certain form of spatio-temporal integration of supply and demand of labour power. In this context, the term ‘virtual’ in both its commonsensical and theoretical associations, seems to be problematic at first glance. Looking at something like ‘virtual migration’ from the perspective of underlying devices and infrastructures such as personal computers, network cable, data centres to the materiality of labour and data, it is precisely this materiality and its relation to other forms of materiality that makes it special.

However, in spite of the maybe unfortunate word ‘virtual’, we can begin to emphasise both the materiality of digital communication and labour, as well as the complex nature and manifold relation of digital migration to forms of ‘offline’ migration and the circulation of goods in line with Aneesh’s concept. In the following investigation into the shadow economy of gold farming, we will stress further qualities which seem to be important for the concept of digital migration: This concerns amongst other things questions of the lived experience and subjectivity of digital migrants, closely related to racism and the racialization of labour, and questions of the socio-economic position in digital economies, especially in terms of legality.

GOLD FARMING, OR, THE PAST OF STEVE BANNON

Steve Bannon, the right-wing chief strategist of Donald Trump, once invested \$60 million in a business based on the labour of digital migrants. In 2006, Bannon convinced his former employer, Goldman Sachs, to invest this amount in a company called *Internet Media*

Entertainment (IGE).⁹ At the time, IGE was one of the most important actors in a shadow economy connected to massively multiplayer online role-playing games (MMORPGs) like *World of Warcraft*. *World of Warcraft* was – and still is – one of the most important of these games, with over seven million players at the time. This digital world, called *Azeroth*, is an impressive graphic medieval landscape of dark forests, vast plains, green hills, large mountains, wide seas, big cities and quiet villages inhabited by a multitude of human and magical creatures. Here the players kill monsters, explore the landscape, socialise and complete quests, thereby developing the skills of their avatars and accumulating gold and virtual goods in order to patiently advance through the game's levels. For those who lacked patience or time to do so, IGE had an offer: They sold gold, the in-game currency, for real money. On their site, they also offered virtual goods like weapons, clothing or even fully-developed characters so that players could begin in high levels. A player could even hand over his account for a few hours and get it back at any level they wished, in exchange for money.

Although officially forbidden by the game's publisher and frowned upon by many players, the trade of real money for virtual goods is a multimillion-dollar business. In 2006, IGE was its biggest player, with offices in Los Angeles, Shanghai and Hong Kong. Unfortunately for the investors Bannon had gained, they soon run into trouble. Players launched a class action lawsuit against the trading of in-game currency for real money, claiming it would “substantially impair” and “diminish” their enjoyment of the game. Beyond that, Blizzard Entertainment, the publisher of the game, started harsh measures against the practice of real money trade, making it even harder for IGE to sustain its profits. In the end, IGE's virtual currency business was sold abroad, the investment a failure, and the company restructured and renamed itself *Affinity Media*, running a number of gaming websites and communities. Bannon became its CEO, a post he held until 2012, when he became chair of the infamous Breitbart News.

Like IGE, the industry trading in virtual goods and currency, took a hit in these years. However, the business is still alive in *World of Warcraft* and other games. After running into legal problems like IGE, most Western platforms moved their operations to places where their supply was already coming from: Asia, especially China. Already in 2006, professional player-workers located in China provided the overwhelming majority of IGE's inventory. These digital migrants to

9 Cp. Julian Dibbell, “The Decline and Fall of an Ultra Rich Online Gaming Empire”, *Wired*, 2008. Available at: <https://www.wired.com/2008/11/ff-ige/> [accessed February 20, 2017].

the Western servers are commonly called “Chinese gold farmers”. Bannon had joined a company that was almost completely based on Chinese labour.

PLAYING/WORKING

The origins of the practice of gold farming, i.e. playing the game in order to earn in-game currency or virtual goods which are then sold to other players for real money, are hard to trace. There are reports of early individual farmers in the United States running up to 20 computers simultaneously in their homes. However, by 2006, major platforms got most of their supply from China. Here, the workshops range from informal groups of friends to professionalised digital factories, employing approximately 500.000 workers.¹⁰

A typical Chinese gaming workshop has 20-100 computers and around 50-200 workers who play in shifts, so that every computer runs 24 hours. While some workshops consist of groups of friends who try to make a living out of their hobby, most operate on a highly professional and disciplined level. The design of these digital factories often looks like a mixture between an internet café and other small factories in the same area. Some of the more professional workshops have uniforms, air conditioning and motivational posters on the walls, while others are characterised by old computers, shabby buildings and unbearable conditions due to the heat of the computers and cigarette smoke. In most smaller factories, the boss directs the gaming workers and conducts the business with the clients, whereas bigger factories tend to have supervisors controlling the gamers and a sophisticated division of labour. One worker describes his workshop to a gaming website:

“The first gold farming company I was in was really big; I guess that this company owned at least 10,000 gold farming accounts. In my workshop there were 40 people who took turns to farm, some in the daytime, some at night. So the accounts are used for farming non-stop for 24 hours a day, 7 days a week [...] every day I feel very tired. You can imagine, every day I need to do at least 10 hours farming. I’m always looking at the computer screen and always seeing the same

10 Richard Heeks, “Current analysis and future research agenda on ‘gold farming’: Real-world production in developing countries for the virtual economies of online games”, *Development informatics working paper 32*, Institute for Development Policy and Management, 2008. Available at: http://hummedia.manchester.ac.uk/institutes/gdi/publications/workingpapers/di/di_wp32.pdf [accessed February 20, 2017].

instance and the same mobs. So I feel very tired.”¹¹

Even if many of the workers are also enthusiastic players of World of Warcraft, farming is mostly a repetitive, boring and exhausting job, as farmers mostly use simple and repetitive functions of a game’s architecture in order to earn gold and virtual goods. Even for normal players, and especially in the lower levels, “the majority of the play involved in advancing a World of Warcraft character is mindless and repetitive to the extent that it verges on Taylorism” as Scott Rettberg notices in the *World of Warcraft Reader*.¹²

To start a workshop, one needs considerable capital, one needs computers, a good internet connection and a credit card/PayPal account and language skills in order to do business with mediating platforms like IGE or directly with Western customers. The composition of the farming workforce has changed over the years. Some workers of the first generation, mostly students who did the farming in internet cafés, started their own gold farming workshops that increasingly employed migrants from rural areas. Wei Xiaoliang, owner of a farm in Shenzhen is quoted in the *South China Morning Post* explaining that they “prefer to hire young migrant workers rather than college students. The pay is not good for students, but it is quite attractive to the young migrants from the countryside”.¹³ Some of the gold farmers have been actual farmers before they became labour migrants to the rural areas and virtual migrants to servers of World Warcraft. Ironically, the reasons for these internal migrants to come to the Chinese cities are often the loss of farmland to capitalist development projects, many of which are connected to the growing Chinese electronics industry, as Nick Dyer-Witherford and Greig de Peuter note.¹⁴

“PLAYING CHINESE”, OR, THE RACIALIZATION OF LABOUR

While many Western players use the services of gold farmers to advance through the game, the general culture of World of Warcraft is disapproving of farming, selling and buying gold for real money. It is

11 Nick Ryan, “Gold Trading Exposed: The Sellers”, *Eurogamer.net*, 2009. Available at: <http://www.eurogamer.net/articles/gold-trading-exposed-the-sellers-article?page=3> [accessed February 20, 2017].

12 Scott Rettberg, “Corporate Ideology in World of Warcraft”, in Hilde G. Corneliusen, Scott Rettberg and Jill Walker (eds.), *Digital Culture, Play, and Identity. A World of Warcraft Reader*, Cambridge MA, The MIT Press, 2008, pp. 19-38, here: p. 30.

13 He Hui Feng, “Chinese ‘Farmers’ Strike Cyber Gold”, *South China Morning Post*, 2005. Available at: <http://english.cri.cn/2238/2005-10-25/160@278526.htm> [accessed February 20, 2017].

14 Cp. Nick Dyer-Witherford and Greig de Peuter, *Games of Empire: Global Capitalism and Video Games*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2009, p. 145.

considered ‘spamming’ and ‘cheating’ and damages the ethos of the game, as well as its in-game economy by causing inflation. Hence, gold farmers are regularly attacked based on the fact that they work where others play. The activity of farming has become profoundly racialized within the space of World of Warcraft. Not all farmers are from China and there is a huge number of Chinese leisure players. However, in the terminology of the game ‘being Chinese’ or ‘playing Chinese’ has come to mean the activity of gold farming.¹⁵

As the physical body cannot serve as a marker for race within an online game, the main marker becomes a specific style of playing, or better: labouring in the game. In many cases, it is quite easy to spot farmers in the game as they often stay in the same lucrative spot and fulfil the same repetitive tasks in order to earn gold. Every avatar that behaves in a certain way that suggests it is not playing but working, or even only stays in spots in the game that are known for their farming possibilities, is potentially subject to racist attacks. In other games, whole classes of avatars have become “unplayable” because of constant attacks by other players after becoming associated with Chinese gold farming.¹⁶

Throughout the game’s landscapes, there is a constant racial profiling in order to differentiate between legitimate ‘leisure players’ and unwanted ‘player-workers’ who are represented as Asians, mostly as Chinese. Western players even form ‘vigilante’ groups in order to find and report, or kill ‘Chinese farmers’ – killing here means killing the avatar, making it harder for the player workers to do their work. The struggles in the landscape of the game and the Western players hunting Chinese farmers have characteristics of “a low-intensity resource war with echoes of ethnic cleansing”.¹⁷ Across various forums and websites, there are many conversations about where to find and how to report or kill gold farmers in the game, who are almost always portrayed as Chinese. Players have also produced a number of YouTube videos documenting the hunt of farmers and songs against ‘the Chinese destroying our game’.¹⁸ Thus, far from observing post-racial digital bodies in the game, what we can note is that race enters the space of the game in peculiar ways, one of which is based on digital workers

15 Cp. Lisa Nakamura, “Don’t Hate the Player, Hate the Game: The Racialization of Labor in World of Warcraft”, *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 26(2), 2009, pp. 128-144.

16 Cp. Constance Steinkuehler, “The mangle of play”, *Games and Culture*, 1(3), 2006, pp. 199-213, here: p. 208.

17 Dyer-Witheford and de Peuter, *Games of Empire: Global Capitalism and Video Games*, p. 147.

18 Cp. Nakamura, “Don’t Hate the Player, Hate the Game: The Racialization of Labor in World of Warcraft”, pp. 134ff.

becoming virtual migrants of the online world of the game. Thus, racism, as Theo Goldberg has argued in his book, *Are we all post-racial yet?*, in which he sets out to conceptualise the globalisation of racism and its variations based on very concrete and heterogeneous spatio-temporal conditions, while urging us to observe how the resulting multiplicity of racism contributes to its mutation and reproduction, and to its limits.¹⁹

DIGITAL LABOUR/DIGITAL MIGRATION

These Chinese workers inhabit a strange double position. While they stay in their country of origin and belong to the emerging digital working class of the Global South, within the space of the game and its surrounding culture, they show almost all qualities of ‘real-world-migrants’. As digital labour migrants, they enter the space of the game as workers in a position different to the hegemonic culture of this space. Their labour is sold as a service to Western players and that is the same reason for attacks by other Western players. To work where others spend their leisure time is a common feature of migrant labour in a variety of ‘offline’ professions, for example in the service sector.

The labour of farming is illegalised and part of an informal economy. The only task of some workers is to hand over the gold to the buyer’s avatar or to attract new customers in the game, all without being detected by vigilant players or the gamemasters, Blizzard’s in game police. The behaviour of gold farmers is accordingly often likened to that of offline street drug dealers, a figure who almost always features as a migrant in most Western imaginaries.

The attacks on gold farmers by other players and the game’s publisher, have economic effects on the workshops, some of which had to be closed due to bans on accounts and IP addresses. For individual workers, the attacks also make the job harder, both emotionally and in terms of the daily quotas most workers need to reach. The material risks, vulnerability and the affective dimension of working in illegal or informal economies, are characteristics the digital migrants share with many of their ‘offline’ counterparts. A gaming worker, featured in a YouTube video, reports of his interactions with Western players, “if they know you are a Chinese farmer, they would say you have no right to be here or even attack you with no reason”. He goes on to plea directly to those players: “If you see a professional gamer in the game, I wish you can understand his job and give him a little space. He will be very grateful. He will not go to other spaces and disturb you. He only

19 Cp. David Theo Goldberg, *Are We All Postracial Yet?*, Cambridge, Polity, 2015.

needs a little space.”

The example of ‘Chinese gold farmers’ illuminates the role of race in the production of labour power and vice versa and here even more important the role of labour in the construction of race. An investigation into digital migration should then start with the border, take *the border as method*, in order to understand:

“the tense and conflictual ways in which borders shape the lives and experiences of subjects who, due to the functioning of the border itself, are configured as bearers of labor power. The production of the subjectivity of these subjects constitutes an essential moment within the more general processes of the production of labor power as a commodity. Once seen from this perspective, both the techniques of power that invest the border and the social practices and struggles that unfold around it must be analyzed with regard to multiple and unstable configurations of gender and race, the production and reproduction of which are themselves greatly influenced by the border”.²⁰

Likewise, the work by anthropologist Anna Tsing on supply-chain-capitalism is instructive in this respect. Through the figure of the supply chain it is possible to think of globalisation (and digitisation) not as a simple process of global homogenisation, but to account for the structural role of difference and heterogeneity in the mobilisation of labour, capital and resources. Racism, patriarchal relations, cultural discourses and practices of different localities tied together by trans-border economies are activated, mobilised and made productive in order to “make labor possible”.²¹ Digital spaces, such as online games, are not post-racial spaces, quite the contrary. However, in the absence of physical bodies, race needs to be reconstituted, and the relation to labour becomes especially crucial and visible. This process shows originary qualities of digital cultures as well as actualisations of historical racist constellations. There are, for example, surprising similarities of the anti-gold farmer rhetoric to racist stereotyping of Chinese laundry workers in United States in the 19th century.²²

20 Mezzadra and Neilson, *Border as Method, Or, the Multiplication of Labor*, p. 20.

21 Ann Tsing, “Supply Chains and the Human Condition”, *Rethinking Marxism*, 21(2), 2009, pp. 148-176, here: p. 161.

22 Cp. Julian Dibbell, “The Life of the Chinese Gold Farmer”, *New York Times Magazine*, 2007. Available at: <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/06/17/magazine/17lootfarmers-t.html?pagewanted=all> [accessed February 20, 2017].

FRAGMENTED GEOGRAPHIES AND THE MULTIPLICATION OF LABOUR

As a shadow economy served by digital migrants, the case of gold farming in online video games represents a new matrix of differential inclusion,²³ where the terms of offshoring and outsourcing are not sufficient in order to conceptualise the complex spatial, economic and social arrangements at play. Here, theoretical vocabulary of virtual or digital migration might be helpful to think further. If we use the vocabulary of virtual or digital migration, we are not arguing for a radical break from forms of outsourcing or offshoring. Rather, we see these concepts as additions in order to help us understand the current transformations of labour mobility enabled by digital technologies and infrastructures. In the same spirit, Mezzadra and Neilson propose to supplement the familiar concept of the division of labour through an understanding of the multiplication of labour.

The concept of the multiplication of labour is again thought of in terms of multiple borders that constitute fragmented, overlapping and unstable cartographies, questioning stable categories such as North/South or centre/periphery. The originary architecture and spatial quality of digital economies is an integral part of this “heterogenization of global space and the way it forces seemingly discrete territories and actors into unexpected connections that facilitate processes of production, dispossession, and exploitation”.²⁴ The figure of a rural migrant working in a digital gaming factory at the margin of Shenzhen as well as in the digital economy of World of Warcraft, is not only a ‘double migrant’ but also inhabits a complex economic topology. The site of the labour power, the site of labour, the site of consumption, and the site of the buyer, are at various disparate but overlapping levels, connected by the real-virtual economy of World of Warcraft, internet infrastructures, various forms of brokering such mediating platforms, payment systems and so on. These complex and fragmented spatio-technological formations correlate with multiple and fragmented figures of labour, and thus, we can argue, with multiple and fragmented figures of migration.

DIGITAL TAYLORISM AND DIGITAL MIGRATION

In the case of the ‘Chinese gold farmers’ the phenomenon of digital migration emerges clearly due to the shared lifeworld of the game, a space where most workers but also many players, spend the majority of

23 Cp. Mezzadra and Neilson, *Border as Method, or the Multiplication of Labour*, pp. 159ff.

24 Mezzadra and Neilson, *Border as Method*, p. 23.

their waking hours. However, we can find many other examples where we can not only observe economic and spatio-temporal integration, but also affective, social and legal forms of *integration and tension* that characterise digital migration. Well-known examples are call centres in India serving the United States. The temporal aspect becomes crucial, with local workers often being alienated from life in their own time frame. Customer contact via call centres is crucially also affective labour, it involves a complicated politics of language and accent, and call centre workers are frequently subjected to racial abuse by customers.²⁵ A main reason why the Philippines have recently overtaken India as the “call centre capital of the world” is that many Filipino workers speak English with an American accent; hence their physical location is not immediately obvious to customers who believe they are speaking to an American worker rather than a virtual migrant.²⁶

Another instantiation of the global circulation of digital labour is the case of content moderation for social media. In order to filter out violence, pornography, hate speech and other content deemed inappropriate, social media platforms need a huge amount of human labour as even the most sophisticated algorithms lack the cultural and contextual knowledge to completely take over this task. Content moderation is an extremely labour-intensive, politically-sensitive and crucial economic aspect of digital social media. Again, the Philippines have become a global hub for commercial content moderation, where tens of thousands of workers sort through the digital waste of social media.²⁷ The labour of cleaning predominantly Western social media includes an important affective component. Scanning up to 6.000 pictures or 1.000 videos per day, many of which contain brutal torture or even murder, racism and sexual violence, leaves emotional traces with many workers. Many Filipino workers who become digital migrants to especially violent sections of Western sociality, often report depression, sleeping disorders and affective and sexual problems.²⁸ In addition to offering relatively cheap labour, the Philippines have become a hub for content moderation due to its Spanish and US

25 Cp. Aimee Carrillo Rowe, Sheena Malhotra and Kimberlee Pérez, *Answer the Call. Virtual Migration in Indian Call Centers*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2013.

26 Cp. Vikas Bajaj, “A New Capital of Call Centers”, *The New York Times*, 2011. Available at: <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/11/26/business/philippines-overtakes-india-as-hub-of-call-centers.html> [accessed February 20, 2017].

27 Cp. Sarah T. Roberts, “Digital Refuse: Canadian Garbage, Commercial Content Moderation and the Global Circulation of Social Media’s Waste”, *Wi: Journal of Mobile Media*, 10(1), 2016. Available at: <http://wi.mobilities.ca/digitalrefuse/> [accessed February 20, 2017].

28 Cp. Adrian Chen, “The Laborers who Keep the Dick Pics and Beheadings out of your Facebook Feed”, *Wired*, 2014. Available at: <https://www.wired.com/2014/10/content-moderation/> [accessed February 20, 2017].

colonial and post-colonial history because of which it has a workforce that speaks (often American-accented) English, is predominantly catholic, and literate in US culture. It is precisely these histories that need to be foregrounded in the analysis the racialization of labour. ‘Ethnicization’ needs to be a crucial dimension but not in terms of fixed races. On the contrary, it needs to investigate precisely how ethnicity becomes a resource to be mobilised and exploited.²⁹

Sometimes content moderation is outsourced via crowdworking platforms, which divide them into micro-tasks which are performed by workers from all over the world. Crowdworking platforms are yet another type of platform that mediates between a workforce that includes potentially everybody with access to the internet, not only for content moderation but for a multitude of tasks that computers cannot (yet) solve. Racism and perceptions of cultural differences are present in the design, infrastructure and global distribution of labour enabled by crowdwork platforms, as for example the research of Lily Irani shows.³⁰ The platform’s global and hyperflexible ‘on-demand’ labour pool is another layer in the geography of digital labour and is also an expression of new emerging forms of the (algorithmic) organisation of labour in “platform capitalism”.³¹ Crowdwork allows not only the scalable, flexible and temporary employment of distributed workers in general, but also taps into further labour resources. As it can be done flexibly and in front of a home computer, crowdworking allows people to do an hour or two of digital labour between domestic tasks.³² And Housework and care work is in its majority still mostly done by women as we know. This phenomenon is yet another example of the multiplication of labour, a process that cannot be understood only in spatial terms, but as a process that allows the inclusion of new and heterogonous fragments of labour power in a multiplicity of ways, and importantly, one connected to the gendered nature of labour.

Crowdworking, content moderation, and gold farming can finally be described as a segment of digital labour that can be analysed as ‘digital Taylorism’. These digital workers are different to the creative, communicative and urban figures of the immaterial labour debate, such as designers and programmers. Repetitive yet stressful, boring yet emotionally challenging, needing little formal qualification yet much

29 Cp. Xiang, *Global ‘Body Shopping’*.

30 Cp. Lilly Irani, “Difference and Dependence among Digital Workers: The Case of Amazon Mechanical Turk”, *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 114(1), 2015, pp. 225-34.

31 Nick Srnicek, *Platform Capitalism*, Cambridge, Polity, 2016.

32 Cp. Moritz Altenried, “Die Geburt der künstlich künstlichen Intelligenz. Crowdwork, Prekarisierung und digitale Selbstorganisation”, *Zeitschrift Luxemburg*, 2015. Available at: <http://www.zeitschrift-luxemburg.de/die-geburt-der-kuenstlich-kuenstlichen-intelligenz/> [accessed February 20, 2017].

cultural knowledge, inserted into algorithmic architectures yet not automatable (at least for now), the segment of labour we classify as digital Taylorism is an integral part of the political economy of the internet and beyond. The labour of content moderators, gold farmers, or the ‘raters’ refining Google’s search algorithm is often invisible behind seemingly automated systems.³³ Yet, the digital factories in China, the booming IT districts in India or the Philippines, the millions of crowdworkers in front of their home computers, are witnesses to the labour intensity of almost every aspect of digital cultures. Since the election of Donald Trump as president of the United States, much has been written about the shift of political campaigning towards the usage of big data and the new scale of manipulation of the electorate. One important argument went astray. Arguably, Trump’s presidential campaign executed by Steve Bannon was less characterised by the innovative and automated use of the magic of big data but rather by the large-scale deployment of outsourced digital labour,³⁴ be it in form of Facebook ‘likes’ delivered by workers from Filipino or Mexican ‘click-farms’,³⁵ or the famous case of the a 15-year-old girl from Singapore who created presentations for the Trump campaign via the crowdworking platform Fiverr.³⁶

DIGITAL MOBILITIES

The journey of labour power takes many different forms. Migrants are crossing borders or move to urban areas in search for better lives. Global logistics and infrastructures allow the global travel of labour power crystallised in commodities. Communication systems allow the even faster transmission of data and services over great distances. China is a focal point and special case regarding all these forms of mobility of labour power. Hundreds of millions of internal migrants move to cities and coastal areas, where a large proportion works for export oriented industries.³⁷ The goods produced here travel via ship, train or plane to

33 Cp. Lilly Irani, “Justice for ‘Data Janitors’”, *Public Books*, 2015. Available at: <http://www.publicbooks.org/justice-for-data-janitors/> [accessed February 20, 2017].

34 Cp. Antonio A. Casilli, “Never Mind the Algorithms: The Role of Click Farms and Exploited Digital Labour in Trump’s Election”, 2016. Available at: <http://www.casilli.fr/2016/11/20/never-mind-the-algorithms-the-role-of-exploited-digital-labor-and-global-click-farms-in-trumps-election/> [accessed February 20, 2017].

35 Cp. Jennings Brown, “There’s something odd about Donald Trump’s Facebook page”, *Business Insider*, 2016. Available at: <http://www.businessinsider.com/donald-trumps-facebook-followers-2015-6?IR=T> [accessed February 20, 2017].

36 Cp. Mary-Ann Russon, “Donald Trump outsourced a teen’s computer skills to create campaign video for youth votes”, *International Business Times*, 2016. Available at: <http://www.ibtimes.co.uk/donald-trump-outsourced-teens-computer-skills-create-campaign-video-youth-votes-1592089> [accessed February 20, 2017].

37 Cp. Pun Ngai, *Migrant Labour in China*, Polity, Oxford, 2016.

their destinations, and labour follows.³⁸ Projects such the ‘One Belt, One Road’ initiative by the Chinese government show that today “rather than the world factory, China might be better conceptualized as a logistics empire”.³⁹ This project, also known as the ‘New Silk Road’ consist of new connections via railway, ship and fibre cable linking China with Central Asia, the Middle East and Europe and Latin America. Such a project produces new logistical spaces, corridors and cities and sets into motion new circuits of migration.

Behind these very visible forms of the mobility of people and goods, the forms of virtual migration by Chinese gaming workers explored in this paper are less visible. It is clear, however, that digitisation is profoundly reconfiguring labour and mobility in any register and digital migration will become an even more important form of labour mobility. The forms of digital migration have to be seen in continuity with other forms of circulation. Goods travel increasingly not only on ships and planes but also through transcontinental fibre optic cables hereby reconfiguring profoundly the global geography of production and circulation. This produces new patterns of mobility, new forms of migration, new forms of exploitation and racism but also new sites of collectivity and resistance.

38 Cp. Manuela Bojadžijev, “Najkraci put u svet’ – Der kürzeste Weg in die Welt. Migration, Bürgerrechte und die EU in den Staaten des ehemaligen Jugoslawien”, in Forschungsgruppe Transit Migration (ed.), *Turbulente Ränder. Neue Perspektiven auf Migration an den Grenzen Europas*, Bielefeld, transcript, 2007, pp. 87-106.

39 Deborah Cowen, *The Deadly Life of Logistics: Mapping Violence in Global Trade*, Minneapolis/London, University of Minnesota Press, 2014, p. 67.

MORTEZA JAFARI

DREAMING OF LIFE

'Dreaming of Life' represents a part of my personal background regarding immigration. About eight years ago when I was travelling on an inflatable boat along with 45 other people in the direction of the Greek island of Samos, we faced death. There were women and children on that boat, young and old people. I promised myself then and there that if I survived, I would make a film about this experience.

Articulating disasters of every immigrant or refugee in the form of a story or a film can help to inform those who are considering leaving their home countries as well as those in destination countries who are oblivious to their plight of those who seek refuge. On the other hand, and in the long term, it can have a positive impact for those who have already gone down this path.

Expressing the pain and struggles which came with this choice can raise awareness for humanitarian activists and human rights organisations who are fighting for policy and attitude changes.

There are many different means for telling these stories and expressing these emotions. Although some people might not have the confidence or skills to write articles, a book or to make a movie, they can easily capture images or sounds with their phones and use it to discuss their problems or simply to record their experiences. They can then upload these materials on the internet, for example, on YouTube for everyone to access and learn from.

Digital technology has made it easier to inform and raise awareness to the extent that one can share news with even the most simple smartphone. Many migrants and refugees who are planning to migrate, take the role of a journalist by sharing their experiences and the reality of migration. In mass media, the coverage of migration is often not fair/impartial/subjective/accurate. That is why it is necessary to encourage refugees and migrants to use these technologies and to play a major role in raising awareness of their plight.

Translated by Golnar Tabibzadeh.

DONYA ALINEJAD

THE QUEST FOR REPRESENTATION

Jafari's film begins on the shores of the Greek island of Lesbos, with images that have become iconic for Europe's borders today. At Greece's closest point to Turkey across the Mediterranean, volunteers on the shoreline and local fishermen in their boats welcome and help the passengers of a black rubber dinghy, filled to capacity, as they disembark. As quietly compelling as they start out, these scenes of first encounter soon become dramatic as a thrilling soundtrack accompanies a fisherman's pursuit of a trafficker in coastal waters. I was immediately gripped by these events, and while the film introduced me to these scenes for the first time, the images also seemed strangely familiar. The way we know that since 2015, similar boats have been inundating these very shores is a result of European audiences having been flooded with similar news media images. But even before that, the internationally-used term, "boat people", had become a way to refer to a group of migrants who are the most vulnerable to becoming the object of visual media sensationalism. Given this opening, I immediately wondered whether the film would manage to move beyond the usual representations that saturate the discussion, framing refugees as symbols of either extreme suffering or threat.

From these opening scenes of arrival on that rocky beach, the film takes us along a journey that includes stops at a series of refugee camps and the passages between them. Ultimately, the route leads to a camp on the Greek-Macedonian border at Idomeni, Europe's largest informal refugee camp, whose very presence is a form of resistance to the EU border regime. This is also where the film suddenly ends, leaving us at the frontline of an unresolved standoff between police in full riot gear and a group of asylum seekers. We are left with scenes of riot police standing steadfastly in lines that absurdly guard a small portion of the invisible frontier in an open field, and the protesters' enduring resistance. Jafari's film makes no pretense of showing us anything beyond this

segment of an unfinished journey. And I think this is precisely why it succeeds. By focusing on the spaces *inside* Europe's formal borders as the open-ended continuation of a punishing passage, it lays bare the reality of the harsh habitability of contemporary Europe, itself.

A COMPASSIONATE BUT IMPERSONAL GAZE

A Greek narrator tells us that this is the work of an Iranian filmmaker, himself a refugee in Greece. This information stayed with me as a viewer, affecting, for instance, how I saw Jafari's decision to pass his camera over such a great number of people so briefly. This came across not as detachment from their personal pain, but as a reflection of Jafari's invested desire to make us bear witness to as much of it as possible, all at once. With no particular case being explored in any depth, hardly any face appearing twice, and no names, the film refuses to make the narrative choices typically used by character-driven reportage to draw viewers in, emotionally. And yet the anonymity of the people captured affords a certain respect. That is, the film does not pry into anyone's story or push to tag along in order to represent a sympathetic but depoliticized experience of trauma. Instead it offers us fragment after fragment of life lived under these particular conditions, showing us that a compassionate gaze does not need to be a profoundly personal one. And it is in this sense that the film does something interesting with its goal of sharing a particular truth with the audience.

The reality depicted is not moving because of the spectacle of its intensity or intimacy, but first and foremost because it reveals the characters' own awareness of, and insights about their predicament, told in their own words, in their languages. This depiction of refugee crossings goes beyond giving a voice and face to a flow of bodies that have been made to endure extreme hardship. It portrays its characters as acutely aware of their political position with relation to the wider world, a portrayal that rarely enters current debates in Europe. We see this keen self-awareness nowhere more clearly in the film than in its abovementioned scenes from Idomeni, where protest erupts after the border is selectively opened to Syrian, Iraqi, and Afghani refugees. Bangladeshis, Iranians, and many others are left in limbo at the border, save for their ability to express their opposition to this exclusion through further protest.

THE LIVED BORDER

In the scenes of protest that follow, the specific forms of resistance people choose emerge from the traditions of protest that are particular to the contexts from which they have migrated, from the sewing of lips, to rhythmic group chants, to the silent brandishing of self-made signboards and banners. An Iranian man explains that some refugees have begun a hunger strike as a last resort, a form of protest strongly associated with political prisoners in Iran and other authoritarian contexts. These are protest forms familiar to those who have faced violent repression, cultivated as a necessity under conditions of persecution, and now used to address the governments of the very nations that might offer sanctuary from such attacks. Across the groups, their message is a clear and shared one, directed to European leaders and their governments: open the borders and let people pass.

These scenes show the struggle from the vantage point of the protesters, as a moment in their continued fight for living a dignified life against all odds. And in showing them up close, the film traces the bizarre continuities between the mode of life inside and outside Europe for this group of people. This culminates in chaos, with the police raid of the camp. In a poignant scene from this intense moment, a shirtless teenager's initial macho posturing for the police, transforms into the frustrated tears of a boy as he sobs into a children's blanket and is comforted by the embrace of another young male protester. A powerful image that seems to glaringly ask whether the force of the EU's border policing is proportionate – even according to its own logic – to the task of containing the actions of an adolescent boy. And in a way this contradiction strangely exposes the border police's use of excessive force as the border's weakness.

While it traces a path from one Greek nation state border to another, the film's journey is not the movement of any protagonist in particular. Instead, the details it offers are the specifics of what the EU border regime looks like on the ground in specific contexts. The many aerial shots show the logistical nature of the operation, what the movement on such a scale entails, and the conditions under which these operations are conducted. It is also in showing these specifics that the film is a compelling portrayal of a situation that calls for visual representation. The drone shots of the boats, roads, coasts, buildings, fences, and tents make up a picture of border infrastructure within and between which human figures move, huddle, rejoice, sleep, and care for their children. We see how the border is lived as it follows these people's movements and activities. The narrator's announcements of specific numbers, events, and distances, as well as hints of the informal economies that

operate along the sidelines, give this movement of people the somewhat chilling character of a mass relocation program. If the building of Europe has engrained certain ideologies into infrastructures,¹ these images illustrate how the idea of Fortress Europe is engrained into border infrastructure.

MIGRANTS AS DOCUMENTERS

Reading the statement that the filmmaker wrote to accompany his film in this publication, I was struck by the importance Jafari placed on documenting “facts of migration”. As a director, he is clearly interested in addressing an audience who might be considering making the trip, which is evident in his repeated question to the subjects of the film about whether their perilous journey was ‘worth it’. This adds an interesting layer to the film, speaking both for and to those who may or may not migrate, rather than strictly being a representation of Europe’s ‘other’ to itself. This is an interesting position, and is a mode of occupying the role of migrant documentary filmmaker that documentary cinema about boat migration to Europe has largely left unexplored.²

But this film is clearly not only intended to reach potential migrants considering the trip. It is also clearly meant for a Greek and broader European viewership. And this is why it is interesting to note that Jafari’s statement places emphasis on the relationship between the migrant and digital technologies. In fact, he goes as far as suggesting that such technologies’ ability to reveal more of reality of the situation consequently could result in fewer deaths in the Mediterranean. This is a remarkable vision, given that the film does not feature any of the characters using digital technologies for accessing news, documenting their experiences, or communicating with one another. The absence of scenes of digital technology use from the film reflects an interesting ambiguity between on the one hand the promise of digital media to allow refugees to represent themselves through their own media production, and on the other hand the relative public absence of such self-representations.

When I conducted ethnographic research on Iranian migrants’ use of digital media for self-representation and expression in a very different context (Los Angeles), I found that many of my respondents wanted to

1 Cp. Dimitris Dalakoglou, “Europe’s last frontier: The spatialities of the refugee crisis”, *City*, 20 (2), 2016, pp. 180–185. Available at: <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/13604813.2016.1170467> [accessed June 11, 2017].

2 Cp. Sandra Ponzanesi, “On the Waterfront”, *Interventions*, 18(2), 2016, pp. 217–233. Available at: <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/1369801X.2015.1079501> [accessed June 11, 2017].

use media to counter negative representations of Iranians, Middle Easterners, and immigrants in the US. But not all of them could gain access to the larger audiences that those negative representations reached. There were very few cases of more widely influential media productions. And these relied on modes of transcending ‘migrant media’ production and accessing institutions and knowledge that reflected their proficiencies in the social and political environments of their ‘host’ country, the US.³ This film is similarly a product of the passage of time since the migrant journey, a proficiency with the medium of film, and a collaboration with Greek, non-migrant partners embedded within the political context in Europe.

Simply put, not everyone with access to a digital video device and an internet connection has access to the same audiences. And thinking so fails to acknowledge the complex ways in which online content circulates and produces audiences in the process, often in very different ways that other media forms do. The notion of “networked publics” is just one of the influential ideas scholars have come up with to theorise how emerging technologies shape how messages (are) spread. And despite the many new potentialities this implies, there are also limits to the scope and pace of changes to how institutions value different media forms. In the case of this film, it suffices to ask the question of whether I would have been asked to write about this film for this publication had it been a YouTube clip.

Finally, I wonder whether more reflexive and less realist styles of documentary film made by migrant filmmakers would be welcomed with the same types of European collaborators and audiences as this film project. This raises the issue, once again, of how self-representational (media) style matters, and specifically whether this director’s particular mode of inhabiting the migrant-filmmaker identity portends the film’s politics and its consequent claim to realism. If so, aside from depicting the reality that faces Europe’s refugees, I wonder which media forms and styles might best be used to document the dreams of these new migrants. Dreams to which this film’s title refers but which receive little attention in the midst of penetratingly conveying their reality.

3 Cp. Donya Alinejad, *The Internet Formations of Iranian American-ness. Next Generation Diaspora*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2017.

CHARLES HELLER, LORENZO PEZZANI AND MAURICE STIERL

DISOBEDIENT SENSING AND BORDER STRUGGLES AT THE MARITIME FRONTIER OF EUROPE

THE MARITIME FRONTIER'S CONFLICTUAL AESTHETIC REGIME

In 2015, the phenomenon of migrants seeking to contest their legal exclusion from the territory of EUrope by crossing the sea, reached unprecedented dimensions. More than one million people crossed the Mediterranean Sea, while more than 3.700 people died in the attempt.¹ A year later, also due to novel and reinforced EUropean deterrence measures, crossings via the Aegean Sea dropped dramatically but increased via the Central Mediterranean Sea. By the end of 2016, more than 360.000 people had survived the journey. The official death toll, however, stood at 5.096 – a new harrowing record.² Over the past two decades, and in particular over the past few years, one has become accustomed to the images of overcrowded vessels and shipwrecked travellers which circulate nearly daily through the international media landscape. Only rarely do we learn about individual fates, such as the Syrian toddler Alan Kurdi, whose body washed ashore in Turkey. His image received global attention, symbolising the desperation of displaced people but did not, however, necessarily prompt a critical conversation on the economies of violence underlying contemporary border regimes, or on the political dimension of migrants' movements

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- 1 Our paper employs the term 'EUrope' throughout. In this way it seeks to problematise frequently employed usages that equate the EU with Europe and Europe with the EU and suggests, at the same time, that EUrope is not reducible to the institutions of the EU.
 - 2 Cp. UNHCR, "Mediterranean: Dead and Missing at Sea. January 2015 – 31 Decemeber 2016", UNHCR. *The UN Refugee Agency*, 2017. Available at: <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/53632> [accessed February 24, 2017].

across borders.³

Illegalised migration across the Mediterranean Sea and its control is predominantly perceived through media images of indistinguishable masses of non-white bodies crammed onto unseaworthy vessels, images which are routinely embedded in a rhetoric of invasion and alarm in the face of the ‘Mediterranean migration crisis’.⁴ These images operate within an ambivalent regime of (in)visibility at play at Europe’s maritime frontier, a “partition of the sensible” in the terms of Jacques Rancière, which occludes as much as it reveals: It creates particular conditions of (dis)appearance, (in)audibility, (in)visibility.⁵ As a result of migrants’ illegalisation, they seek to cross borders undetected, *clandestinely* in the etymological connotations and secrecy of this word. As opposed to the logic of clandestinity, what all agencies aiming to control migration try to do, is to *shed light* on migration and in particular on acts of unauthorised border crossings in order to make the phenomenon of migration more knowable, predictable and governable. To this effect, a vast dispositif of control has been deployed at the maritime frontier of Europe, one made of mobile patrol boats but also of and an assemblage of surveillance technologies, through which border agents seek to detect and intercept migrants’ vessels.⁶

However, the partition of the sensible at Europe’s maritime borders is more ambivalent than this binary opposition would let us believe. Migrants in distress may do everything they can to be seen, so as to be rescued, and conversely border agents may seek *not to see* migrants in certain instances, as we documented in the left-to-die boat case described below, considering that rescuing them at sea would entail responsibility for disembarking them and processing their asylum claims and/or deporting them. This points to the fact that the light shed on the maritime frontier by agents of border control is highly selective. Through the constant circulation of images of overcrowded boats, the “border spectacle” so incisively analysed by Nicholas de Genova, simultaneously spectacularises the transgression of the border and the

3 Cp. Kim Rygiel, “Dying to live: migrant deaths and citizenship politics along European borders: transgressions, disruptions, and mobilizations”, *Citizenship Studies*, 20(5), 2016, pp. 545–560.

4 Cp. New Keywords Collective, “Europe/Crisis: New Keywords of ‘the Crisis’ in and of ‘Europe’”, in Nicholas De Genova and Martina Tazzioli (eds.), *Near Futures Online*, 2016. Available at: <http://nearfuturesonline.org/europecrisis-new-keywords-of-crisis-in-and-of-europe/> [accessed January 1, 2017].

5 Cp. Nicolas De Genova, “Spectacles of migrant ‘illegality’: the scene of exclusion, the obscene of inclusion”, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 36(7), 2013, pp. 1190–1198. Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, London, Continuum, 2006.

6 Cp. Lorenzo Pezzani and Charles Heller, “Liquid Traces: Investigating the Deaths of Migrants at the Maritime Frontier of the EU”, in Forensic Architecture (ed.), *Forensic: The Architecture of Public Truth*, Berlin, Sternberg Press, 2014.

neutralisation of the “threat” of migration by state actors, and keeps the state production of illegality through policies of exclusion, the structural violations of migrant rights at the border, and their future exploitation in European economies, in the dark.⁷

Through selective spectacularisations, migrant death at sea is routinely folded into naturalising and depoliticising narratives, within which the fate of precarious travellers seems to depend on their struggle with the natural forces at work in the Mediterranean – the winds, the currents, the waves, and the cold.⁸ Serving as Europe’s alibi, the loss of thousands of lives can be conveniently blamed on the forces of the sea or on third parties, especially human smugglers. Within these narratives, critique of Europe and its border authorities would revolve solely around a supposed passivity, a lack of engagement, and often give rise to calls for increased intervention, more militarisation, and for reinforced and externalised border control measures to pre-emptively halt migration movements before reaching the space of the sea in the first place. In these hegemonic narratives, Europe’s border *activities*, always already at work to significantly shape this borderzone and to condition migrant experiences, become effaced and invisibilised.

While the deaths of migrants at sea have long appeared as an obscene supplement of the border spectacle, recently a partial reversal has occurred within what William Walters has called the “humanitarian border” – a way of governing migration that seeks to compensate for the social violence embodied in the regime of migration control.⁹ While rescue at sea by rescue agencies have long been the clear humanitarian counterpart of the illegalisation of migrants which forces them to resort to clandestine means of crossing in the first place, the deaths of migrants have come to be increasingly spectacularised, however only to denounce the practices of smugglers. As a result, the violence of borders still remains hidden, not only because the denunciation of smugglers serves to divert attention from it, but because border control becomes framed as an act of saving migrants and its violence is covered up by a humanitarian varnish. The aesthetic regime imposed by the European border regime on the Mediterranean is thus a complex and conflictual field, where visibility and invisibility do not designate two discrete and autonomous realms, but rather a topological continuum, within which any practice that seeks to contest the deadly border

7 Nicholas De Genova, “Spectacles of migrant ‘illegality’”, p. 1183.

8 Cp. Maurice Stierl, “A Sea of Struggle – Activist Border Interventions in the Mediterranean Sea”, *Citizenship Studies*, 20(5), 2016, pp. 561–578.

9 William Walters, “Foucault and frontiers: notes on the birth of the humanitarian border”, in: Ulrich Bröckling, Susanne Krasmann and Thomas Lemke (eds.), *Governmentality: Current Issues and Future Challenges*, New York, Routledge, 2011, pp. 138–164.

regime must position itself carefully.

A DISOBEDIENT GAZE: TURNING SURVEILLANCE AGAINST ITSELF

For several years now, transborder activists struggling against the European border regime have sought to contest this *regime of selective (in)visibility*. Migrant and refugee rights organisations have long protested the mass dying at sea, and denounced it as a consequence of Europe's policies of deterrence, exclusion, and border militarisation.¹⁰ They were, however, hardly able to document events within the maritime frontier to demand accountability for these deaths, and even less able to actually intervene *in real-time* into ongoing struggles at sea to avert them and enable the crossing of borders. Recently, researchers and activists have developed new practices that have enabled them to claim and enact the right to look and the right to listen in the unlikely and seemingly inaccessible spaces of the sea. In that way, they also began to challenge the borders of what could be seen and heard.

An initial intervention and a significant breach in the simultaneous spectacularisation and invisibilisation of the maritime frontier, came through the Forensic Oceanography project. Uncovering the case of the so-called “left-to-die boat” in 2011, the project's first report offered an account and analysis of a particularly harrowing maritime tragedy.¹¹ At the height of the NATO-led military intervention in Libya, 72 travellers fleeing Libya were left to drift in the Central Mediterranean Sea for 15 days, despite distress signals sent out to all vessels navigating in this area, and despite several encounters with military aircrafts and a warship. While the testimonies of the nine survivors brought this crime of failing to render assistance that cost the lives of 63 people to light, its perpetrators remained, at first, unidentified.

In conjunction with a coalition of NGOs, and in collaboration with several parallel investigations, Charles Heller and Lorenzo Pezzani reconstructed a composite image of the events by corroborating the survivors' testimonies with information provided by the vast apparatus of remote sensing technologies that have transformed the contemporary ocean into a digital archive of sorts: optical and thermal cameras, radars, vessel tracking technologies, distress signals which

¹⁰ See in particular the database established by UNITED and the maps produced by Migreurop based upon them.

¹¹ For our reconstruction of these events, see our report: Charles Heller, Lorenzo Pezzani, and Situ Studio, “Forensic Oceanography. Report on the ‘Left-To-Die Boat’”, *Forensic Architecture*, 2011. Available at: www.forensic-architecture.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/FO-report.pdf [accessed June 10, 2017]. Our video animation *Liquid Traces* summarises our findings.

contained geo-referenced coordinates, wind and current data, satellite imagery, and so forth. By interrogating this sensorium, we were able to model and reconstruct the drifting boat's trajectory as well as to account for the presence of a large number of vessels in the vicinity of the drifting migrant boat that did not heed their calls for help. While these technologies are often used for the purpose of policing illegalised migration as well as the detection of other 'threats', they were repurposed to find evidence for the failure to render assistance. The reconstruction of events formed the basis of several ongoing legal cases against states whose assets were in operation at the time of the events.¹² Through our work on the 'left-to-die' case, we sought to put into practice a *disobedient gaze* that used some of the same sensing technologies of border controllers, but sought to redirect their 'spotlight' from unauthorised acts of border-crossing, to state and non-state practices violating migrants' rights. We conceived this gaze as

“[aiming] not to disclose what the regime of migration management attempts to unveil – clandestine migration – but unveil that which it attempts to hide, the political violence it is founded on and the human rights violations that are its structural outcome.”¹³

Through our critical observations and counter-mapping practices of the sea, we demonstrated how a variety of actors and technologies interact to shape this space, and how Europe *actively* employs the sea and its forces for the purpose of migrant deterrence. Far from being an empty expanse where migrant tragedies occur seemingly 'naturally', the sea forms a deeply political space, where struggles over human movement and its policing are continuously being played out. While facing systematic forms of oppression that significantly condition irregularised attempts to traverse the Mediterranean, the subjects of sea crossings are protagonists of these struggles who enact their right to leave, move, survive and arrive. Hence, it is crucial to understand the 'viapolitics' of Mediterranean migration, where the migrant boat is, in fact, “a site of political action”, as Walters has argued.¹⁴

Through [WatchTheMed](#), founded in 2012 in collaboration with a

12 Cp. fidh, “63 migrants morts en Méditerranée: des survivants poursuivent leur quête de justice”, *fidh*, June 18, 2013. Available at: <https://www.fidh.org/La-Federation-internationale-des-ligues-des-droits-de-l-homme/droits-des-migrants/63-migrants-morts-en-mediterranee-des-survivants-poursuivent-leur-13483> [accessed June 10, 2017].

13 Lorenzo Pezzani, and Charles Heller, “A disobedient gaze: strategic interventions in the knowledge(s) of maritime borders”, *Postcolonial Studies*, 16(3), 2013, pp. 289–298, here: p. 294 (emphasis in original).

14 William Walters, “Migration, vehicles, and politics: Three theses on viapolitics”, *European Journal of Social Theory*, 18(4), 2015, pp. 469–488, here: p. 481.

wide network of NGOs, activists, and researchers, we sought to collectivise and multiply this practice of disobedient observation as political intervention. In another detailed investigation, we contributed to uncover events that transpired in the Central Mediterranean Sea on the 11th of October 2013, leading to the loss of more than 260 lives.¹⁵ By remapping the trajectory of the migrant boat that had fled from Libya, and by reconstructing distress calls, as well as the responses of responsible authorities, or rather the lack thereof, we showed how the many fatalities could have been prevented. However, as a result of Italy and Malta's reluctance to carry out search and rescue operations, time was lost and rescue measures were delayed. When the rescue forces finally arrived at the scene, about half of the travellers had already drowned. Only years later, in May 2017, this case received wide public attention, following the release of an audio recording on which the pleas of passenger Dr Jammo to the Italian coastguards and the latter's reluctance to help can be heard.¹⁶

DISOBEDIENT LISTENING: AMPLIFYING MIGRANTS' MOBILE COMMONS

In light of this case and the ongoing mass suffering at sea, the need to find ways to intervene *directly* within maritime borders became ever more pressing.¹⁷ Through the WatchTheMed monitoring platform, our hope was, on the one hand, to be able to multiply the documentation of violations, and, on the other, to move towards real-time interventions so as to shift from a post-fact analysis to actually preventing violations and deaths from occurring in the first place. The WatchTheMed platform, which was initially used as a tool in the service of the tradition of documenting, denouncing, and seeking accountability for violations, as exemplified by the work of the GISTI and Migreurop networks, was seized by another important militant tradition that explicitly referred to the abolitionist network of secret routes and safe houses used by escaping enslaved populations in the US: the 'underground railroad'.¹⁸

15 Cp. Watch the Med, "Over 200 die after shooting by Libyan vessel and delay in rescue", *Watch the Med*, 2013. Available at: <http://watchthemed.net/reports/view/32> [accessed January 8, 2017].

16 Cp. Samuel Osborne, "Horror phone calls reveal how Italian Coast Guard let dozens of refugees drown", *Independent*, May 8, 2017. Available at: <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/italian-navy-lets-refugees-drown-migrants-crisis-asylum-seekers-mediterranean-sea-a7724156.html> [accessed June 10, 2017].

17 Cp. Watch the Med, "Guardia Civil runs over refugee boat near Lanzarote", *Watch the Med*, 2012. Available at: <http://watchthemed.net/index.php/reports/view/33> [accessed May 23, 2015].

18 For a discussion of the connection with the underground railway of anti-slavery within migrants' rights activists discourse, see: Welcome to Europe Network, "From

Regarding themselves as part of an existing transnational underground railroad that supports trans-border mobilities and migratory acts of escape, activist networks such as NoBorder and Welcome to Europe, have long directly supported unauthorised mobilities across European borders. Migration is understood by these networks as a *social movement* in its own right, as a “creative force” that upsets the government of mobility imposed by the border regime not only by means of “explicit” legal and political claims (such as those grounded on the documentation and denunciation of specific episodes of violence at the border) but also through an everyday practice of refusing the border. This perspective opens up the field of struggles for freedom of movement to a whole series of “imperceptible” practices that would otherwise not be included in the political field, modifying the very borders of what we understand as political.¹⁹ Brett Neilson and Angela Mitropoulos have tellingly made this point in a passage that is worth quoting at length:

“In the case of struggles surrounding undocumented migration, the very notion of movement fractures along a biopolitical or racialised axis: between movement understood in a political register (as political actors and/or forces more or less representable) and movement undertaken in a kinetic sense (as a passage between points on the globe or from one point to an unknown or unreachable destination). To keep these two senses of movement separate not only denies political meaning to the passages of migration but, also, fails to think through the complexities of political movement as such, not simply as the incompleteness and risk of every politics but, more crucially, as the necessarily kinetic aspects of political movements that might be something more, or indeed other, than representational. [...] It is in this nexus of ‘movement as politics’ and ‘movement as motion’ that the non-governmental struggles over undocumented migration take shape as challenges to the demarcations that define politics as always, inexorably, national and/or sovereign.”²⁰

It is this reframing of the political meaning of ‘movement’ that grounds activist practices seeking to facilitate and sustain migrants’ unauthorised movements. Acknowledging that unauthorised migration in our

Abolitionism to Freedom of Movement? History and Visions of Antiracist Struggles”, *NoBorder lasts forever*, Frankfurt am Main, 2010. Available at: <http://conference.w2eu.net/files/2010/11/abolitionism.pdf> [accessed June 10, 2017].

19 Dimitris Papadopoulos, Niamh Stephenson, and Vassilis Tsianos, *Escape Routes: Control and Subversion in the 21st Century*, London, Pluto Press, 2008.

20 Angela Mitropoulos and Brett Neilson, “Exceptional Times, Non-Governmental Spacings, and Impolitical Movements”, *Vacarme*, January 8, 2006. Available at: <http://www.vacarme.org/article484.html> [accessed June 10, 2017].

bordered world are often enabled by ‘under the surface’ knowledge economies and networks composed of the very subjects of migration, their friends, relatives and connected communities and allies, activist networks sought to practice solidarity by creating further ‘pillars’ of the underground railroad. One such example is the creation of an [online guide for migrants and refugees](#) that provides practical information for their journeys towards and within Europe.

Inspired by this tradition, the WatchTheMed network also started to produce a series of leaflets containing information about the risks, rights, and safety measures at sea.²¹ All these political interventions sought to contribute to already existing ‘knowledges of circulation’ which emerge from the collective experience of transnational irregularised migration. As Mehdi Alioua and Charles Heller write, the social network that is progressively constituted through the experience of migration “is what allows [migrants] to make the link between the stages, obtaining information about the spaces they intend to traverse and the ways to enter into contact with the collectives there who might be of help to them. Knowing how to cross borders is a know-how that is built up gradually and tried out collectively at the different stages of the trip.”²² In this sense, the mobility of migrants constitutes an infrastructure of sorts, one that includes not only the footpaths, highways, train lines, or airports through which precarious travellers move; not only the wireless networks that transmit their information, the internet café where they chat with relatives and friends, the mobile phones with which they alert the coastguards and the satellite phone which locates their GPS position; it includes what has also been referred to as ‘mobile commons’, i.e. “a world of knowledge, of information, of tricks for survival, of mutual care, of social relations, of services exchange, of solidarity and sociability that can be shared, used and where people contribute to sustain and expand it.”²³

The creation of the [Alarm Phone](#), an activist hotline supporting boats in distress in the Mediterranean Sea, was the next crucial step in the collectivisation of these activist and militant practices, a new nodal

21 Cp. Watch the Med, “Safety at Sea. Instructions for a Distress Call”, *Watch the Med*. Available at: <http://watchthemed.net/index.php/page/index/10> [accessed May 23, 2015].

22 Mehdi Alioua and Charles Heller, “Transnational Migration, Clandestinity and Globalization: The Case of Sub-Saharan Transmigrants in Morocco”, in: Gerlinde Vogl, Susanne Witzgall, and Sven Kesselring (eds.), *New Mobilities Regimes in Art and Social Sciences*, Farnham, Ashgate, 2013, pp. 175–84.

23 Dimitris Papadopoulos and Vassilis S. Tsianos, “After Citizenship: Autonomy of Migration, Organisational Ontology and Mobile Commons”, *Citizenship Studies*, 17(2), 2013, pp. 178–196, here: p. 190; see also Ilker Ataç, Kim Rygiel, and Maurice Stierl, “The Contentious Politics of Refugee and Migrant Protest and Solidarity Movements: Remaking Citizenship from the Margins”, *Citizenship Studies*, 20(5), 2016, pp. 527–544.

point and pillar in the transnational underground railroad.²⁴ Initiated by a coalition of freedom of movement, human rights, and migrant activist groups, including WatchTheMed, Boats4People, Welcome to Europe, Afrique Europe Interact, Borderline-Europe, No Borders Morocco, FFM and Voix des Migrants, the Alarm Phone was launched in October 2014, with the intention to respond to violent border ‘protection’ practices and the unabated mass dying in maritime spaces around Europe, and to offer travellers alternative ways to make their distress heard.

Thanks to a management software, the Alarm Phone can re-route distress calls to a vast number of volunteers operating shifts, situated in about 12 countries, thus ensuring that every call is attended to. Due to the very different conditions in the maritime spaces of the Mediterranean, specific handbooks with step-by-step emergency plans and instructions had to be written, based on years of experience in migration and Noborder struggles as well as local and region-specific expertise. In addition to meteorological and geographical conditions, the organisation and modes of irregularised travelling differ considerably in the Mediterranean Sea. The build and size of vessels vary, many have (often malfunctioning) engines, some carry only paddles. Precarious travellers in the Aegean Sea often carry smartphones, which makes tracing them significantly easier than finding the whereabouts of those leaving from Moroccan shores, who usually only carry regular mobile phones. But, at least, they often have mobile phone reception, not available to the same extent in the Central Mediterranean Sea. Then again, groups leaving from Libya often keep a satellite phone on their vessel which allows most of them to quickly pass on GPS coordinates and which can even be charged with credit, often by the activists, from afar.

In its two years of existence, the phone project has gathered extraordinary momentum, supported about 1.800 boats in distress, and has thus proven to be one of the most important political interventions against Europe’s border regime in recent years. Besides supporting precarious human mobilities at sea, the wide solidarity network of the Alarm Phone, composed of about 150 activists and several connected organisations, can exercise pressure when there is a risk that a violation at sea may be perpetrated, such as cases of failing to render assistance or push-back, the illegal collective expulsion of ‘aliens’ from a country’s territory, or even direct assaults on migrant groups, such as those perpetrated by units of the Greek coastguards in the Aegean Sea.

24 Cp. Alarm Phone, *Official Website*. Available at: <http://alarmphone.org/> [accessed June 10, 2017].

Among dozens of such cases that were uncovered by the Alarm Phone was a push-back operation carried out by the Greek authorities in cooperation with the Turkish coastguards and in the presence of the European border agency Frontex on the 11th of June 2016. Fifty-three people had already crossed the territorial line and entered Greek waters where they were illegally transferred, at gunpoint, onto a Turkish coastguard vessel and returned to Turkey.²⁵

Through its ability to directly follow trajectories of migrant boats in real-time, and to document and scandalise violations at sea based on information and data passed on by precarious passengers themselves, the Alarm Phone has significantly altered the ways in which in/visibility is being played out at sea and tapped into ‘migrant digitalities’, facilitating disobedient forms of irregularised migration, where migration can be conceived “as a multidirectional, dynamic movement, that is, a networked building system facilitated to a great extent by information and communication technologies”²⁶. Several of the hotline’s members have experienced sea crossings themselves and now support the project by, for example, sharing their embodied expertise and offering linguistic capabilities fundamental to adjust to the many languages spoken on board, ranging from French, Arabic, Urdu, and Farsi to English, Tigrinya, and others.

Crucial in the intervention of the Alarm Phone is thus not so much high-tech remote sensing devices such as satellite imagery that were central to report on the ‘left-to-die’ boat, but simple mobile and satellite phones and the interpersonal networks they connect. Furthermore, these mobile connections operate less through the sense of sight than the sense of sound. While it may seem paradoxical, the best instruments for the exercise of a critical right to look and observe in maritime borderzones are those that transfer sounds. This is consistent with many instruments required for oceanography, such as sonars that use sound waves to ‘see’ in the water and measure the sea’s depth instead of technologies relying on light which does not travel far beneath the ocean’s surface. Listening to those in the process of crossing maritime spaces then allows to disobediendly observe the Mediterranean Sea. By

25 Cp. WatchTheMed, “WatchTheMed Alarm Phone denounces illegal push-back operation with Frontex present”, *Watch the Med. Alarmphone*, 2016. Available at: https://alarmphone.org/en/2016/06/15/watchthemed-alarm-phone-denounces-illegal-push-back-operation-with-frontex-present/?post_type_release_type=post [accessed January 8, 2017]; see also: Maurice Stierl, “Every refugee boat a rebellion? Supporting border transgressions at sea”, *Open Democracy*, September 18, 2016. Available at: <https://opendemocracy.net/maurice-stierl/every-refugee-boat-rebellion-supporting-border-transgressions-at-s> [accessed January 8, 2017].

26 Andoni Alonso, and Pedro J. Oiarzabal, *Diasporas in the New Media Age*, Reno, University of Nevada Press, 2010, p. 5.

employing the word *sensing*, we point precisely to how the entanglement of these different practices blurs the distinctions between rigid notions of “the senses”.

Mobile lines of communication have long been a crucial means of connection amongst migrant and diaspora communities. Especially for precarious and illegalised travellers, mobile phones function as orientation devices and become, as Maurice Stierl has shown, “carriers of life signals and signs of survival”²⁷. Several ‘private alarm hotlines’ established by relatives and friends of people on the move as well as by activists, have played a crucial role in countless cases of distress, including the ‘left-to-die’ boat case cited above, during which the initial information of distress was relayed by satellite phone to Father Mussi Zerai, an Eritrean priest who has become a point of reference for the East African diaspora. The Alarm Phone has been able to tap into these networks, operating under the surface and beyond the gaze of sovereign control. Vital information for crossing borders and unauthorised journeys circulate in real-time and allow for direct exchange, intervention, and assistance. Smart phones in particular function as a medium of immediate information transfer: snapshots of GPS locations can be forwarded via WhatsApp or Viber, distress situations are made public via Facebook, and border guard violence can be filmed, circulated, and denounced. In the activities of the Alarm Phone, the two activist traditions we have outlined above, one based on documentation/denunciation and the other based on assisting migrants’ while on their journey, find perhaps a new convergence, insofar as acts of documentation and denunciation of violence at the border are understood as tools that enable migrants’ movements rather than simply as claims for greater compliance with human rights standards.

The mode of intervention of the Alarm Phone however was predicated on the presence of (state) vessels at sea that could be called upon and pressured to intervene to rescue migrants in distress. This is precisely what was challenged by the termination of the Italian Mare Nostrum operation, a large-scale military and humanitarian operation deployed in October 2014 off the coast of Libya. With the end of the operation, which had come under attack for constituting a “pull-factor”, we witnessed in early 2015 the creation of a lethal search and rescue gap.²⁸ This resulted in the deployment of a record number of nongovernmental humanitarian rescue boats by large organisations such as Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) and several much smaller initiatives. By contributing to rescuing several tens of thousands of lives since

27 Maurice Stierl, “A Sea of Struggle”, p. 561.

28 We have detailed this policy shift and its effects in our report deathbyrescue.org.

2015, this fleet of “Mediterranean border humanitarians” has further widened the breach in the state-imposed regime of (in)visibility at sea.²⁹ Contesting the boundaries of the (in)visible and (in)audible has thus been a crucial aspect in the contestation of border violence.

THE SUBJECTS AND PRACTICES OF POLITICS IN THE INTERSTITIAL SPACE OF THE SEA

Together, the movements of illegalised migrants across EUrope’s maritime frontier through which they contest the contemporary geography of banishment, the use of innovative technologies and methodologies to break the impunity for deaths and violations at sea, the creation of an Alarm Phone network to force actors at sea to carry out rescues, and the deployment of a humanitarian fleet to contest and partly make up for the retreat of state-led search and rescue operations, have all transformed the interstitial space of the Mediterranean into a fundamental arena of politics. Through these combined practices, illegalised migrants and those who support them seek to contest the government of migration across the sea. While we have described these distinct yet interconnected practices above, *how should we conceptualise them together as distinct forms of political practice?* To begin to answer this question, we must inscribe them within the particular political space in which they operate, the sea.

The distinct characteristics of the political geography of the sea are well captured by the following comment by Commander Borg of the Armed Forces of Malta: “When you have a land border, here is country A and therefore the subject of law is country A, and here is country B, there is no limbo in between. At sea it’s different. Here you have country A, here you have the high seas and here begins the jurisdiction of country B. But in between, on the high seas, things are a little bit delicate.”³⁰ As the very name of the “Mediterranean” indicates, the sea is an interstitial space lying between territorial polities which divide the lands of our planet. While architects and scholars located in border studies and political geographies have, for several years, contested the spatial imaginary of the border as a line without thickness, the extended border zone of the sea challenges this imaginary particularly forcefully.³¹

29 Maurice Stierl, “A Fleet of Mediterranean Border Humanitarians”, *Antipode*, 2017. Available at: doi: [10.1111/anti.12320](https://doi.org/10.1111/anti.12320) [accessed June 10, 2017].

30 Quoted in Silja Klepp, “A Contested Asylum System: The European Union between Refugee Protection and Border Control in the Mediterranean Sea”, *European Journal of Migration and Law*, 12, 2010, pp. 1–21.

31 See for example Eyal Weizman, *Hollow Land: Israel’s Architecture of Occupation*, London, Verso, 2007.

The world's oceans constitute a vast and deep frontier zone, which both separates and connects not a handful of states as on land, but all coastal states.³² In this sense, it is a topological border, which establishes a relational proximity between distant territories that are put into contact by maritime circulation – you may cross the line of the border in the port of Dakar and cross it again in Marseille. While no state can exercise exclusive sovereignty over the frontier zone of the sea, all states exercise partial rights and obligations which often overlap and conflict with each other. At work then is a form of “unbundled” sovereignty described by Saskia Sassen, in which the rights and obligations that compose modern state sovereignty on the land are decoupled from each other and applied to varying degrees depending on the spatial extent and the specific issue in question.³³

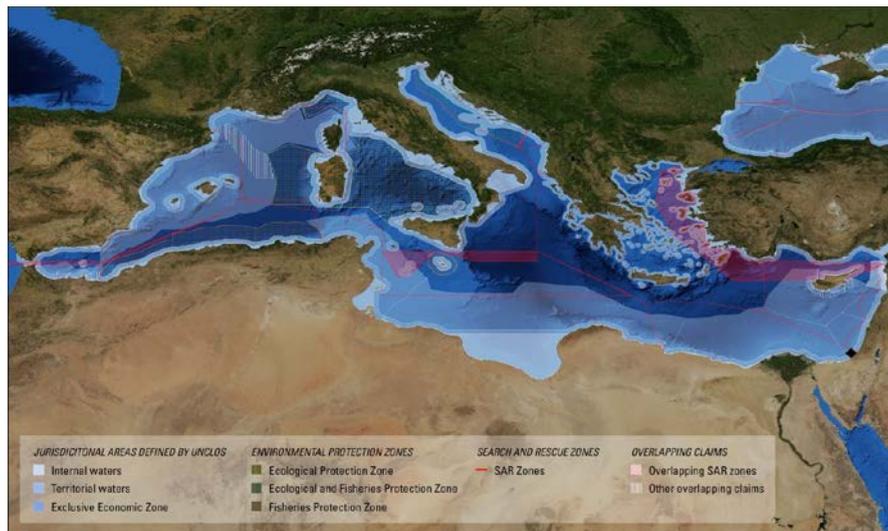
As a result, the moment of border crossing at sea is expanded into a process that can last several days and extends across an uneven and heterogeneous territory “in which the gaps and discrepancies between legal borders become uncertain and contested”³⁴. As soon as a migrant boat starts navigating, it passes through the various jurisdictional regimes that crisscross the Mediterranean: from the various areas defined in the UN Convention on the Laws of the Sea to Search and Rescue regions, from ecological and archaeological protection zones to areas of maritime surveillance (see the figure below). At the same time, it is caught between a multiplicity of legal regimes that depend on the juridical status applied to those onboard (refugees, economic migrants, illegals, etc.), on the rationale of the operations that involve them (rescue, interception, etc.) and on many other factors. These overlaps, conflicts of delimitation, and differing interpretations are not malfunctions but rather a structural characteristic of the maritime frontier that has allowed states to simultaneously extend their sovereign privileges through forms of mobile government and elude the responsibilities that come with it – as in the case of the left-to-die boat.³⁵

32 Cp. Paolo Cuttitta, “Le monde-frontière. Le contrôle de l’immigration dans l’espace globalisé”, *Cultures & Conflits*, 68, 2007, pp. 61–84.

33 Cp. Saskia Sassen, *Territory, Authority, Rights: From Medieval to Global Assemblages*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2006. See also Philip E. Steinberg, “Lines of Division, Lines of Connection: Stewardship in the World Ocean”, *Geographical Review*, 89(2), 1999, pp. 254–264 and Philip E. Steinberg, “Free sea”, in: Stephen Legg (ed.), *Spatiality, Sovereignty and Carl Schmitt: Geographies of the Nomos*, London, Routledge, 2011, pp. 268–275.

34 Brett Neilson, “Between Governance and Sovereignty: Remaking the Borderscape to Australia’s North”, *Local-Global Journal*, 8, 2010: pp. 124–140, here: p. 126. Available at: <http://mams.rmit.edu.au/56k3qh2kfcx1.pdf> [accessed June 10, 2017].

35 Cp. Philip E. Steinberg, *The Social Construction of the Ocean*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2001; Thomas Gammeltoft-Hansen and Tanja E. Alberts,



Map of maritime jurisdictions in the Mediterranean. Based on data compiled by www.marineplan.es and the International Maritime Organization.
Design: Forensic Oceanography

In a sense, then, we could argue that while the current form of the territorial state on firm land is founded on an imaginary of sedentariness, the political form of maritime space is founded on movement and its management – the policing of the so-called “freedom of the seas”. The particular political geography of the sea and the type of government that is exercised across it have in turn resulted in the aforementioned political practices to contest it. What is distinctive about them, is that they strictly concern the government of movement across borders – in this case the extended frontier zone of the sea. Illegalised migrants seize a right to move across borders which is denied to them, and contest through this very act, the dictatorial nature of all migration policies. As Étienne Balibar has underlined, migrants are by definition excluded from the institutional political process that shapes national migration policies.³⁶ Since the government of mobility across the sea is not imposed by one state but by many, at times operating in alliance, as in the current European operations of Frontex or EUNAVFOR MED, but also conflicting with each other, as in the conflict over search and rescue between Italy and Malta, the support to illegalised migrants draws citizens of multiple nationalities to deploy their senses and bodies to this frontier zone.

“Sovereignty at Sea: The Law and Politics of Saving Lives in the Mare Liberum”, *DIIS Working Paper* 18, 2010; Juan Luis Suárez de Vivero, *Jurisdictional Waters in the Mediterranean and Black Seas*, Bruxelles, European Parliament, 2010.

³⁶ Étienne Balibar, *We, the People of Europe? Reflections on Transnational Citizenship*, Princeton, University Press, 2004, p. 109.

In this sense, the space of the sea has bred novel forms of political practices that mirror the form of power exercised across it: transnational nongovernmental practices which take the government of mobility as their main target. Performed in the interstices of territorialised polities, these combined practices seize the right to move, contest and transform the way the movement of people is governed. Through them, the sea is recognised as a political space in its own right, and movement is recognised as a fundamental dimension of our life in common.

MARIBEL CASAS-CORTES

POLITICS OF DISOBEDIENCE – ENSURING FREEDOM OF MOVEMENTS IN A B/ORDERED WORLD

Acts of border crossing bring territory and body together in deeply contrasting ways. As such, the border constitutes the space where different visions of mobility clash on an everyday basis. This raises questions as to what kind and scale of politics might work in that contested territory. Current migration policies guarantee a system of privileges in which *a few* are allowed to freely move while *many* are under attack throughout their journey. Indeed, in order to sustain such a hierarchical system, a high-tech matrix of violent surveillance mechanisms and exclusionary bureaucracies has developed inside and outside borderlines. This unequal way of dealing with human mobility, is slowly being normalised and if contested, usually focuses on the humanitarian consequences affecting a concrete set of people. Outraged by the unnecessary and ongoing human suffering that is institutionally induced, certain pro-migration activist initiatives work on exposing and avoiding the structural logics and practices of arbitrary restriction enacted by this border matrix. Movements are able to do this by not taking two main axes of migration control ideology for granted: the space of the border and the condition of illegality.

Such questioning is an exception in conventional thinking about migration, which is based on a double assumption in both territorial and identity terms: First, borders are conventionally understood as clearly marked lines between countries, and second; the ingrained dichotomy of *citizen/illegal* is taken as a given, as two tattoos distinguishing who belongs to the assumed *us* and who, to the risky *them*. Even some scholarly literature on irregular migration and border management runs the risk of normalising those categories. On the one hand, studies focused on state-centered approaches to international relations ignore the growing policies

of border externalisation by the EU, US and Australia. On the other hand, empirical studies trying to quantify and qualify types of human mobility as well as map irregular itineraries in terms of origin, transit and destination, contribute to normalising and legitimising the controversial exclusionary logic of migration control policies.

In contrast, a growing literature of intertwined scholarly and activist analyses speak about migration control in “biopolitical” terms, genealogically exploring the social construction of policies, their corresponding practices of power/knowledge, and the intricate logics of visibility/invisibility. Thus, critical migration studies offer sharp deconstructive readings of borders,¹ citizenship,² and illegality.³ For instance, border control beyond territorial lines, points to how the act of bordering not only takes place at expected points of entry, but how practices of policing, interception and deterrence are carried out within and outside the border lines of the destination state’s territory. Also, the notion of legality is presented as a spectrum of different existential conditions, marked by paper work and bureaucratic encounters. Such notions take us not only to more complex territorial arrangements of migration control, but also to a broader understanding of migration policy as a producer and reproducer of hierarchies among people, in terms of access to entitlements, mainly the freedom to move. The lack of implementation of the historical and legally-grounded “Right to Migrate”⁴ allows for the normalisation of exclusionary practices, as the Nijmegen school puts it: “B/Ordering as Ordering and *Othering*.”⁵ Current forms of *migration management* – to use the neutral-sounding terms of policy – are indeed selectively restrictive, designating who is permitted to move, who is not, and under what conditions.⁶ When this approach to human mobility trickles down and gets materialised through an assemblage of laws, policies, bureaucracies, surveillance technologies, interceptions at sea, and military operations, the given result is the disproportionate distinction between populations. This is when certain international patterns of mobility that have occurred historically (e.g.

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- 1 Noel Parker and Nick Vaughan-Williams, “Critical Border Studies: Broadening and Deepening the ‘Lines in the Sand’ Agenda”, *Geopolitics*, 17(4), 2012, pp. 727–33. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14650045.2012.706111> [accessed June 14, 2017].
 - 2 Vicki Squire, *The Contested Politics of Mobility: Borderzones and Irregularity*, London/New York, Routledge, 2012.
 - 3 Nicholas De Genova, *The Deportation Regime: Sovereignty, Space, and the Freedom of Movement*, Durham, NC, Duke University Press Books, 2010.
 - 4 Ángel G. Chueca Chueca-Sancho, *Derechos humanos, inmigrantes en situación irregular y Unión Europea*, Lex Nova, 2010.
 - 5 Henk van Houtum and Ton van Naerssen, “Bordering, Ordering and Othering”, *Tijdschrift Voor Economische En Sociale Geografie*, 93(2), 2002, pp. 125–36. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9663.00189> [accessed June 14, 2017].
 - 6 EU Council, “EU Strategy Paper on Immigration and Asylum Policy”, 1998. Available at: <http://archiv.proasyl.de/texte/europe/eu-a-o.htm> [accessed January, 31 2017].

between Morocco and Spain before Spain's EEC membership) are *illegalised*. They become targets of surveillance and policing, since they are reconceived as potential channels for criminal activity, such as terrorism and the trafficking of drugs (more so since the European Security Strategy of 2003).

Such a cross-disciplinary body of critical migration studies, calls for the recording of both the violent traces of borders on bodies⁷ and of the ways in which the act of b/ordering is designed and implemented, tracking down the material practices of migration policy representatives, security experts and border authorities. This is precisely what *WatchtheMed* and *AlarmPhone* are carrying out, a methodology of 'counter-mapping' the border regime, showing how a repressive system is operationalised from the inside out. In this way, particular operations of the EU's external border regime in the Mediterranean are tracked, mapped and dissected – not only to highlight and predict its lethal outcomes – but to try to efficiently intervene during a moment of distress within the ongoing biopolitical war on migrants, to ensure rescue, or clandestinity if that is what is needed.

Existing activist practices that support transborder mobilities and migratory acts of escape grow out of a complex take on b/ordering. Indeed, those biopolitical readings of the border – including approaches inspired in the *Autonomy of Migration*⁸ – materialise into a series of political practices for freedom of movement in times when representative democratic systems do not seem to represent many of its constituencies' needs and opinions. This question of migration is well captured by the UN High Commissioner of Human Rights in his public address in early 2017:

“Many ordinary people in Europe have welcomed and supported migrants, but political leaders increasingly demonstrate a chilling indifference to their fate. I am particularly disturbed by lurid public narratives which appear deliberately aimed at stirring up public fear and panic, by depicting these vulnerable people as criminal invading hordes.”⁹ (Geneve, March 8, 2017)

7 Jason De León, *The Land of Open Graves: Living and Dying on the Migrant Trail*, California Series in Public Anthropology, 36, Oakland, California, University of California Press, 2015.

8 Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson, *Border as Method, Or, the Multiplication of Labor*, Durham, NC, Duke University Press, 2013.

9 UNOG, “UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra'ad al Hussein highlights current major human rights issues in more than 40 countries around the world in an address at the UN Human Right Council in Geneva, 8 March 2017”, UNOG. *The United Nations Office at Geneva*, 2017. Available at: [http://www.unog.ch/unog/website/news_media.nsf/\(httpNewsByYear_en\)/321DBF8562C5336BC12580DD003BF66E?OpenDocument](http://www.unog.ch/unog/website/news_media.nsf/(httpNewsByYear_en)/321DBF8562C5336BC12580DD003BF66E?OpenDocument) [accessed June 14, 2017].

Given the political impasse regarding migration in Europe, grassroots and independent organisations such as *Sans-Papiers*, *Welcome to Europe*, *No one is Illegal*, *Precarious and Migrants Unite*, *NoBorders*, *Frassantio Network*, *WatchtheMed*, *Ferrocarril Clandestino*, *Boats4People*, *Afrique Europe Interact*, *Borderline-Europe*, *No Borders Morocco*, *FFM*, *Voix des Migrants*, and the *AlarmPhone*, have been acting under the same political logic of the abolitionist movement against slavery a century ago. Addressing a fictional ‘public opinion’ by denouncing the brutal violence of a repressive system that denies ‘freedom’ to many, was not enough. Rather, this mode of political action runs ‘underground’, permeating the everyday, through practices of mutual aid and social media, aimed at preventing further containment of mobility, ensuring safe escape, arrival and stay. Heller, Pezzani and Stierl’s account of struggles against the European border regime in the Mediterranean invoke the resistance by the Underground Railroad during the era of slavery in the USA. In a similar way, ‘disobedience’ emerges as a legitimate form of politics in advanced democracies, which discursively claim to represent but ignore their own supposed demos within their territories.

Border regimes attempt to distinguish and separate populations according to mobility rights. Yet, there is a possibility of finding a common ground between ‘populations’ via sharing a politics of disobedience towards that very border regime. These include those deemed as *EU citizens*, the ones allowed to move. Disobedient citizens are claiming and enacting the right to look (*WatchtheMed*) and the right to listen (*AlarmPhone*) to the hidden violence of the border, “turning surveillance against itself”:

“In its two years of existence, the phone project has gathered extraordinary momentum, supported about 1,800 boats in distress, and has thus proven to be one of the most important political interventions against the EU border regime in recent years”.

Also, those produced as *irregular migrants*, people on the move despite not being granted the right to do so, are also engaging in practices of disobedience. As Heller, Pezzani and Stierl point out:

“Illegalised migrants seize a right to move across borders which is denied to them, and contest through this very act, the dictatorial nature of all migration policies.”

These *illegalised* migrants can be morphed into security concerns as ‘irregular flows’, creating a need to trap them on time and contain them in space (Detention centres, Hot Spots, etc.), processed and categorised under a single legal status, and embodied by a non-white, male figure. An

autonomous/disobedient gaze on migration¹⁰ breaks with such a portrait of the ‘clandestine’ and offers a take on illegality as a fluid spectrum of legal statuses and diverse existential conditions that a person accused of ‘illegalized movement’ goes through. By crossing borders, this person is not only addressing a historical human need and desire – mobility and transportation – but is also acting politically against a restrictive system. In this way, disobedient practices reframe and update the current political repertoire of collective action and personal identities. The same person who jumped the fence, might soon disobey the border regime through other acts of ensuring further movement and access to goods and services.

Acts of disobedience under a regime that legitimises and implements obstacles to freedom of movement, are also practiced by holders of temporary work visas – including those highly skilled and with dependents – when ‘overstaying’ and taking their ‘illegal’ children to school and medical services, acting as a citizen without papers.¹¹ Thinking in terms of the irregular migrant as the extreme of total exclusion and unbearable suffering, does not allow seeing the long and changing spectrum of the machinery of exclusion. Moving away from the focus on the ‘illegal’ as a homogenous figure, broadens our horizon of political possibilities at the border zones. The border regime is not only producing and targeting those “irregular flows”, but also differentiating as *uneven mobilities* – temporary visa holders, refugees, deportees, asylum seekers, emigrants, etc. If we get stuck in the framework of two extremes – the totally excluded Other and the normal citizen – our gaze will turn to focus solely on suffering by a hard-to-relate-with Other, leading to forms of ‘top-down solidarity’, or its inversion, seeing every act of border crossing as a heroic act of resistance. While the witnessing of vast suffering created by the volumetric border regime is a must, *WatchtheMed* and *AlarmPhone* constitute exemplars of autonomous forms of intervention, which instead of homogenising and romanticising the figure of the clandestine,¹² sustain and call for a shared politics of disobedience.

Critical race studies and anti-racist organising have learned this lesson well, pointing to the inaccuracy and political disaster of thinking and

10 Sandro Mezzadra, “The Gaze of Autonomy: Capitalism, Migration, and Social Struggles”, in Vicki Squire (ed.), *The Contested Politics of Mobility: Borderzones and Irregularity*, London, Routledge, 2011, pp. 121–42.

11 Peter Nyers and Kim Rygiel (eds.), *Citizenship, Migrant Activism and the Politics of Movement*, Routledge Research on the Global Politics of Migration, 2, London/New York, Routledge, 2012.

12 Stephan Scheel, “Studying Embodied Encounters: Autonomy of Migration beyond its Romanticization”, *Postcolonial Studies*, 16(3), 2013, pp. 279–288. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13688790.2013.850046> [accessed June 14, 2017].

acting in dichotomies. Biopolitical readings of illegality draw from studies on racialisation processes and are aware of the multiplicity and unexpected overlapping of axes of oppression. In this way, the figure of the *emigrant* comes into play when talking about disobedient politics and the migration regime. Many who hold EU passports are going through long-term periods of short-term contracts, loss of benefits and increasingly uncertain livelihoods. *Prearity*, as the induced condition of instability under neoliberal globalisation, is leading to growing numbers of EU citizens to migrate to north-Atlantic areas, but also, and less important for governmental statistics and the media, to countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America. Engaging in no-border activism requires thinking in terms of both inward and outward migration, ensuring safe escape, arrival and stay to all those moving. Indeed, a shared politics of disobedience might well serve many of those Europeans abroad who are going through situations of irregularity and *semi-compliance*.¹³

As an immigrant under the Trump administration, I recall the productive grassroots organising in Spain right after the *15M or Indignados* movement during the Occupy wave: Increasingly precarious young people with “no job/no house/no future” about to migrate themselves, were linking arms with migrants from non-EU countries. While marked by racialised differences, a shared politics of disobedience might lead to an effective common struggle for access to b/order territories and their correspondent entitlements. When recognising how precarious conditions are spreading temporary arrangements and a continuous indeterminacy of life, the solidarity call of “we are all migrants” becomes even more real.¹⁴ This is when a shared politics of disobedience makes sense in its assertiveness of contesting borders and ensuring freedom of movement for all.

13 Bridget Anderson, *Us and Them? The Dangerous Politics of Immigration Control*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2013.

14 Gregory Feldman, *We Are All Migrants: Political Action and the Ubiquitous Condition of Migrant-Hood*, Stanford, California, Stanford Briefs, 2015.