

The Infrastructure of border regime:  
Neocolonial subjugation of life in modern democratic societies.

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Abstract:

In 2015, the European Union's border regime witnessed a paradigm shift in managing migrant mobilities due to the so-called 'migration crisis'. This change involved the implementation of digital technologies, such as databases and biometrics, to 'socially sort' migrants and refugees, as well as the establishment of Registration and Identification Centres (RICs) to enforce restrictions while enabling movement beyond traditional containment measures. Interoperability became a crucial component of control and governance, as EU databases were interconnected to generate new data, process asylum applications, and limit cross-border movement, particularly in Greece. The incorporation of advanced technologies allowed the border regime to transcend temporal and spatial limitations, enabling greater fluidity and penetration into refugees' daily lives and experiences. This thesis seeks to critically examine this perceived novelty through a postcolonial lens, positing that the deployment of such technologies and governance strategies primarily extends historical colonial legacies and perpetuates power imbalances between the Global North and South. Drawing upon Ann Laura Stoler's 'Imperial Ruins' and Mbembe's concept of 'necropolitics', the thesis scrutinises the (re)emergence of colonial and imperial practices, which consequently generate *death in life* conditions, predominantly by controlling individuals' mobility through space and time. This study contributes to the ongoing discourse within the social sciences by offering an unfiltered understanding of the enduring colonial legacies shaping contemporary migration and border management in the European Union.

for Shahida Raza

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### A horizon, bleak

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## List of abbreviations

CEAS:	Common European Asylum System
DA62:	
EC:	European Commission
EASO:	European Asylum Support Office
EU:	European Union
<b>Eurodac:</b>	<b>European Dactyloscopy</b>
Europol:	The European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation
Eurojust:	The European Union Agency for Criminal Justice Cooperation
<b>eu-LISA:</b>	<b>European Union Agency for the Operational Management of Large-Scale IT Systems in the Area of Freedom, Security and Justice</b>
<b>Frontex:</b>	<b>European Border and Coast Guard Agency</b>
GAS:	Greek Asylum Service
HIV:	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
IT:	Information Technology
RIC:	Reception and Identification Centre
SIS:	Schengen Information System
TB:	Tuberculosis
UNHRC:	United Nations Human Rights Council
VIS:	Visa Information System
WHO:	World Health Organization



What is it? What is it... Where is it? What makes you wait? Wait till it chokes you on waiting. Longer and longer into periods of every lasting kafkaesque circle of frustration. Maybe it's anxiety? Anger? So many emotions all merging into one time and space. Effect so powerful that it detaches you from reality, throws you off the present and lets you simmer into the voids of uncertainty. Uncertainty is the closest equivalent to what you can find in the English language. Has any other a far more expressive phrase? Necro. It keeps you alive while it accomplishes all the required conditions for death. It's a slow death that it induces. Injures you and your body. Heartbeat rises and blood pressure rises up. Sometimes you feel your palms sweaty. Your legs tremble too whenever it speaks to you, for you. It's a decree that commands you to play by its rules now that you play by its rules in its territory. You feel death, or maybe beyond it sometimes too. Suffocation. Is it an omnipresent entity? If not why is it everywhere, where I go. Where you go. Where they go. Is it what they mean to be Jehova, Allah, Ra, Shiva or Bhagwan? If it has god-like attributes. Why is it not as compassionate? Why is it the opposite? It's difficult to call it an infrastructure, because I see it as an order, a decree of a sort, that is powerful in its vagueness and concrete in its permeability to annihilate lives while keeping many alive. It seizes entire control of bodies and territories and thrusts vast power which traps humans inside kafkaesque hoops of process and labyrinthian bureaucratic systems. I see it as an experience, based on (very limited) personal exposure and mainly meta-experiences of those who are undergoing asylum procedures and predominantly those whose claims have been rejected, stuck in a far away settlement in Germany for years, waiting for their data to be deleted. For them, I see it as a vicious circle, not improving, but every passing day gets complicated and more

intense. The system sometimes knows them better than themselves. With every new digital system added to the existing systems, sometimes probability turns into possibility. And with each passing day, the more it grows, the more intrusive it gets (in all the possible ways one could think of) and the more agency it strips away, till it gains absolute/total control. One then observes how a glitch in the system transforms that system to its most violent form.

## 1. varied velocities

On the 22nd of February 2023, a group of people set out from the northern coast of Turkey, near the city of Izmir. They departed in a small wooden sailing boat, their destination: the Southern coast of Italy, specifically Steccato di Cutro. As they set off, joy and desperation filled the air, the mixed emotions embodied in the cries of 'Italy here we come!' They moved from the Aegean to the Mediterranean sea. Every passing day brought them closer to what they envisioned as their promised land.

However, they were not alone on this journey. An Austrian DA62 Reconnaissance aircraft, flying at a speed of 140 knots, had been surveying their boat for approximately two days. Equipped with a thermal camera, the aircraft captured images and transmitted them to FRONTEX's headquarters in Warsaw. Analysis of this data suggested the presence of over 200 people on the boat.

Three days later, Frontex relayed information to the Italian authorities stating that the vessel showed 'no signs of distress' and was moving at a speed of 6 knots with 'good buoyancy'. On the 26th of February, weather conditions worsened. Frontex alerted the Italian authorities of the need for a potential rescue operation. But the rescue never came. By that time, the boat had collided with rocks and sank just 100 metres from the shores of the European Union. 86 people died in the incident, including almost all the children on board<sup>1</sup>.

The surveillance was a part of FRONTEX's operation Themis, an initiative aimed at monitoring the Mediterranean sea for marine traffic, particularly for controlling the 'incoming flows' of refugees. In Greek mythology, Themis is the personification of justice, the goddess of wisdom and good counsel, and the interpreter of the gods' will. Her symbol is the scale of justice. Yet, in this case, it remains unclear; who is the recipient of justice, Who serves it and to whom is it due? Amidst operations veiled in the guise of rescue, safety, and security; death continues to proliferate.

Unfortunately, this is not a one-off incident. Since the start of 2023, 400<sup>2</sup> people have lost their lives in the sea, bringing the toll to over 25,000 deaths since 2015. These numbers do not account for the loss of lives on land, a number that continues to rise in tandem with FRONTEX's swelling funding.

This brings us to the question of the underlying power asymmetry between those who have it and those who are deprived of it. What made the Reconnaissance drone fly at speeds far exceeding that of the boat below? What led these people to stay at less than a metre above the sea level, whilst driving *it* to take that photograph from hundreds of metres above them? It's a stark contrast - millions of euros versus a few thousand.

The answers I seek lie on land. Surveillance and observation, effective tactics in the hands of the dominant, have historically been used to establish and preserve imperial supremacy.

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<sup>1</sup> Falcioni, Davide (5 March 2023). 'Naufragio Crotona, trovata la 71esima vittima: ieri ripescati i corpi di altri due bambini'

<sup>2</sup> Person (2023) *Over 400 migrants died crossing Mediterranean early in 2023 -un agency, Reuters*. Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/over-400-migrants-died-crossing-mediterranean-early-2023-un-agency-2023-04-12/>.

I turn my gaze to the past, where these relationships were first forged. I do so with an urgency to delve into the historical colonial legacies of the countries that make up the European Union.

I propose that excavating colonial history and associating it both materially and ideologically underpins the racial politics embedded in the European Union's contemporary border governance and its imperial dominance. And by introducing the idea of transgressive timelines, the traditional linear chronological narrative can be disrupted, allowing for a more unfiltered portrayal of colonisation in modern societies; an imperative to expose its deeply ingrained influences that have been conveniently veiled for far too long.

## 1.1 Crisis of Reception: Genealogy into migration crisis

In 2015, the Syrian civil war along with other conflicts in the Middle East, countries like Iraq and Libya, coupled with the conflicts in North Africa, led to over a million migrants seeking asylum in Europe within that year alone<sup>3</sup>. The number of people seeking refugee enroute to Europe, either through the Libya-Italy passage or the Balkan route via Turkey and Greece, in hopes of reaching northern countries like Germany, continued to rise<sup>4</sup>. Although the 1951 Geneva Convention asserts asylum rights for those in peril, the reality for many seeking refuge in the European Union deviates markedly. And despite the native population of a country vastly outnumbering incoming migrants, the media portrayed migrants as arriving in a tsunami<sup>5</sup> or as an invasion<sup>6</sup>.

While alongside the civil war and other conflicts in between 2014 to 2016, a 'crisis' also emerged prominently in Western media spheres. Proliferated by such media franchises, the so-called 'migration crisis of 2015'<sup>7 8</sup> has become a ubiquitous term that denotes the influx of refugees and migrants into the European Union during that period. However, if looked from the ingredients that made the working construct of the expression, the etymology of 'migration crisis' reveals deeper ideological and historical influences which makes it more apt to describe as a 'crisis of reception' as well as its construct as a Eurocentric terminology<sup>9</sup>. As I explore the term 'crisis' in the context of the EU's changing political landscape reveals links to the rise of far-right populism, disinformation, and social polarisation. These have fueled anti-immigrant and anti-refugee sentiments, which are further aggravated by the paradoxical nature of the Western border regime that causes

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<sup>3</sup> Teresa Fiore & Ernest Ialongo, Introduction: Italy and the Euro-Mediterranean 'migrant crisis': national reception, lived experiences, E.U. pressures, *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*, 23:4, 481-489,

<sup>4</sup> Tassinari, Fabrizio. "Lessons from the Refugee Crisis." *PRISM* 6, no. 2 (2016): 70-83.

<sup>5</sup> *Syria: UN cites utter desperation behind 'tsunami' of refugees into Europe*. (2015, September 25). UN News. <https://news.un.org/en/story/2015/09/509742>

<sup>6</sup> Trilling, D. (2020, August 11). Don't be fooled by the myth of a 'migrant invasion' | Daniel Trilling. *The Guardian*. <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/aug/11/myth-migrant-invasion-government-asylum-seekers-britain>

<sup>7</sup> The term 'Migration crisis of 2015' appeared in 2015 referring to an unprecedented influx of refugees and migrants arriving in Europe, predominantly from conflict-ridden countries like Syria, Afghanistan, and Iraq. It denotes the complex and multifaceted situation that marked a sharp increase in the number of people seeking asylum in European countries. The term is mainly used in media and political discourses and broadly incorporates non-EU residents.

<sup>8</sup> 'Migration crisis of 2015' from now on will be referred to as 'the crisis' or 'crisis' throughout the thesis.

<sup>9</sup> GiGA, *Perceiving Migration Crises: A View from the European Neighbourhood* (2020), German Institute for Global and Area Studies (GIGA), <https://www.giga-hamburg.de/en/publications/giga-focus/perceiving-migration-crises-a-view-from-the-european-neighbourhood>

mass displacements in the first place. As Prof. Elizabeth Brown and George Barganier write; 'border controls are most severely deployed by those Western regimes that create mass displacement, and are most severely deployed against those whose very recourse to migration results from the ravages of capital and military occupations. (Brown & Barganier, 2018)'.

The relationship between the actions of these countries (which also constitutes mainly the NATO) and the recourse to migration for those affected by the ravages of capital and military occupations is rarely acknowledged in mainstream discussions of the crisis. Instead, the focus remains predominantly on the perceived threats posed by migrants and refugees instead of the systemic factors that drive forced migration.

As I would further argue in the chapter: 'Imperial Ruins in the Union' and 'Trial and testing: Ad Hoc improvements to the asylum procedure' that the 'crisis' may be more accurately described as a crisis of reception. The term 'migration crisis' serves to obfuscate the true nature of circumstances created by the European Union during this period, which were rooted in its own policies as well as underlying ideologies. By interrogating the origins and usage of this term, one can begin to understand the ways in which the rise of far-right populism, data manipulation, disinformation campaigns, and social polarisation have contributed to the radicalization of anti-immigrant and anti-refugee beliefs. Upon further interrogation, a more dominant colonial ideology underpinning such situations becomes conspicuous.

Who created the 'crisis' in the first place? Was it brought by the migrants themselves or did they declare a crisis upon arrival? Isabel Lofgren further reframes its as a 'crisis of hospitality' she says; "Migrants, who are themselves often escaping genocide at home precisely due to their non-hegemonic cultural, religious, ethnic affiliations or sexual identities, thus often meet the necropolitics of genocidal ideologies in their host societies as well"<sup>10</sup>. Introducing a new perspective on the ontological question of crisis allows a reframing of it being a matter of positionality rather than an objective reality, thus interrogating the role of receiving societies' ability and willingness to host migrants.

Much of these encounters are reflected in urban forms and relations, as the increasing presence or (absencing) of migrants in cities rather than camps calls for a reevaluation of urbanism; a composite of flows of mobilities and immobility. The 'crisis' certainly reactivated the dominant ideologies that structures the composition of the urban, the society and the everyday, reinforcing the existing power dynamics.

How long have these dynamics been existing for? Where do they exist? And in fact what does it actually mean when I say they exist? And for whom do they exist? And why do they exist in the first place?

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<sup>10</sup> Lofgren, Isabel. *Satellite Lifelines: Media, Art, Migration and the Crisis of Hospitality in Divided Cities* (2020),7.

While I would fail to answer the last question in this thesis, I will turn towards the existential conundrum that entangles migrants within the urban spaces. I argue that while much of the 'crisis' is ontologically constructed in the colonial historical legacies of Europe, it is very much a crisis faced by the people. The crisis of making *absencing* happen. Which here simply implies the deliberate exclusion, invisibilization, and marginalisation of a wide range of people from urban spaces, which constitutes the lived realities of many who move or at least try to, in European urban centres.

## 1.2 Paradigm shift and the (re) emergence of Fortress Europe

While the 'crisis' in the thesis is discussed from a longer historical narrative along with looking at past ways of thinking about and responding to the movement of people from and, mainly, to Europe, the thesis traces these past constructs to investigate the contemporary migration governance. In the wake of 'the crisis', the border regime quickly mobilised new strategies and tactics<sup>11</sup> that appeared to be strikingly novel, but are in fact continuities of the practices from the past. As I argue in the thesis, that they need to be understood from the Colonial ideological legacies, mainly in the EU laws and systems governing and administering mobilities of people and crucially; the sorting/classification of certain populations. While predominantly these population groups were refugees fleeing war torn areas in 2015 or later as the aftermath of the conflict grew, they were met with the securitization discourse that buffed up the walls around the EU.

Whether it was former prime minister Theresa May's hostile environment policy<sup>12</sup> targeting undocumented migrants in the UK; by restricting their access to essential services and opportunities<sup>13</sup> or by EU's enhancement of external borders; by barring entry into the block. The objective was the same to create an acutely 'hostile' environment forcing certain *groups* to voluntarily leave. As in the, then Minister's own words: "create here in Britain a really hostile environment for illegal migration"<sup>14</sup> or by new laws mobilised to control refugee mobilities in the EU, the metaphor of the fortress saw itself translated into many domains that directly or indirectly influenced the existence of non-EU populations.

Europe, in 2015, witnessed a resurgence of nationalist tendencies, leading to the reemergence of what is often referred to as 'Fortress Europe' which captures the increasingly restrictive and

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<sup>11</sup> Strategies here are a broad reference to the instruments as well as long term strategic measures for migration mobility management like; Reception and Identification centres, Biometric Identification, Procedures and systems to apply for asylum. Tactics include emergence of refugee camps, strengthening external border controls, Ad-hoc amendments in application systems, pre-registration processes, changing policies. It must be noted that strategies and tactics can not be segregated and often compound each other.

<sup>12</sup> Home Office hostile environment policy first emerged in 2012 made it difficult for undocumented immigration to access essential services and participate in everyday life and was composed of key aspects including rental, bank account, and employment checks, as well as restrictions on healthcare and driving licences for those without legal immigration status. The intention was to create an environment where people are forced to leave 'voluntarily'. For more, see: *Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration (2016) Inspection report of hostile environment measures, October 2016, GOV.UK.*

<sup>13</sup> Hill, A. 'Hostile environment': the hardline Home Office policy tearing families apart. *The Guardian* (2017). Retrieved April 22, 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2017/nov/28/hostile-environment-the-hardline-home-office-policy-tearing-families-apart>

<sup>14</sup> Kirkup, J., Winnett, R., Howse, C., Nicholls, D., Maidment, J., Holl, G., & Murphy, E. (2012, May 25). Theresa May interview: 'We're going to give illegal migrants a really hostile reception'. *The Telegraph*.

exclusionary policies and practices adopted by the EU in response to the *crisis*. I argue that the EU's response to the migration crisis has been marked by paradoxical and adhoc practices along with much intense subjugation of migrants and refugees. The EU shifted towards a securitized approach; prioritising border controls and externalisation of migration management at the expense of letting-die<sup>15</sup> (Mbembe 2003) as well as channelling, bridling and obstructing migrants from reaching centre<sup>16</sup> Europe.

The initial response by the EU was marked by a *sense of emergency*, with individual countries scrambling to accommodate the new arrivals which was denoted another crisis of management challenging EU's capacity to address the *unprecedented*<sup>17</sup> numbers of people seeking refugee. However, the rise of arrivals got coupled with the apparent lack of a unified EU strategy, which soon sparked a sense of panic, ultimately leading to the *hardening* of EU borders. Thus the *crisis* in the last 7 to 10 years has been discursively intensified and disseminated as an *emergency response* along with the failure to receive the incoming population.

However, the EU's response to the creation of the migrant as a 'crisis' was characterised by a shift towards securitization, resulting in the proliferation of border controls and increased surveillance. The Schengen Agreement, which originally allowed for the free movement of people across participating European countries, came under threat as several member states reinstated temporary border controls<sup>18</sup> to stem the flow of migrants. Additionally, EU agencies such as FRONTEX, which I would expand on later, have seen a significant increase in funding and resources<sup>19</sup>, reflecting the prioritisation of border security and migration control over humanitarian concerns. Furthermore, the lack of initial multilateral agreements, mutual cooperation amongst the member states of the Union coupled with the proliferation of war in the middle east; Migrants, though were not the cause of the problem, but saw themselves discursively getting created as the face of it. As Brazilian theorist Denise Ferreira da Silva argues that the seemingly welcoming gestures from German and British authorities conceal Europeans' failure to understand that they have played a role in creating the conditions that force millions to leave their homes (da Silva, 2017). Consequently, these individuals risk their lives traversing the perilous Mediterranean waters and navigating hostile territories in Eastern and Southern Europe.

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<sup>15</sup> Mbembe refers to 'Letting-die' as a by-product of necropolitics, where authorities do not directly cause death but are the authors of certain conditions that lead to the deaths of certain populations. I use this concept in the context of management of migration; where the refusal for aid, strict border controls, asylum application procedures as well as the neglect of the well-being of vulnerable populations, results in unnecessary suffering and death of individuals.

<sup>16</sup> I would use the term 'Centre', as also used by Ivan Kalmar in the book: *White But Not Quite*, to illustrate firstly, the relationship between Greece and the EU, and secondly, denoting specifically Western Countries that construct the 'centre Europe' but at the same time include Central European Countries like Slovakia, Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland. Highlighting this distinction is important here as Kalmar writes; 'The same system that produces such radical racial opposition [...], also produces ambiguous positions of ... Eastern Europe (which subsumes Central Europeans).'

Kalmar, I. (2022). *White But Not Quite: Central Europe's Illiberal Revolt* pg. 7, Bristol University Press.

<sup>17</sup> Unprecedented itself is a polemic term framing refugees arriving the Global North as a burden mainly when coupled with language or discourse that highlights strain on security issues, resources or cultural clashes. It also ignores the historical contexts and global perspectives as well as the fundamental aspect that 'Low- and middle-income countries host 74 per cent of the world's refugees'. <https://www.unhcr.org/refugee-statistics/>.

<sup>18</sup> Several Schengen member states temporarily reinstated border controls, including Germany (with Austria), Austria (with Hungary and Slovenia), Sweden (with Denmark), Denmark (with Germany), and France (citing security concerns). Dina Pardijs, S. D. (2016, April 14). *The Future of Schengen*. ECFR. [https://ecfr.eu/special/schengen\\_flash\\_scorecard/](https://ecfr.eu/special/schengen_flash_scorecard/)

<sup>19</sup> Statistica. Frontex budget 2022.

Another aspect of the EU's fortress mentality was seen in the externalisation of migration management, as evidenced by the controversial EU-Turkey<sup>20</sup> deal and similar arrangements with North African countries. These agreements essentially aim to prevent migrants and refugees from reaching European shores by outsourcing border control to non-EU countries. While the EU claims that these deals help reduce irregular migration and save lives at sea, they also expose migrants and refugees to human rights abuses and neglect in countries with less stringent asylum procedures and inadequate reception conditions. Moreover, the Dublin Regulation<sup>21</sup>, which requires asylum seekers to lodge their applications in the first EU country they enter, has put disproportionate pressure on countries located at the EU's peripheries, such as Greece and Italy. Particularly Greece's territory saw being instrumentalized to restrict the mobility and flow of people towards the Centre of EU. An entire infrastructure of Reception and Identification Centers (RIC) as well as hotspots<sup>22</sup> emerged on the islands and mainlands of Greece disguised to receive and process refugees facilitated the restriction of refugees in Greece. This lack of international distribution of burden burden-sharing has led to the emergence of ad-hoc and short-term solutions putting many at the edges of existence, of precarity and uncertainty.

The EU's fortress mentality has also had a significant impact on the public discourse around migration with the securitized approach to migration contributing to the compounding of migration with security threats, proliferating xenophobic and anti-immigrant sentiments.

Thus the re-emergence of Fortress Europe in 2015 is a troubling development, highlighting the EU's paradoxical practices in humanitarianism and securitization. The former compounded with the latter, with security being central, exacerbating existing divisions and inequalities within the EU. By privileging border controls and externalisation of migration management over humanitarianism, an environment perpetuating a vicious cycle of marginalisation, exclusion, and resentment got created. I characterise these as the socio-political and spatial consequences of the deployment of fortress Europe.

While these aspects could be studied in their present context, however as I argue in the thesis, there is an urgency to unfold the historical colonial legacies of the member states that constitute the EU while attempting to interrogate the rise of fortress Europe and its border regime. Contemporary border governance driven by colonial mentality is in fact the rise of neo-imperialism operating in the present day with interruptions built to obstruct the flow of migrants.

Such compounding of historical Border imperialism involves four interrelated dynamics: mass displacement of marginalised communities due to global power imbalances, securitization of borders against displaced migrants, criminalization of migration and harsh punishment, and exploitation of migrant labour by capitalist interests (Brown & Barganier 2018: 7).

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<sup>20</sup> Hooper, K., & Terry, K. The EU-Turkey Deal, Five Years On: A Frayed and Controversial but Enduring Blueprint. Migration Policy Institute (2021).

<sup>21</sup> Dublin Regulation determines which EU Member State is conducting examination of asylum application. Mainly, the first State in which the asylum seeker entered is responsible for processing their application, mainly Greece, Italy and Spain. This also exists for family reunification where someone having a family member legally residing in another EU Member State can apply for asylum in that country. Dublin regulation is enforced by the Eurodac database which tracks asylum seekers' movements across the EU to prohibit an applicant's attempt to apply for asylum in other Member States.

<sup>22</sup> One of the 5 Greek islands in the Aegean sea, where the Greek Asylum Service has RICs and camps designed to contain people who wish to claim asylum and have their asylum procedures on the island.



The paradigm shift thus becomes an evidence of the awakening of border imperialism and in the thesis, I intend to highlight first three out of four of such structures that discursively produced and reproduced the 'crisis', who the crisis is, and towards whom it was/is directed towards and the consequences of such direction; i.e. social sorting<sup>23</sup> as the foundation of the asylum application system.

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<sup>23</sup> I refer to the term 'Social sorting' as the categorization of migrants which is based on elements like nationality, age, gender as well as risk profiles, which further influence procedures and policies on who can enter, stay, and the rights in the EU.

## 2. Historical interrogation

Histories have been often visited to make sense of the prevalent structures of inequalities within society. Social and political theorists like Achille Mbembe, Hanna Arendt, Michael Foucault Giorgio Agamben, Homi K. Bhabha and Edward Said have often revisited the past, interrogatively, while simultaneously discussing the present situation. Such juxtaposition of dual discourses and transgression of timelines reveals recurring patterns and trends that have sustained throughout history and continue to proliferate in the present day.

For (Mbembe 2001), looking at colonisation helped him understand his inquiry: there still seems to be a lot of *death*, for (Arendt 1951) and for Agamben; this would be concentration camps while for (Foucault 1975), it would be the 19th century prisons and asylums that would help in understanding the world around him. While the personal experiences and encounters of (Bhabha 2004) and (Said 1978) with (post) colonialism helped in understanding the structural inequalities of societies around them.

The enclosure of camps where the limits of state's power and human suffering could be tested to their extremes, Arendt describes camps as '*totalitarianism's laboratories*'<sup>24</sup> where scientific racism intensified with physical instruments was put into practice in the realm of use of advanced technology and bureaucratic rationality. Agamben expands on the inhabitants of such spaces, referring to '*bare life*' (Agamben 1998) where humans are reduced to just a living being, stripped off from all the political and social worth they could have, rendered naked, legally, by an omnipresent sovereign power. While (Mbembe 2001), who has influenced much of this dissertation (along with Bhabha and Said), building on Agamben's view, takes into account the 'Colony' and its ascendancy into the spaces of contemporary oppression and violence; where slave plantations and execution of authority in colonies replaces Agamben's camp, constituting the hidden structure of modernity. The psycho-spatial situation orchestrated as the enactment of various Colonial empires flourished was 'death worlds' (Mbembe 2003), where colonised bodies, instead of being killed (absolutely), were kept alive in a state of phantasm; 'a state of injury in a world of horrors and intense cruelty and profanity' (Mbembe 2003, 21). The discussion by far doesn't stop the production of death worlds somewhere in an abstract past but aims at unpacking its proliferation in the present realities faced by refugees undergoing the process of claiming asylum. I would, further in the thesis, locate it in the enactment of the asylum applications system and the effect it leaves on the (potential) applicants.

A more nuanced form of political violence is illustrated by both Edward Said and Homi K. Bhabha. 'Orientalism'<sup>25</sup> illustrates Western (inaccurate) representations of the East are shaped by the desire to control and subjugate the cultures and people, which I would expand upon in *Algorithmic Profiling*, and the subsequent prevalence of complex and contradictory 'Ambivalence'<sup>26</sup> feelings produced as *colonial subjects* find themselves negotiating agency and power by either *mimicking* or resisting the coloniser. While this

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<sup>24</sup> O'Sullivan, N.K, Politics, Totalitarianism and Freedom: The Political Thought of Hannah Arendt. Political Studies(1973), p21.

<sup>25</sup> Said, Edward W, Orientalism. New York, Pantheon Books, 1978.

<sup>26</sup> Bhabha, H. K, The Location of Culture (1994).

comes later in the discussion of resisting and subverting the system, my thesis scope is mainly pinned down towards contemporary subjugation practices based on colonial desires as illustrated by Said.

Such ideas behind excavating colonial history and linking it ideologically and materially, as I would further argue, underpins the racial politics that are a key part of European Union's contemporary border governance. This brings us to the present day, where much of the colonial governance has diminished, the denial of the most basic human rights and even the conditions of *letting-die*<sup>27</sup> not only continue to exist but have intensified in less visible forms.

Said's and Bhaba's postcolonial theories definitely serve as a foundation for Mbembe to develop necropolitics and offer valuable insights into historical colonialism, but their lack of precision and focus on western canon, I see is insufficient in pinning down the argument of the thesis to present-day context. For this reason, I build further on decolonial thought by Mbembe which offers a more radical approach to illustrating not only the power dynamics but also challenging and dismantling them. Here I would further attempt to depart away from the homogenization of diverse experience, as often seen in postcolonial traditions, to emphasise on plurality and multiplicity of experiences felt. Or atleast, I would try to.

In the context of the 'Migration Crisis' in Europe, I witness it in a very specific population, falling under the category of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers with the latter being effected the most, that has been subjected to a necropolitical governance: *reduced* into a state of being, gradually *wounded* into *barely living* status, into less-citizens, *injured*. All of these have a common political motive; to coerce, subdue and keep the bodies docile in an attempt to slow down, redirect or return by the sovereign powers. As the discussions by Agamben and Mbembe unwraps around the production and extension of 'bare life' past the borders of the camps and the proliferation of death beyond the (so-called) collapse of colonial times, so do I add an extended narrative to detect the necropolitics of contemporary EU's border regime beyond the spatial and temporal limits of the colonialism.

The analysis of the political genealogy of the border regime shows its intertwined relationship with the development of technology, where one influenced the other in development and deployment. However, before I proceed with untangling such a bond and link with the migration crisis, it is integral to witness the current border regime's production of the migrant crisis and the deployment of technology in migration governmentality from a longer historical perspective. For this purpose, interrogation of colonisation and imperial projects, and transgression of timelines to join historical cause and effect allows me to introduce a conspicuous understanding of this contemporary conundrum. It further opens up a wider discussion when a line is drawn connecting the murky past of many countries

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<sup>27</sup> While Foucault's ideas on the power to 'let die' comes from the critique on the management of life (biopolitics), I use Mbembe's 'necropolitics' to further discuss the ways in the context of EU migration policies, where systemic neglect and the *hardening* of borders has lead to the death of migrants.

that now constitutes the EU<sup>28</sup> and their present response towards border control. Through understanding imperial history, the current context of political agendas, immigration laws and structures of inequality can be better understood. Furthermore tracing the genealogy of border technologies undoes presentism and pivots away from the (binary) idea of balancing out the benefits and harms of technologies in migration management.

Much of the literature found on the critique of technology problematizes firstly, the distinction between high and low tech which predominantly reproduces current state-gaze<sup>29</sup> on migration which inadequately disengages with presentism as well as ahistoricism and secondly, fails to take into account the experience of migrants and how they are affected by technologies. I attempt to locate both high and low tech together in an attempt to part ways with the state-gaze that gets developed in much of the found literature.

## 2.1 Technologies of quantification and control

The application of technologies in migration governance is closely linked with control and social sorting, which in turn have deep historical roots in colonial strategies. Their practices for administrative purposes are broadly associated with surveillance which plays an integral function in the process of 'social sorting' (Lyon, 2001) where the notion of personal information assemblage as well as observation and monitoring is contested, mainly in the case of migration population governance. Surveillance systems thus act as a gateway to 'manage or influence those whose data have been garnered' (Lyon 2005). Classification appears to be the chief characteristic of such sorting where the gathered data constitutes classifications, categories, lists, collective grouping (Further discussed in *Interoperability* and Algorithmic profiling) to be further evaluated and assigned an identity in comparison to what constitutes, according to Lyon, as normative white (ethnicity), middle class, middle aged, cis-gender, able-bodied, heterosexual men (Marx and Salter 2005, Lyon 2005).

Interrogating surveillance from a historical account of colonisation reveals that the rapidly changing border regimes which appear to be strikingly novel have in fact deep roots in past ideologies. Between the 14th and the 19th century, European colonists amassed extensive amounts of data, both qualitative and quantitative, of the populations and territories they colonised. Thus, strategies inherent to modern day surveillance were essentially used for classification (which led to organisation) of people (Zureik 2013) and, if not the newly acquired territories, then those in planned acquisition.

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<sup>28</sup> During the so-called 'Age of Discovery' from the 15th to 20th century, colonisation proliferated. At Least 12 European Union's, pre Brexit, member states, which includes Austria, Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, United Kingdom, directly colonising 44% of the countries that now exist. This empirical calculation doesn't take into account the indirect influences and control they had, which as per a study by Caltech, accounts for 80% of the entire world (Stoller).

<sup>29</sup> I see State-gaze as the top down framing of understanding and managing migration; which includes the state's view, categorization and subsequent treatment of migrants. Much of the literature on migration research deals with scrutinising aspects like surveillance, control and data privacy which aligns with similar state's lens and motives.

Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin in *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts*, point out that surveillance ( and observation<sup>30</sup>) is one of the most effective tactics used to establish imperial dominance, allowing viewers with a superior viewpoint<sup>31</sup>, indicating the ability to analyse and comprehend what is being seen. Such objectifies and summons the colonised subject in a manner that solidifies its identity in relation to the surveyor

India, for British officials, was an extensive collection of numbers. Bernard S. Cohn describes this mentality beginning in the 17th century with the arrival of British merchants who were tasked to compile and transmit a list of products and prices, customs and duties, heights and weights, values of coins (Cohn 2002, 8). Here, quantification appears as a kind of technology for governance, where local practices and customs are redefined in numerical terms.

Such a process not only made the society and land more legible for the British colonialists, but also altered the understanding of value and the meaning of local ecologies for the indigenous population. Such detachment eradicated any empathetic understanding of local contexts, as well as the populations. And in this context, numbers provided a sense of certainty in an unfamiliar land and allowed the colonial administration to more easily govern and control the colonised society. Thus a number helped in holding a particular form of certainty in an estranged society, in an alien land.

British colonists in the Indian subcontinent<sup>32</sup> produced a wide variety of surveys including; Great Trigonometrical Survey of India (1802-1871)<sup>33</sup>, Survey of India (1767-Present)<sup>34</sup>, Linguistic Survey of India (1894-1928)<sup>35</sup>, Anthropological Survey of India (1945-Present)<sup>36</sup>, Zoological Survey of India (1916-Present), Census Survey (Conducted first in 1872) as well as many surveys on Forest, Minerals and Agriculture later followed. Many of these surveys were instrumental in information gathering about people and resources, but proved to be an integral part of application of powers.

*Britain's Home Office in August 2020, decommissioned the use of 'Streaming Algorithm' that processes and gives ratings to suspect nationalities based on traffic light systems, where many applicants from the Global South would receive red tag on*

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<sup>30</sup> Observations included many individuals from intelligentsia reaching out in the colonies and producing materials counted as intellectual resources which included Colonial Paintings, Literature and Survey reports.

<sup>31</sup> Ashcroft, B., Tiffin, H., & Griffiths, G. (Eds.). *The post-colonial studies reader* (2005).

<sup>32</sup> Region of South Asia that includes the countries of India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan, and Sri Lanka.

<sup>33</sup> It was used to measure the height of the Himalayan peaks and to create accurate maps of the region.

<sup>34</sup> Created in 1767, the agency was formed for mapping and providing geographical information for governance and economic purposes. Like many other British established agencies, it continues to function to date.

<sup>35</sup> It was conducted to document the languages spoken in India and to classify them into different language families. It mapped out 364 languages and dialects along with gramophone recordings to document the phonology. It can be accessed here in digitised form:

<https://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/ddb82fee-4767-4b06-8b0b-1ac06e3feb82>

<sup>36</sup> This survey was established to study the ethnic diversity and cultural heritage of the people of India.

*their applications. The major parameter included nationality as an indicator of risk. As per Foxglove, the Algorithm, based on Machine Learning, suffered from 'feedback loop' where biased claims were self-amplified. At the peak of its processing, the non-profit reported that many educational institutions and other NGOs 'no longer even tried' to have their colleagues from abroad visit the UK.*  
(Foxglove 2020)

In the Indian Subcontinent the *Divide and Rule*<sup>37</sup> tactic separated groups on numerous categories including religious, linguistic, and caste lines, were incrementally developed and deployed for organisation and governance purposes. Disguised as policies for various communities ensuring everyone's interests were represented, they were aggressively used to prevent emergence of the Indian independence movements, formulation of larger communities between villages and cities and exploitation of resources<sup>38</sup>. Social sorting here followed the similar principles of observation, classification of individuals (new to the observers; Occident (Said 1978)), formulation of groups based on a certain trait (ethnicity, racial and social hierarchies, gender, religion) followed by production of policies and their implementation.

There are countless examples of such in other parts of the world like Casta System; a 16th-century framework exercised by Spanish colonists in Latin America for social sorting based on epidermal traits<sup>39</sup> and the 1911 South African census which shaped apartheid with racial classification based on physical features where photography and fingerprinting were used to collect population data<sup>40</sup>. Hence the 20th century saw the introduction of novel tools for nomenclature; defining groups in the mass of population, many of which were based on the previous centuries techniques of data gathering and surveys used by the colonial empires. Definitive groups emerged from the newly constructed and, later, observed racial and ethnic composition of the population. Thus quantification acted as a kind of governance technology deployed by the empires, where local customs, practices got calibrated into measurables, as they sought to make local customs, practices, and societal structures more comprehensible and manageable. Consequence of such was the loss of indigenous knowledge, cultural assimilation, and social cohesion among local communities and populations consequently leading to identity crises, exacerbated inequalities, and resistance movements against colonial rule.

Thus such developments categorised an emergence of a system for the control, administration, management and eventual subjugation of entire population groups where social sorting served as foundation. This also propagated European ways of understanding, particularly the reliance

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<sup>37</sup> 'Divide and Rule' tactic by the British colonists in India, aimed to facilitate divisions among local populations to prevent unified opposition. Examples include the development of Princely State of Kashmir and Jammu in 1846, 1905 partition of Bengal and Partition of Indian Subcontinent 1947. Robb, P. (2002). A History of India. London: Palgrave.

<sup>38</sup> Tharoor S. Inglorious Empire: What the British Did to India citation, 2007.

<sup>39</sup> Katzew, Ilona, and Susan Deans-Smith, eds. Race and Classification: The Case of Mexican America. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009.

<sup>40</sup> Khalfani, Akil K.; Zuberi, Tukufu. Racial Classification and the Modern Census in South Africa, 1911-1996. Race and Society. 2001; 4:161–76

on binaries and categorical divisions which up till today continues to characterise; EU and non-EU students/residents/citizens, 3rd country nationals, immigrants and migrants and so on...

## 2.2 Modalities: Instruments of quantification

While the above mentioned examples assist in demonstrating how techno-colonial roots have evolved over time, employing various methodologies to socially sort populations, they are still not comprehensive in illustrating the underlying structures that governed such practices. Cohn, in the context of British Imperial Raj, describes different techniques, or strategies by which colonial powers exercised control and maintained dominance. These are collectively referred to as 'modalities' where the fusion of emerging technologies and the quest for knowledge were used for comprehension of the 'alien' land and people. These underlying principles also facilitate the transmutation of colonialism to imperialism by promoting more indirect and immanent forms of control, extending the reach and influence of colonial practices on a global scale.

Colonial Indonesia where Dutch Authorities created visual records, Belgian Congo where photography and fingerprinting were done to create a system of (visual) identification leading to *domination and subordination* (Mbembe 2001, 103), French West Africa where census on religious classification determined tax payments or in Sudan where the Intelligence Department's survey of 1920 gathered data on tribal and ethnic identities later used for the subjugation of anticolonial groups. There are more countless examples of data gathering, staticization of population with consequent development of racial classification based on racialized surveys in various parts of the globe in late 19th and early 20th centuries.

All of these practices centre around the idea of gathering information for the purpose of generating *knowledge* on the so-called new terrains with the predominant purpose of control, which effectively continues as a systematic tool of oppression in today's border conditions, highlighting the continued relevance of these historical tactics in contemporary migration governance. Knowledge production in these cases legitimised systems of oppression and the tools that emerged for such reinforcement were the feats of modernity, crucially technologies. The use of different technologies thus gave Colonial Empires immense ontological power in 'producing assumptions about the working and composition of real social and natural worlds' (Cohn 2002, 5). It is important to note here that use of technical tools were subservient to the principal idea of knowledge production which was part of the process of such modernization.

'Historiographic modalities' (Cohn 2002, 5) are the facts collected about Indian subcontinent's history seen to be the most valuable form of knowledge on which to build the colonial state, mostly by learning about the past traditions and values and thus *codifying* them followed by reinstating them as ruling practices. "This modality is the most complex, pervasive and powerful, underlying a number of other more specific modalities" (Cohn 2002, 5).

'Observational/Travel modality' refers to the collection of visual and typified information, emphasizing details significant to the 'European Eye', particularly within itineraries and their

narrative structures. These observations are influenced by socio-political contexts and aesthetic principles such as the "sublime", 'picturesque', 'romantic', and 'realistic' (Cohn, 2002).

'Survey modalities', encompassing observation, measurement, and analysis, aim in understanding the control over landscapes. As, the 'Survey of India' constructed an imaginative grid over the landscape for administration, Cohen states: "[...] the structures of the practices by which such knowledge was compiled [...] and the process by which these vast amounts of knowledge were transformed into textual forms [...] were deployed by the colonial state in fixing, bounding and settling India." (Cohn 2002, 7).

### 2.3 Emergence of modern biometric practices

The Imperial settlement project's 'Enumerative modalities' constituted a series of censuses that provided a cross-sectional illustration of the continent where numerics in the form of statistical data were instrumental in 'measuring' what was to be governed. "The census represented a model of the Victorian encyclopaedic quest for total knowledge" (Cohn 2002, 8).

While almost all of these modalities have strong overlaps with contemporary practices of governance of (certain populations), 'Surveillance modalities' as described by Cohn have a profound impact. Surveillance by the British was the most comfortable from a privileged and expansive distant position; either on horses, elephants, boats, trains or carriages as intermingling with the Indians in the streets and bazaars was seen threatening. Certain groups and categories emerged as a consequence of the performance of the above-mentioned modalities who were deemed threatening to the prescribed social order of the empire. As per Cohn, by their nature, these people were considered to be beyond the boundaries of settled civil societies included: Sannyasis, sadhus, fakirs, dacoits, goondas, thags, pastoralists, herders and entertainers. Special instruments as well as practices emerged as a reaction to the empire's interaction with such groups.

For instance, the Thuggee and Dacoity Department, established in 1830 (Roy 1998, 41), was deployed to gather information, mainly on murderers, investigate and punish. The performance of the department's work led to the creation of criminal ethnography (Kuiiry and Rath 2023,) which resulted in designating increasing numbers of individuals as 'criminal tribes or casts'. This mechanism later expanded to take into account 'antisocial', 'political' and 'criminal' activities that were outside the state's popular narrative and dominant social order. Such practices have strong overlaps with the emergence of organisations like FRONTEX and eu-Lisa as part of the EU's response to the 'incoming' migrants which I would expand on in the chapter *Genesis: Debris into Developments*.



KONAI'S HAND Bengal  
1858 in *The Origin of  
Finger-Printing* by William J.  
Herschel, 1916



As the problem of visually identifying individuals arose to take into account permanent distinguishable features, more systematic approaches to record and classify emerged. While photography was already being used to record bodies physiognomically as well as for administrative, missionary and scientific purposes (Cole 2019), the large scale of India required a more efficient way of documenting and recovering records. Fingerprinting here emerged as a solution. Though records of fingerprinting goes far back to ancient Babylon and Egyptian times, as explained in his own work *The origin of Finger-Printing* by Sir William Herschel writes while experimenting with recording fingerprints to prevent fraud and forgery of contracts.

*"I was only wishing to frighten  
...[him] out of all thought of  
repudiating his signature hereafter.  
He, of course, had never dreamt of  
such an attestation, but fell in  
readily enough. I dabbed his palm  
and fingers over with the  
home-made oil-ink used for my  
official seal, and pressed the whole  
hand on the back of the contract,"<sup>41</sup>*

Later, Sir William Herschel joined forces with another, Sir Francis Galton, a proponent of social Darwinism, eugenics and scientific racism, who was already developing the hypothesis that racial differences manifest (also) in fingerprints <sup>42</sup>which he would later discard as a result of many discrepancies in the empirical data collection. Together they created the systems of classification that made Herschel's collection of fingerprinting for intimidation purposes into identification (Cohn 2002, 11).

Transgressing the timeline to the present day, it doesn't come as a surprise to see the development and deployment of official departments registering, processing, identifying and managing populations in wake of the *crisis*. Above mentioned example of the origin of the Thuggee and Dacoity Department and the anthropometric detection of various aspects of the body have been one of the many examples where such responses under the context of a *crisis* have been witnessed over the course of colonial historical legacies and its transmutation into imperial domination of cultures, societies and individuals. Thus technologies in these circumstances seem to play a pivotal role in creating an unbridgeable gap which establishes *never-be-toppled* hierarchies. The digital turn continues the same process with developments of tools, I would further argue, that has seen the border regime take an unprecedented turn and consolidate such asymmetrical power relations. However, in doing so, such mobilisation of digital technologies makes their entrenchment into the 'coloniality of power' (Quijano 2000) more evident.

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<sup>41</sup> William J. Herschel, *The origin of finger-printing*, Oxford University Press 1916, p7.

<sup>42</sup> APA. 2003. "To Catch a Thief: The Psychology of Fingerprints." American Psychological Association. <https://www.apa.org/topics/forensics-law-public-safety/fingerprints>.

## 2.4 Imperial Ruins in the Union

Interrogating colonialism and imperialism and their intersections with the modern border regime and how it employs necropower over refugees requires some explanation. My main emphasis for revisiting the colonial historical legacies against the backdrop of the crisis in 2015, firstly is to ontologically reframe it and relocate it as a crisis from the European Union's reception and the response to accommodating disadvantaged populations from areas where NATO's involvement in conflicts is evident.

Secondly, to look at it from the socio-historic structural asymmetries of North-South and 'continuities' from the past to the present by re-presenting the use of technological infrastructures to control mobilities of certain populations (refugees coming to EU in this case). This is part of 'colonial ruins' or 'imperial debris'; two intersecting and overlapping concepts and using the latter to describe the continuation of practices from colonial to contemporary era. Introduced by feminist theorist Ann Laura Stoler in her book *Imperial Debris: On Ruins and Ruination* (Stoler 2013) uses the theoretical framework to describe the physical and cultural residues of colonialism that survived long after the end of colonial era which continue to exist and shape the experiences and identities of colonised people.

Compounding this framework with Mbembe's idea of necropower, I would interrogate the current realities of refugees as well as those getting processed under the term of *asylum seekers* and those who have been proceeded through such processes, (with respect to their proximity to major urban centres) and how they get affected by EU's deployment of advanced technologies. I argue that such advanced technological infrastructure is part of the 'imperial debris' that not only continues to persist but is seeing an ever consolidation and further deployment into the domains of everyday life of many immigrants and migrants. This consolidation and deployment of such infrastructures are part of 'imperial formations', however they have been more observed as nuanced processes collectively experienced by migrant populations, which makes it relatively different from conspicuous colonial mechanisms of population control.

Aníbal Quijano presents this as a part of metamorphosis of the empire that has preserved colonial inequalities over time now getting transmuted in the present socio-politics (Quijano 2000). Later in the chapter 'Absencing' I would argue that the enactment of such historical infrastructure, as part of the colonial debris, amongst other things is responsible for the tangible and intangible absencing of many from the major urban centres of many European Union member states.

Hasn't colonialism constituting "a practice of domination involving the subjugation of one group of people by another via military, political and economic means" (Mignolo and Walsh 2018, 116) overridden by well-established independence of democratic and modern post-colonial states? Making use of post-colonial (Stoler 2016) and decolonial (Mbembe 2003), (Quijano 2000) theories, I would argue that not only colonial inequalities endure but have also metamorphosed, as well as obscured, in the contemporary context of controlling migrant mobilities.

As illustrated above; the staticization of the 'alien' population into numbers, as numbers produced knowledge that held a certainty over a 'foreign' land, the same practices exist in

continuity for staticization of refugees as they first arrive. Quijano's notion of 'coloniality of power' draws on such continuity and explains how the subjugation of the colonised people have outlived direct colonial exploitation. Eurocentric systems of knowledge, which historically assigned the production of facts (knowledge) to European colonists, for Quijano constitutes the foundation of 'coloniality of power', which in current context marks the codification of racial and social discrimination. This duo interweaves with the pervasiveness of globalization maintains social domination which explains the continuance of coloniality after the emancipation of colonised regions from the empire (Quijano 2000).

*"Europe's hegemony over the new model of global power concentrated all forms of the control of subjectivity, culture, and especially knowledge and the production of knowledge under its hegemony"*  
(Quijano 2000, 540).

Such situation not only led to the subduing of traditional knowledge among conquered people, but also the denial of knowledge production, due to the enforced superiority/inferiority dynamic within the hierarchical structure. This explains the power asymmetry between the refugees, (or more accurately, enforced to) presenting themselves at the RIC (Reception and Identification centres; located mainly at European peripheral member states mainly Italy and Greece) and the border officers<sup>43</sup> who always ask the questions. The flight of the drone over the boat, their differences altitudes and velocities.

Walter Mignolo, an Argentinean semiotician and theorist, denotes such colonialism as a 'dark side of modernity' where complex structures of control and management underlines many western socio-political spheres<sup>44</sup>. Breaking free from the obscurity, an extension of such becomes stark, when practices of such often reflect the desire to maintain order and control over the migrant population. This modern manifestation of the colonial-era power dynamics is underpinned by the same ideology that enabled the *great surveys* by the empire. This, I argue, is the underlying 'debris' that renders people into mere numbers and points in-line with the management and organisational strategies in which colonial legacies continue to shape contemporary policies and attitudes towards migration and refugee populations. 'Imperial debris' here finds itself getting consolidated into the creation of new infrastructures of border technologies that include RICs, biometric record and identification mechanism and emergence of a unusual hi-tech in border genealogy: data centres, who's ability on controlling migration flows, intangibly, allows them to be located far away from the geographic locations where they govern such flows. These systems, working in a novel 'interoperability' mechanism, which I

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<sup>43</sup> I use this as an umbrella term to incorporate various actors of the border regime which includes personal working at the front desk as the first introductory member of staff which meets a refugee which includes but is not limited to: border guards, police, immigration officer.

<sup>44</sup> Mignolo, Walter D., and Catherine E. Walsh. *On Decoloniality: Concepts, Analytics, Praxis*. 2018.

would expand in the chapter *interoperations*, grasps the power of the digital flows and allows the extension of border, boundaries, control and management beyond the spatio-temporal confines of the conventional camp. Beyond the socio-temporal limits of the bygone era.

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*I arrived in Italy somewhere in mid June or July. I can't remember now as it was difficult to keep track (on the journey). It was 2017 and it was quite hot as well. There we separated and someone told us to go to the police station where I sat for 3 days. They would come out and then go back inside. Then after the 3rd day they came and asked us to give our statement. They asked me for my nationality but I did not tell them. My cousin told me to throw the Passport away otherwise they will send you back (to Turkey). It was a mistake from me because they didnt do anything. Afterwards, they took me to Ancona camp where I stayed for 6 months. I wanted to leave because they took them to other places. And i didnt know anyone in Ancona.*

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A.D, January 2023 <sup>45</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> A.D, Conversation with the author in Milan Airport, 25 January 2023.

\*To ensure confidentiality and protect the privacy of the individuals involved, all names have been anonymized.

### 3. Unravelling the Infrastructure of the Border Regime

Witnessing a plethora of interconnected systems; of policies; of colonial legacies, all compounding each other to subjugate only one subject: the refugees, I see it as an infrastructure; an infrastructure; an apparatus; an array of systems. It is my attempt to effectively capture, to comprehend not only the material and organisational aspects of the border regime. Not only in highlighting the underlying systems, technologies, and policies that enable the management of asylum seekers. Not only the complex of interconnected network of state agents, technologies, policies, and systems that govern and control the movement of asylum seekers and refugees across borders. Not only by characterising its dynamic and evolving nature, as it adapts to the changing political climate. Not only to illustrate biometric data collection, recognition systems, and digital databases that work in tandem to manage and restrict the flow of migrants.

But also to see how colonial legacies, white supremacy and racism governs such infrastructures, such infrastructures, such apparatuses, such infrastructures. By arguing that historical and ideological roots continue to exist and proliferate in the operation and sustenance of the border regime. And that they are not historical anymore, but very much contemporary and present. By insisting that colonial power dynamics not only affects border crossings but also extends into the daily lives of migrants; infiltrating urban spaces; infiltrating privacy or whatever is left of it; infiltrating bodies; infiltrating minds. By shaping the politics of immobility. By holding on to the thought of creation of 'deathworlds', of spaces that produce social death, of disadvantaged groups living under its tight control. By opening up the proverb 'it' to encompass colonialism, border control and its infrastructure, its operations and growth; all in one. And also to see how *it*, initially appearing unrelated and isolated, comes together to create a cohesive and far-reaching system that impacts the lives of migrants and asylum seekers on multiple levels. To see how it feels to feel it and how it affects the lives of those who feel it. Who witness *it*... working on them.

To further break the construct of the genealogy of the border regime, acting either as an entity or a process, I would expand on the genealogy of border technologies in controlling

the flows of entire communities of asylum seekers and refugees, and critique of intersection of low and high-tech in migration governance and urban mobility flows. And also to see it as an infrastructure; that works by putting together the most violent agents of the state and technology.

Such fusion of state, border agencies and technology are primarily responsible for the creation of fluid borders that seep into the domain of everyday life, thus creating a 'hostile environment'<sup>46</sup> of everyday borders. This infrastructure; an array of evolving systems, policies and ideologies, as I argue, depicts the modern incarnation of biopower in democratic nations which accounts for contemporary forms of subjugation of life.... something that was left out of Foucault's biopower but not left out by Mbembe who uses it as a departure point.

Mbembe's necropolitics helps in looking at digital traps of technologies for geographical restrictions at different scales across the terrain. The thesis predominantly expands more on the repercussions of such functioning works mainly by looking at Systems like Eurodac enforcing Dublin Regulation<sup>47</sup> of 2003 and Facial Recognition systems. Systems that frees up authorities from tracking people in and out refugee camps, but tracks them across transnational EU borders. As I argue that fingerprints of migrants are not taken for the sole objective of applying the Dublin Regulation but they are collected for anti-terrorism purposes as well as for "general security reasons"<sup>48</sup> but follow an underlying colonial impulses, a residue, that makes fingerprinting happen in the first place.

The spatial production/ repercussions and urban implications of such operations of the border regime, as I argue, produces the condition of social death in sites that are primarily inhabited mainly by disadvantaged groups. In such sites, the border's pliability becomes evident as it seeps deeper into the domain of everydayness. Its evidence grows even stronger as one moves closer to cities. Thus the existence of this meta-border control system that works in proximity to urban centres rather than the boundaries of a nation state. Where its absolute repercussions of such seepage of *ruins* foster a pervasive 'absencing' of people - leading to either physical displacement or mental disengagement, eroding the visibilities of individuals within the urban environments.

Here I interrogate the existence of conditions within the realms of laws and policies that govern such *existences* in major urban centres, primarily Greece, to look at how the conditions of Death Worlds are produced. Such conditions grow where technology and the urban politics of asylum interact when applicants undergoing application decisions primarily residing in urban centres are denied access to have rights and contestation. Such

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<sup>46</sup> Leah Cowan uses the term hostile environment, in reference to May's created for migrants by turning individuals like Landlords, Rental companies, Employers and Administration officers into border guards. I would use the cases analysed in this book to illustrate the existence of a meta-border control system that works in proximity to urban centres rather than the boundaries of a nation state. Cowan, Leah. *Border Nation: A Story of Migration*, 74–97, 2021.

<sup>47</sup> The Dublin Regulation in Greece is used to push people further into Europe to be reunited with close family members, while in Northern European countries, it is used primarily to push people back to where they were first fingerprinted when entering Europe.

<sup>48</sup> Tazzioli, Martina. "Counter-mapping the techno-hype in migration research." *Mobilities*, 2023.

entanglements on urban asylum communities, as I argue, is crucial for the border regime to obstruct migrant's access to asylum. And technologies used by the regime are instrumental to bridle, channel and manage their flow. Such bridling creates the the politics of immobility<sup>49</sup> which comes out as a consequence of when techno-legal border regime and state policies meet in urban spaces, blocking asylum seekers from pursuing legitimate activity i.e movement; a real contentious activity of everyday life.

### Methodology? Methodology.

Interrogating the (ab)use of high-tech in such mobility controls makes it difficult for me to academically scrutinise one particularly case study as the 'contemporary' in the border regime has transmuted the conventional control management, breaking free from the confines of socio-temporal obstructions into an omnipresent realities for many.

Thus in order to grasp its operations, and for the sake (and limitations) of this academic thesis, I focus mainly on the different geographies in Greece. This in my opinion still constitutes a very small physical territory considering that borders have moved away from the material to more intangible, abstract, concealed and intrusive systems of oppressive control, having overlaps with its predecessor technologies prevalent in colonial histories. Which brings me to the second point as to what it means to feel and experience such an enormous web of tech as a refugee awaiting the processing of their asylum applications, stuck in the system, confined by digital traps in an entire country, only to be held by a fingerprint. As I will expand on later, this is predominantly done to challenge the state based gaze which is mainly used for surveillance and tracking which also constitutes a part of academic and political discourses on it, and subvert this techno-hype by counter-mapping approach.

At this point, I find it difficult to locate the operation of the regime or their effects on a particular case study. How can I when its residues are to be found everywhere at any time? I travelled from Tallinn, to London. Then to Lisbon. Then to Athens. Then to Milan. Everywhere was the same. Different intensities but similar feelings. From Helsinki, Tampere, Oulu, Luleå, Umeå, Stockholm, Copenhagen, Hamburg, Berlin, Warsaw, Vilnius, Riga and back to Tallinn too was the same. I found it difficult to study Puhos, Rinkby, Barking, Mjølnerparken, Kreuzberg,

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<sup>49</sup> **New Borders: Hotspots and the European Migration (2019) Regime** by Antonis Vradis, Evie Papada, Joe Painter and Anna Papoutsis describe the concept of immobility as intentionally created burden by state on individuals to suppress or elongate the access to freedom (page 52)



Metaxourgeio, Veddel, Omonia... the list goes on. Across the entire continent, the border regime's repercussions are similar. I find power in such generalisation to show the uniformity of its operations. It has bypassed the spatial groundedness into an omnipresence infrastructure that appears where they are. Transcending transnational boundaries, the experiences follow a commonality, the policies are homogeneous with slight regional variations, the practices interconnected with technologies and legislations. Even when I had a slight glimpse of it as 'SSSS' on my boardpass, as I became the first person in the family to fly to NYC. Pulled out by TSA for an "intense and invasive" security check, as I got flagged as a risk.

As the contemporary border regime detaches its from geographical confines, so do I to interrogate the regime in its entirety to highlight its ubiquitousness and uniformity across time and space. However, in unravelling the infrastructure of the border regime and also for the sake of my master's thesis (and its limitations), my departure point is Greece, which for many is the arrival.

Movement where some bodies are slow.  
Movement where some are slowed down.  
Movement where many are faster than some.  
Just some.  
Movements where some are docile.  
Movements where some are stagnant.  
Movements where longer are the journeys.  
No longer shorter.  
Just for a few.  
Movements become permanent.  
Though they should've been temporary.  
Temporary becomes the new permanent.  
Or otherwise.  
Otherwise is the luxury.  
Movements are luxury.  
But not just for those few.

### 3.1 Genesis: Debris into Developments

“

*A green lawn, broken by low walls of stone,  
Dipped to the rivulet, and pacing,  
I thought next Of men like Hawkins, Walter Raleigh, Drake,  
Ancestral murderers and poets, more perplexed  
In memory now by every ulcerous crime.  
The world's green age then was a rotting lime  
Whose stench became the charnel galleon's text.  
The rot remains with us, the men are gone.  
But, as dead ash is lifted in a wind  
That fans the blackening ember of the mind,  
My eyes burned from the ashen prose of Donne.*

”

—Ruins of a Great House, by Derek

Walcott written in 1953, is set in an old deteriorated mansion in the Caribbean built for lime plantation during the colonial era presenting a poignant commemoration to an empire and its reverberations. His eulogy to a brutal empire as an 'ulcerous crime' brings forward the pain and trauma inflicted on the colonised people and their land by the colonists who are '...are gone' however 'the rot remains'. Walcott's in the poem constantly shifts between multiple tenses to insist that the brutal acts that ceased to be, continue to exist. Their effects of 'rot' remain, so does the past without any clear termination, continuing to destroy materials and minds. Thus

the poem refuses to be bound by the timeframe of formal legitimacy of the empire's impact on people, places and things. The vocabulary, the tenses and the metaphors, as I see it, are Walcott's attempt to throw off a deeper set of assumptions about colonial past and its relationship with the 'colonial present' and bring forth the pain and trauma that was caused in the past that continues to exist with the residues of the empire, intangible or tangible, that still stand and are being revitalised.

Such continuity of 'imperial residues' after the emancipation of colonies into consolidated structures governing many domains of the public sphere, including migrant mobilities, intersects with Ann Laura Stoler's (2016) idea of 'imperial formations' in their tangible as well as intangible forms. One such formation as I would expand on later is techno-colonialism or digital colonialism, where intersecting logics of colonial legacies compounds with datafication and innovative 'solutions' have impacts on urban asylum communities. Such technologies obstruct migrant's access to not only asylum but also resources concentrated in urban centres. Thus to look at 'imperial formations' is not to look at the empire, but to register the processes of decimation, deterrence and displacement of migrant communities as part of what Stoler calls 'racialized relations of allocations and appropriations' (Stoler 2008, 18).

*Ruins* as a verb or a noun often indicates the disintegration or decay which is mostly manifested in a physical form, sites of abandonment, grown over, taken over by the time, providing a glimpse of a vanished past. If talking about 'empire's ruins' mostly archeological sites e.g. of ancient civilizations come to mind that have become part of an aesthetic or melancholic gaze into the past. However my focus is to work exactly against this gaze and to bring in *ruination* as a process that continues to corrode the present.

'To ruin' as per The Britannica Dictionary is 'to damage (something) so badly that it is no longer useful, a state of complete destruction, something that badly damages someone physically, morally, economically, or socially'. The verb thus brings to attention, an active process of violence. The focus then not goes towards the monumental relics or 'leftovers' but to what people are left with from the empire; that subjects to injury either physical or psychological, to the degradation of mind and matter, or to death either corporal or social. Such an

effect remains in the performance of borders for some, in the immigration que, in the corroded infrastructure of hotspots or in the digital trap of biometrics.

For Stoler (2016), such contemporary inequalities are 'refashioned and sometimes opaque reworkings of... colonial histories' (Stoler 2016, 5) where empires leave debris behind; these ruins are durable and can be reworked with; reactivated under different conditions like emergencies, disasters etc, often in opaque and oblique ways (Stoler 2016). These ruins or connections, Stoler crucially observes, are oftentimes 'occluded', and are consequently mistakenly assumed to be novel. Under such conditions of occlusion, the ruins of the colonial past simmer becoming durable and hardened producing 'imperial formations' (Stoler 2016, 56). Such formations as per Stoler are 'processes of becoming and not fixed things' which makes them distinct from the empires of the past representing fixed and readily distinguishable forms of sovereignty (Stoler 2008, 193-194). It is crucial to highlight here that these characteristics do not attribute specifically to a dominant or single sovereign empire but on the intangible aspect of 'protracted processes that saturate the subsoil of people's life and persist over a longue duree' (Stoler 2008, 192). This here is an intersection to reassess the forms of migration governance and contemporary colonial relations.

Under such intersection, many of our globalised societies features, from migration and displacement to racial capitalism<sup>50</sup>, can be traced to colonial histories of which they have been a component of. While capitalism underlines emphasis on extraction of raw materials, resources and labour in the globalized societies, extractivism underlines the oppression of migrant populations where it has been extended to the mining of biometric data from staticization of their bodies, like mining for resources and other immaterial forms of labor (Mezzadra and Neilson 2019) which is the foundation basis of capitalism.

The link between capitalism, colonialism and migration governance delineates my analysis drawn between the last two which is the predominant focus. And despite the occlusion in their comprehension, imperial debris becomes conspicuous when reframed from the prescription of data extraction. While paying attention to such processes, colonialism not only reveals its legacies but also the active role that digital technologies and practices play in hiding or revealing the relationships of inequality.

However, for Stoler, the main emergence of such migration and displacement under certain catastrophic conditions itself are 'imperial formations'. This allows us to revisit the 'crisis', as the aftermath of European colonialism and reframes migration as its historical productions. The production of current colonial order, as emphasised earlier, is predominantly by the racial subjugation of migrants as also argued by De Genova, who add into account the 'problem of postcolonial whiteness' and that the migration 'crisis' of European Union can only be

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<sup>50</sup> Part of a much larger discussion which extended the scope of the thesis, it illustrates a concept that emphasizes the interplay between race and capitalism, arguing that racial oppression and economic exploitation are intrinsically linked and compounded by each other. Cedric J. Robinson in 'Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition' points out that capitalism is intrinsically racialized and relies on racial hierarchies. However, I would briefly touch upon the idea of extractivism and social hierarchies in mobilities of different population grounds under the chapter: Interoperability.

understood by the “enduring coloniality of power”<sup>51</sup>. Adding another note that recent migration trends might not follow the colonial routes but are enacted as a direct consequence of the socio-political or military intervention of many countries who have experienced migrants reverting to their land. This predominantly is the direct result of contemporary warfare in which the US, the UK and many other European Union member states, as a coalition of NATO forces, have been occupied in, particularly in Iraq, Syria and Afghanistan as well as military operations in Libya, many African countries including ‘Horn of Africa’ constituting the geographical region of East Africa, and in the North West region of Pakistan. Predominantly, the population that constitutes many refugee camps are from these regions.

Another conceptual lens that transgresses timelines, joining together colonial inequalities and their metamorphosis into contemporary context is 'continuities'. Like previous examples where mechanisms of anthropological and geographical surveys get instrumentalized into control of population and territories, many other parallels can be drawn between the current treatment and management of refugees and the colonial practices from the past. As Stoler identifies, the persistence of colonial debris can be found in continuities between earlier formations like the penal colony of the 19th century and the contemporary refugee camps further denoting that displaced populations in the current context have become 'the toxic refuse of our contemporary world' (Stoler 2016, 337), taking the place of previously marginalized communities. And thus through this prism, many aspects of the control from the border regime, the response of the European Union, the discursive production of the 'crisis' along with humanitarian responses are understood as an imperial formation, ever continuing as the lasting remnants and consequences of historical domination and exploitation by the empire.

By introducing the idea of transgressive timelines, one can do away with the linear chronological order by opening up the way colonisation is thinly portrayed in contemporary context. 'Imperial debris' thus facilitates the opening up of regimented narratives, challenging their dominance, while at the same time emphasizes on the interconnectedness of events and experiences, akin to the interoperability of databases, which I would expand on in the chapter 'Interoperations', and experience felt by migrants as they operate and perform, that might otherwise have been seen unrelated. Such transgression brings out the opaqueness where imperial formations operate, where imperial ruins thrive.

Daniel Miller points out the “unexpected capacity of objects to fade out of focus”<sup>52</sup> while they continue to exist 'peripheral to our vision' marking their potency in the creation of splintered lives. This resonates much with what Edouard Glissant writes about those:

*“whose domination by the ‘Other’ is concealed: it must search elsewhere for the principles of domination , which is not evident (in the country itself): because of systems of domination (...) which are not directly tangible.”*<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> De Genova, Nicholas. “The 'European' Question: Migration, Race, and Post-Coloniality in 'Europe.’” Migration Research Hub, 2016.

<sup>52</sup> Ucl. “Materiality: An Introduction.” UCL Anthropology, December 2, 2022. <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/anthropology/people/academic-and-teaching-staff/daniel-miller/materiality-introduction>.

<sup>53</sup> Glissant, Édouard, 1928-2011. Caribbean Discourse : Selected Essays, The Known, The Unknown Charlottesville :University Press of Virginia, 1989.

The concern of the thesis here too lies in such oblique relations, formations or ruins, of formal institutions, with disassociated histories of the creation of 'Migration crisis'. That also continues to proliferate violence, pain and death in concealed and obscured fluidity: In delayed autonomy, in registration and reception, in temporary interventions, in bureaucratized processes and policies, in military operations concealed as; violent protection and inhumane conditions in the name of human rights and security control in the name of peace and facilitation.

### 3.2 'Imperial formations' of contemporary border regimes

This chapter is an invitation to reassess colonial relations and the inequalities they perpetuate, not as a byproduct of the imperial accomplishments, but as a direct synthesis of one of its aims. As in the previous section, I emphasised on empires leaving behind debris- *ruins*, durable, which can be reactivated and reworked under different conditions, often in opaque and oblique ways (Stoler 2016). One of such conditions that made the *ruins* manifest itself was the 'emergency' in the wake of the 'crisis'. This 'emergency' led to the reactivation of the 'imperial ruins' in the form of borders that were deployed to control, deter or 'manage' refugees approaching the European Union. The border here did not end at being a physical obstacle at hindering the mobility of people escaping war, but flowed into the socio-spatial and political spheres. This flow, as I argue, was part of its metamorphosis into a complex of control and management strategies. Such fluidity empowered the border regime to break away from the socio-temporal confines of traditional border control strategies of populations as collective and permeate deep into the domain of everyday life up to the very individual member that constituted the population.

'Imperial formations' of contemporary border regimes in an attempt to comprehend the genealogy and fluidity of the border, used as a departure point to firstly, investigate the assemblage of high and low-tech in migration mobilities by mainly looking at the responses by European Union, as a as a supranational institution, and mobilisation of different mechanisms in refugee population management. This would be an interrogation of the role of organisations like FRONTEX and the emergence of eu-Lisa, acting in historical continuities of 'imperial debris', where military tactics and data sciences are seen acting in a fusion. While the former, constitutes a hard border; preventing refugees from approaching the EU, the latter, an immaterial and fluid border; distributes and atomizes refugees and asylum seekers on the terrain, away from the major urban centres of the EU.

The 2014 'crisis' saw arrivals of refugees in the EU surge to 1.8 million by 2015 (FRONTEX, 2015, 2016). This influx prompted increased EU agency funding: FRONTEX's budget rose from EUR 93 million to EUR 143 million within a year, and its 2014-2020 contribution more than doubled to EUR 1638 million, while Europol's funding grew to EUR 753 million. Also in 2015, FRONTEX moved its headquarters to Warsaw in Warsaw Spire, in a neomodern

architecturally styled building finished also in 2015 costing EUR 307 million<sup>54</sup> is only a few minutes walk from Warsaw Line 2 Metro station.

As per Frontex's website  
*"Amenities in our office include an on-site canteen, and free coffee and fresh fruits. We enjoy spending time with each other outside the office in activities such as our sports clubs, which include volleyball, football, basketball and sailing."<sup>55</sup>*

The building was made by Jasper Eyers Architects, who on their website show their aim to 'design for life' however they continue to articulate stating sustainability is 'obligation, ecology the theme, 'but *'designing for life'* also means we keep certain goals and principles in mind (JEA). They also present a design brief for the building saying that 'The tower is amazingly slim and dynamic and looks as if it might never end... (creating) an unprecedented oasis of peace within the city centre'. Such descriptions, I find, have strong overlaps with not only FRONTEx's operation but with collective coordination of the EU in pushing violence outside the bloc's borders to protect the peace inside its terrain. While the slim tower thrusting high in the skyline of Warsaw appears to never end, so is the traumatic experience of the border faced by the migrants.



Warsaw Spire by Jasper Eyers Architects. Credits: jaspers-eyers.be

In the wake of such a crisis, the border was deployed. But the question arises that haven't they already been drawn? Already existing in the terrain and on the minds? However, that is the political line drawn cartographically on land and as coordinates on water. The border that consequently got deployed was an administrative and political technology used to regulate, manage and control

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<sup>54</sup> Cienski, Jan. 2018. "Warsaw Spire: The Long Road to Poland's Tallest Office Building." Urban Land Magazine, January 26. Accessed April 18, 2023. <https://urbanland.uli.org/economy-markets-trends/warsaw-spire-long-road-polands-tallest-office-building/>.

<sup>55</sup> Our offices. (n.d.). Frontex. Retrieved April 18, 2023, from <https://frontex.europa.eu/careers/where-we-are/our-offices/>

incoming population's entry and exit into the boundaries enclosed within those lines. Alongside Greece's shoreline, and on the Balkan border, new infrastructure emerged for a streamlined (and Europeanized) apparatus for processing and sorting out arriving people. This border was bureaucratic. Utopic for some. Dystopic for many.

The entire geographic region around the central Mediterranean came under the direct jurisdiction of supranational EU policies, military and judicial agencies while the rapid pace with which all these institutions compounded brings about, as per Papoutsis, the intensity of 'crisis retaliation' as a style of policy making in the wake of rapidly moving events (Papoutsis et al., 2018, 5). While much of the physical infrastructure that existed physically witnessed an overhaul, for many, the emergence of migration managerial and governance infrastructure appeared strikingly novel. Much of it consisted of heterogeneous border technologies that included Biometric identification systems, electronic registration systems and tracking sensors technologies compounded each other.

However, much of this nexus of low and high tech with mobility control is not unfamiliar in the scenario of emergency or in our case, the migration 'crisis'. Rather, the genealogy of identification technologies and genealogy of border regime exist in a fusion (Tazzioli, 2023) alongside the continuity from historical instruments that see coevolving alongside the border(ing) practices. Ada McKeown argues about the emergence of technological developments in the 19th century, including but not limited to "fingerprinting, photography and anthropometric measurements,"<sup>56</sup> which went in parallel with the emergence and practices of border(ing) control. Or in fact control over a population relatively 'unknown' to the *other*.

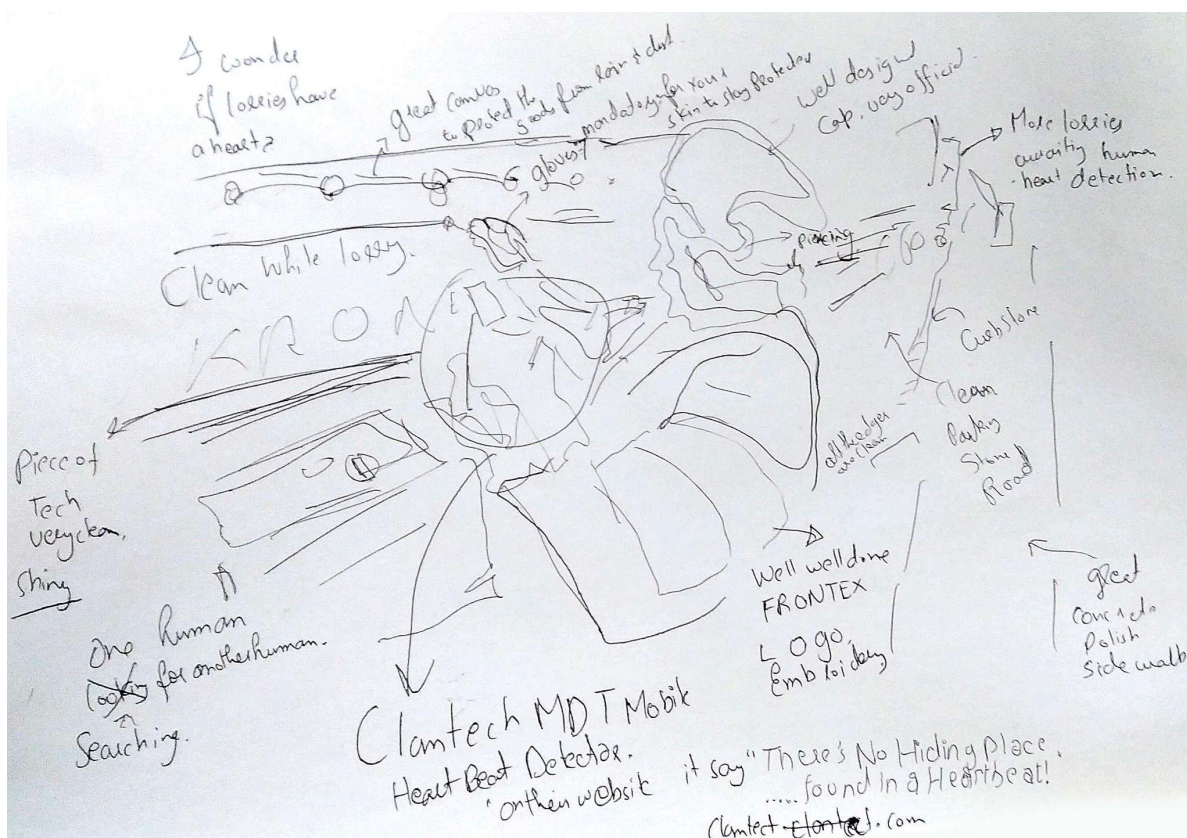
In the section 'Historical interrogation' as well as in 'modalities', taking into account colonization's legacies, it was illustrated how during 18th and 19th century, European colonists collected vast quantities of data by recording and surveillance which subsequently led to the categorization of people and for controlling (also newly acquired territories alongside). Such collected data resulted from the deployment of instruments or apparatuses numericalizing land, bodies, language, culture, behaviour, socio-spatial topography and so on saw its extension, taking into account the same characterization methodologies, on the refugees coming on to the soil of Greece today. As I would argue further, much of Greece's asylum systems, developed with the help of the European Commission, has its roots in imperial history and much of the modern day technological infrastructure used like biometrics such as fingerprinting, map-making, census and

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<sup>56</sup> McKeown, Adam M. 2008. *Melancholy Order: Asian Migration and the Globalization of Borders*. Columbia University Press.



profiling, as per Elia Zureik, were refined and put into practice in the colonial setting<sup>57</sup>. Thus the imperial formation attempts to describe the compounding of present technologies and past ideologies in the context of the operation of the border regime predominantly to govern migrant mobilities from the peripheries.



A middle aged male officer with a FRONTEX band on his well exercised bicep points a heart beat detector underneath a lorry at the border between Hungary and Serbia near Rösztke to search for "irregular migrants". Drawn by the author over the image seen in a report by Frontex. Frontex, Risk Analysis Unit, 2018.

Who makes whose peripheries?  
 Who sits in the centre?  
 Just some.

As they craft the edges for others.  
 As they've also erected the borders.

<sup>57</sup> Zureik, Elia. 2013. "Colonial oversight." Red Pepper. Accessed April 23, 2023. <https://www.redpepper.org.uk/colonial-oversight/>.

As well as the margins, and the lines and the outskirts,  
And the limits.

Do you not know that your periphery is my centre?

### 3.3 Edges of Existence: re-territorialized

The border is experienced differently by different people. Those coming to the European Union as tourists, academics or business trips, it serves as a gateway. A portal to all the resources they can tap into. A market bordersless. While for *others*, it is an impenetrable mountain. For some are part of and pushing for a globalised, borderless world. For many get pushed out from that world. For the security of the former, the latter gets filtered out. Thus the two discourses of the globalised world without borders and the securitization discourse sees pulling each other in opposite directions. Within this context of *continuous* struggle between these two discourses, the present witnesses some borders becoming softer (deterritorialize) for some, and for many it closes down and becomes harder (re-territorialize)<sup>58</sup>.

During 2015, Greece (or the EU) found itself on the 'frontline' as refugees arrived on the shore of either the Islands or its mainland. For many, Greece was used as a transit point to reach other European countries, mentioned Lucy Alper, a lawyer working for assistance in asylum application and family reunification in Athens. In turn, Greece took several measures to manage the influx of refugees. This included the reinforcement of the maritime borders in and around the island in the Aegean sea where Greece's coast guard along with, the European Border and Coast Guard agency; FRONTEX, increased its patrol to intercept migrant boats.

The North East border with Turkey saw the immediate eruption of the border wall along with the deployment of FRONTEX, and Greece's border patrol regiments to 'control' and manage the movement of people. In 2020, another incident dubbed as the 'Migration crisis of 2020' saw the same site turning into a militarised fortress or 'no mans land' with infrastructure like sound cannons, drones, cameras as well as a metal wall with barbed wire ran for 500 km<sup>59</sup> across the terrain.

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It resembled a scene from what  
in this one conversation I had

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<sup>58</sup> Deleuze, Gilles, and Eugene W. Holland. 1999. *Deleuze and Guattari's Anti-Oedipus: Introduction to Schizoanalysis*. London: Routledge.

<sup>59</sup> Boitiaux, Charlotte. 2021. "Evros frontier: A militarized no-man's land where 'no one can access migrants'." *InfoMigrants*, October 12. Accessed April 19, 2023. <https://www.infomigrants.net/en/post/35657/evros-frontier-a-militarized-nomans-land-where-no-one-can-access-migrants>.

with A.R. who crossed the border in 2020 mentioned: 'It was almost like English films where you step on the soil and the lights turn on and loud noise comes (from behind) and they spot you. And it was an open land where there was nothing. But there was a road many kilometres away from the opening (that someone earlier made in the fence). Sometimes, you could hear the sound of lorries and cars. But when a very thin sound came, we knew it was the drone. Someone told us that they fly them at night as well. But at night we hear their sounds more so we crossed the fence in the early morning.'  
(A.R., 2022).<sup>60</sup>

Hotspots also appeared in Greece as a new practice in bordering where 'a combination of novel administrative and legal practices and partly a set of physical infrastructures are located close to but not on EU's external mediterranean boundaries' (Papoutsis, 2018, 3). Such combination of practices and entities formed 'Hotspots' which roughly denotes a refugee complex or a camp in physicality however, serves more than just physical restrictors and were mainly located on the islands of Lesbos, Chios, Leros, Samos and Kos and in three locations on the mainland which includes Evros near the Turkish border, in three regions near but not inside Thessaloniki while only one, Eleonas, exist inside Athens and one in Skaramagas, with 41% of the inhabitants comprising of children<sup>61</sup> located 18km away from Athens. Already at a disadvantaged location, Greek Authorities closed it down in 2021 since the site was for sale<sup>62</sup>.

The localities of such places located in the 'peripheries' of a periphery resonates much with the imperial settlement projects where many of the colonial settlements were built strategically away from the 'indigenous' populations. The strategy to offset was a calculated move to reinforce their dominance while maintaining a 'safe' distance. The entire geography of the Global South is filled with examples like Lahore's Model Town and

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<sup>60</sup> A.R. Conversation with the author. London, December 28, 2021.

<sup>61</sup> Santelli, Giusi. 2021. "Goodbye Skaramagas" Peace for Asia, April 23. Accessed April 19, 2023. <https://peaceforasia.org/goodbye-skaramagas-volunteer-giusi-santelli-leaves-one-of-greeces-biggest-refugee-camps-fearing-for-the-future-of-its-3000-inhabitants-as-the-camp-faces-closure/>.

<sup>62</sup> Åkerstedt, Ingvild. 2021. "Greece: Camp closures, rebuilds and transfers." *Dråpen i Havet*, June 15. Accessed April 19, 2023. <https://www.drapihavet.no/en/greece-camp-closures-rebuilds-and-transfers/>.

Cantonments<sup>63</sup> in British India, New Delhi, Cape Town's District Six, Jakarta (Batavia), Algiers (Ville Nouvelle) and Nairobi. The tool of distance here was instrumental in the political and spatial move of dislocation. While the position of stakeholders have changed, one could locate the underlying hidden *debris* in similar distancing tactics either in hotspots, multi-ethnic suburbs, migrant housing or inside city centres, where the access to integral resources are so close, yet so far.

Besides these interventions, instrumentalization of diplomacy saw the Turkey-EU deal getting signed off in March of 2016 to 'manage' the flow of migrants where Turkey received a total of EUR 6 Billion<sup>64</sup>. Disguised as a migrant management strategy, all these interventions led to a gradual reduction of migrants arriving to Greece either by land or sea from 861,630 in 2015 till to 18,000 in 2022<sup>65</sup>.

Thus in the wake of the *emergency*, many sites in Greece, came under enormous EU legislative and administrative power where at the end of 2015, European Commission produced a cohesive agenda which came to be known as the European Agenda for migration featuring increase of funding and expansion of function of FRONTEX along with a complete overhaul of the Common European Asylum System (CEAS). The whole agenda represented a novel, though a familiar continuation, approach in migration management from the border regime where the physicality of control in the conventional bordering practices witnessed a transmutation into complex non-physical, immaterial strategies of control and management. It constituted as an operational support for the territories of the union, mainly at the 'peripheries', which were thought to be under the 'extreme' migratory pressure<sup>66</sup>.

The union thus coming to 'rescue' its member states provided such platform; an infrastructure of a sort which provided space for interagency collaboration and their collective or individual intervention, which as per Anna Papoutsi, was 'a prototype for a more integrated EU administration' (Papoutsi et al., 2018, 6) that for the EU itself was unprecedented collaboration beyond actors and agencies for a united market economy and movement.

Much of this could be seen from the framework of 'imperial ruins' which, as Stoler's concept, opens up multiple narratives that emphasises the interconnectedness of events and experiences. In the context of the border regime, this interconnectedness is evident in the way different European departments collaborate and contribute to the continuation of colonial legacies and the justification of necro-managerial tactics of bureaucratic control of specific populations under the pretext of a self-declared 'emergency'.

While such fusion of administrations and agencies could be observed in many splinters of the border regime, its manifestation, ontologically, was ever visible in the repercussions of

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<sup>63</sup> Cantonments are military zones mainly located in former colonies of South Asia like India, Bangladesh and Pakistan.

<sup>64</sup> International Rescue Committee. 2023. "What is the EU-Turkey deal?" March 16. Accessed April 19, 2023. <https://www.rescue.org/eu/article/what-eu-turkey-deal>.

<sup>65</sup> UNHCR. n.d. "Situation Mediterranean Situation." Accessed April 20, 2023. <https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/mediterranean/location/5179>.

<sup>66</sup> Willermain, Fabian. 2016. "The European Agenda on Migration, One Year on." Egmont Institute. Accessed April 20, 2023. [https://www.egmontinstitute.be/app/uploads/2016/10/IEMed\\_MedYearBook2016\\_Europe-Migration-Agenda\\_Fabian\\_Willermain.pdf](https://www.egmontinstitute.be/app/uploads/2016/10/IEMed_MedYearBook2016_Europe-Migration-Agenda_Fabian_Willermain.pdf).

the reception (and identification) system (RIC). They became conspicuous in the *impact* that was created on the lives of those that are made to pass through it; beginning from the camps or hotspots as the point of 'first reception screening' continuing alongside those who left, or continued to move in the future with the state of mind developed by the fear and anxiety, constituted the experience for *many* as the system *inter-operated* on them.

A shop turned into an office in a predominantly multicultural district of Athens with a visible presence and activity of businesses that are focusing on communities mainly from Syria, Iran, Iraq as well as Pakistan, Afghanistan and Somalia. The office had a Pakistani Passport painted on the wall alongside Iran's and Afghanistan's depicted with the same accuracy but a bit smaller which made me think that the business owner was from Pakistan. The assumption turned true when I entered. A couple of middle-aged men involved in a lighthearted conversation over a cup of tea immediately stopped and looked around at the new face entering. I was given a warm welcome, behind a slight confusion, and made to take the seat behind a disproportionately huge desk relative to the office's space, as I inquired in Urdu if the *shop* was open. The Pakistani community, composed mainly of men, spending a month in Athens, made me realise (or judge, naively,) that they are quite hospitable to other new Pakistani's. However, this had to be... looking from my perspective; myself being heterosexual young and abled body cis-male, navigating alone, along with my immigration status as well as my 'career' (which certainly had an impact on my conversations with people during my so-called thesis research, as immigration and employment circumstance

profoundly influences a non-European's life in Europe). Both sides of the table felt comfortable enough to exchange details on the nature of the business as the owner mentioned that he provides free consultancy services to people (asylum applicants) to book appointments provided they buy the service of ordering the passports, pointing out to the freshly painted images painted on the other side of the wall, amongst other services that his 'clients' find it difficult to do independently. There are many other businesses providing similar services in Athens. Such dependency depicts a glimpse of the obstructed and difficult to navigate asylum application system. Upon further discussion, as well as looking around the religious artefacts hung on the walls of the office, the business owner seemed to be identifying himself with a strong believe in Sunni Islamic Values<sup>67</sup> while also supporting Iranian's<sup>68</sup> to retrieve their passports. Thus the business saw an expansion opportunity based on the precarity created by the nexus of EU agencies on the asylum application system while also keeping aside ideological differences.

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<sup>67</sup> Sunni Islam is the largest branch in Islam plays a significant role in the socio-political landscape of Pakistan where the majority of the population identifies as Sunni-Muslims. This is as a consequence of the past few decades of Saudi Arabia's influence on Pakistan's socio-economic and political landscape with major turn in 1970's during the Soviet invasion in Afghanistan.

<sup>68</sup> Shia is the second largest branch while Iran is the largest Shia-majority country with an ongoing conflict with Saudi Arabia stemming from geopolitical competition, religious differences, and contrasting political ideologies. This has led to heightened tensions, proxy conflicts, and a struggle for influence in the Muslim world where Pakistan actively sides with Saudi Arabia while sharing the geographic border with Iran. After the 1970's Islamization of Pakistan, an increased hostility towards Shia minority in the country has sustained with many extra-judicial prosecutions of people from Shia community taking place. For more see: *Islam and Democracy in Iran* by Richard Tapper and Ziba Mir-Hosseini.

The inter-operations mobilised by EC as part of Agenda on Migration as their main approach for migration management<sup>69</sup> gathered all the suitable (or nearly) European departments to reinforce their co-operation and control over the territories under *emergency*. While their effects are difficult to locate on a socio-temporal locality, their immediate effects are present on the subjectivity of many. Starting from hotspots; as a physical site of the commencement of such infrastructure, and biometric registration; as formal procedure that enabled and inhabited the movement of people from Greece's islands or mainland to elsewhere (mainly to move up North in the European Union), psychological consequence of such low/high tech entanglement remains across the localities, which I would expand in the chapter: digital trap.

The site, declared as under stress or *emergency* in Greece, hosted the formation of a hotspot which in return became the locality, or mechanism, that brought all the relevant departments. The sites under *stress* serve as a site for the erection and operation of the regime's infrastructure. This includes EASO, FRONTEX, Eurojust and Europol are all deployed here, and as per EC's report; to support a particular member state to "swiftly identify, fingerprint and register migrants [...] the work of the agencies will be complementary to one another"<sup>70</sup>. All four agencies will work together for reception, identification, registration and recollections for those whose claims were successful (by EASO). Besides those whose claim for asylum are rejected, are ultimately *sorted* as irregular migrants or 'apprehended migrants' are then 'returned' by FRONTEX<sup>71</sup>. A third category also emerges where investigations and successive prosecutions of crime are conducted by Eurojust and Europol.

Such stages are inline with the colonial *debris* of knowledge gathering by classifying 'unknown population' (Zureik, 2013) as a form of control in the newly acquired territories most of which was based on their innate biological attributes on the lines "scientific racism in colonies as well as at home"<sup>72</sup>. However it is alarming to see all the three different types of 'social sorting' of migrants happening simultaneously at one site. This is mainly facilitated by Eurodac and eu-Lisa which are discussed in detail in the chapter: Biometrics: rationalising identity and violence.

Together with Eurodac and eu-Lisa, newly established agenda represented the initiation of one of EC's endeavour to Europeanise<sup>73</sup> the EU's border on Greece; a long-term strategic overhauling of the asylum and migration systems, an immaterial border, that not only surpassed the peak of migration time but extended or 'continued', up till now, into policies on immigration, mobilities of people as well as the effect of its operations on their subjectivities.

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<sup>69</sup> European Commission. 2015. "European Agenda on Migration." Migration and Home Affairs. Accessed April 20, 2023.

<sup>70</sup> European Commission. 2015. "Communication on the European Agenda on Migration." Accessed April 20, 2023. [https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2020-09/communication\\_on\\_the\\_european\\_agenda\\_on\\_migration\\_en.pdf](https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2020-09/communication_on_the_european_agenda_on_migration_en.pdf).

<sup>71</sup> European Commission. 2015, 6.

<sup>72</sup> Brown, Elizabeth, and George Bargañier. 2018. *Race and Crime: Geographies of Injustice*. University of California Press, p14.

<sup>73</sup> Mignolo, Walter. 2011. *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options*. Duke University Press.

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*They rejected my (asylum) application saying that I don't need it. The first one was in Greece because we wanted to go through Hungary as a friend told me that they are letting us in (though Bulgaria and Romania) but then at the Romanian border they didn't let us in and I didn't know what to do so I followed a group who said that they are going to Greece because they are taking applications. It was difficult to go back because we could have also gone back back... but at the border (at Evros) they took us in. After a few weeks my turn came but then they rejected my application. I then went to Germany where they said my application was already in the system. Someone told me that I now have to wait for 2 years before my fingerprints will get deleted from their system. And after that I will try again.”<sup>74</sup>*

### **3.4 Digital fortress**

*“Criminals are never imagined as politicians, bankers, corporate criminals, or war criminals, but as a racialized class of people living in poverty. The word criminal becomes synonymous with dehumanizing stereotypes of ghettos, welfare recipients, drug users, sex workers, and young gang members”<sup>75</sup>*

With the working of EC's 'Agenda on Migration 2015', as well as the admissibility law, the practice of expulsion of 'irregular' migrants whose asylum claims got rejected based on the

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<sup>74</sup> S.D, Communication with author. Lison, January 03, 2023.

<sup>75</sup> Walia, H. 2013. Undoing Border Imperialism. Edinburgh: AK Press.



claims were returned back to Turkey. As the agenda operated, a series of criterias emerged which sorted people out based on the nationalities which were and are still used to define the grounds for exclusion or inclusion sustaining the performance and perforation of the border. As per Greece's asylum laws (JMD 42799/01.06.2021) , those people belonging to Afghanistan, Somalia, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Syria<sup>76</sup> upon the rejection of their asylum claims they can be returned to Turkey, considering it as a safe country. With the exception of Syria, the more applications from nationals of these countries gets rejections, the more their admissibility ratio drops resulting in even more negative decisions (Papoutsi et al., 2018). Defining people based on the construct of their nationalities, reveals ethnicity and religion is one of the chief factors that influence applications in the post 9/11 European asylum system.

Such characterization is as a consequence of the interoperations of EU's many databases, sharing data from different geographies, that interact together with each other's statistics to generate such parameters that hampers and restricts or creates hurdles in mobility. Furthermore, the entire infrastructure also has the responsibility of defining individuals desirable or undesirable, normal or deviant, safe or risky, civilian or criminal as well as healthy or diseased. The construction of such profiles or definitions profoundly impact on the freedom of those people (Lyon, 2005; Finn, 2005) and this form of defining people is the most primordial form of authoritarian social sorting witnessed not solely in the emergence of modern societies but have deep roots in colonial construct of the criminal, or dacoits, as illustrated earlier in the workings of Thuggee and Dacoity Department.

As expressed by Elizabeth Brown and George Baganier in their book, *Race and Crime: Geographies of Injustice*, 'colonial racial taxonomies' continue to serve as the foundation of modern study of the 'deviant', a main concept in the scholarship of criminology<sup>77</sup>. This logic thus gets most apparent in analysing the infrastructure that creates such sorts or racial hierarchies in 'irregular migrants'. These racial hierarchies in the present context are imperial formations that stay with people as they move from the 'camps' or peripheries, towards the 'mainland' or the urban centres where these camps are *not*. Applying for residence, getting job contracts, healthcare, education, insurance amongst other social facilities demand cross checking a migrant's information in the *system*, where these taxonomies sit. Thus in an attempt to create inaccessibility or inadmissibilities towards the European Union's major urban centers, such sortments play a central role in reproducing inequality by creating hierarchies in accessing various political, social or economic benefits (Lyon, 2005). EU's databases, as I would expand on in section: interoperability, serves as a new immaterial border, which the implementation of their processing of data i.e. interoperations, serves as a virtual border guard, a main agent of the *system* through which cross examination of individuals (electronic identities) occur.

In an attempt to control, channel or interrupt the mobility of refugees navigating either the geographical terrain or asylum seekers scrolling through the digital spaces, it all starts with the process of registration at the sites of hotspots, located as mentioned about, across multiple localities away from urban centres. The registration and identification here also serves as a gateway to induct the individuals in the digital network, or synthesise their electronic identities which then removes state's responsibility, hypothetically, to halt control over bodies. Biometrics, or more precisely, a set of 10 finger prints then replaces the traditional spatial confines of the border police or enclosure and their role of geographic restriction of movement. However, not only such mobility of control happens, but control on the access of resources, facilities, and

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<sup>76</sup> International Rescue Committee. 2021. "IRC Submission." Accessed April 23, 2023. <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/2022-04/IRCSubmission.docx>.

<sup>77</sup> Brown, Elizabeth, and George Baganier. 2018. *Race and Crime: Geographies of Injustice*. University of California Press, 54.

spaces alongside with mobility, almost all of which are (made to be) concentrated in urban centres, subsequently are followed.

European Search Portal (ESP), currently under development, serves as the platform for such control, where individuals from various law enforcement or management departments will be given access to huge collections of data stores in EU's databases to cross check their various statuses (Vavoula, 2021). This is already happening in Britain, where amongst many policy changes, Immigration Act also known as 'Right to Rent' blocks many from ethnic migrant communities to one of the most fundamental rights i.e. housing where landlords and real estate agencies are compelled to check their immigration status and history or face fines or jail time.<sup>78</sup>

Similar to Greece, German Integration Act of 2016, compels refugees and asylum seekers to live in the region allotted to them upon their arrival in the country restricting them to move elsewhere. This was mainly done to 'distribute'<sup>79</sup> them across the country to elevate the 'burden'<sup>80</sup> in urban areas. If caught moving, they are punished by the loss of their social benefits. Digital border of Eurodac here plays the role of catching intra-German movements if they try applying for asylum in other states. Moreover, preventing their access to Germany's urban centres, the law paradoxically necessitates the participation in integration courses and programs. 'The Reception Conditions Directive'<sup>81</sup> (EU, revised 2013), 'Asile et Immigration law' or 'La loi Collomb'<sup>82</sup>(France, 2018), 'The Residenzpflicht' or 'Residence Duty'<sup>83</sup> (Germany) are a few more examples of non-Greek legislation/acts that administer the mobility of refugees across the geographies of the EU.

Registration and Identification emerges as a spine of such administrative architecture of the border regime. Playing a pivotal role in transcribing the power of the European Union as a supranational entity, registration and identification process has seen its separate infrastructure emerge alongside hotspots. Reception and Identification Centre (RIC) emerges as a structure in which GAS (Greek Asylum Service) registers people applying for asylum in Greece - there are 5 RICs, one on each 'hotspot' (as mentioned above), and 3 on mainland Greece, all of them in isolated locations. The operations of RIC, as explained in the book 'New Borders; Hotspots and the European Migration Regime', were a team of researchers conducted discussed with many officials and people working in them, found most of the responses conflicting in nature; which for RIC was indicated as a bureaucratic, yet experimental as well as non-uniform nature of the functioning in the border control (Papoutsi et al., 2018, 79). While many of these entities, appear to be working in isolation, are an integral component of a wider fluctuations of the infrastructure; of border policies, laws and regulations; rapidly changing due to their resonance with refugee influx, as well as, because of the synthesis that comes out from the data and statistics which informs them.

### 3.5 Trial and testing: Ad Hoc improvements to the asylum procedure

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<sup>78</sup> Cowan, Leah. 2021. *Border Nation: A Story of Migration*. London: Pluto Press, 84.

<sup>79</sup> See report: *Migration, Integration, Asylum Political Developments in Germany 2016: Annual Policy Report* by the German National Contact Point for the European Migration Network (EMN), Federal Office for Migration and Refugees 2017 on Pages: 35, 45, 48, 68)

<sup>80</sup> Ibid, pg. 45

<sup>81</sup> This requires member states to provide refugees with food, housing and basic necessities. Often, this gets translated as a legal burden for many to live in certain localities in remote and underserved areas creating barriers in mobility and access to education, social services and job opportunities.

<sup>82</sup> This legislation accelerates asylum procedures, where many find themselves being confined in urban detention units for prolonged periods. For undocumented migrants, it also doubles the time of detention, further limiting their mobility.

<sup>83</sup> It requires the asylum applicants within certain regions determined by the immigration office as their applications get processed. However, many of these regions are located predominantly in rural area.

To bring in more clarity of the working of different entities in the process of migration governments, it is important to look at different phases of categories that are formed when people are filtered through the process of asylum application:<sup>84 85 86</sup>

1. Upon arrival, the beneficiaries (the term often used in Greece) go through the first phase of registration also called as first reception *screening* which also existed before the enactment of RIC in the hotspot. During the *screening*, people are allotted a personal registration number. The main purpose of this screening is to determine if the beneficiary wishes to apply for asylum.
2. The second phase is executed under the jurisdiction of the European Border and Coast Guard, FRONTEX, alongside with the Greek Police Department which conducts another 'screening' disguised as an interview. What is termed as 'nationality identification interview' is conducted using different identification procedures and tools for their assistance in executing the operation; standard interview questions, language interpreters with a strong grasp on language and customs of particular areas and, sometimes interrogation tactics (Papoutsi et al., 2018, 80) merged with standard questioning.
3. The third phase is marked by fingerprinting, for the purpose of data collection, and is done in a separate secured space by Europol department members where the information is sent to the Eurodac database for any cross matched with criminal records.
4. The screening process is finally concluded by a checking the health status which is mainly conducted by a private organisation or NGO followed by an issuance of a health card.

This phase of the first reception process is executed swiftly due to the allocation of all resources present inside the hotspot or RIC. The compounding of such human and fiscal resources alongside the 'field and technologies of expertise' for biometric data collection and identity verification is the first experience migrants have with such of *the border regime*. Even after leaving the camps, their interaction with the information capturing *system* would continue to control their lives primordially by controlling their mobilities.

At a later stage, the second, more detailed and longer screening procedure is performed by the European Asylum and Support Office (EASO) in collaboration with Greece Asylum Services (GAS) with stricter border policies that determine the person's eligibility for asylum. Now that the border policies are implemented, the earlier procedure where people were sorted out based on four screening criterias was seen playing a decisive role in their application results. The tool as a result of biometric as well as physical screening was rolled out in the form Article 14.8 of the Greece's Asylum Law (4375/2016) and used as a tool by EASO for deciding the people who belonged to the vulnerability set. As per the article, the following are deemed vulnerable; unaccompanied minors, victims of torture, rape or other forms of sexual, physical or psychological violence, persons with PTSD, persons suffering from severe disability or terminal illness, victims of human trafficking and in particular survivors or family members of victims of

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<sup>84</sup> Refugee.info Greece. 2023. "Registration - Asylum Seeker's Smart Cards." Accessed April 21. <https://greece.refugee.info/en-us/articles/4985589502743>.

<sup>85</sup> UNHCR. 2023. "How Do I Apply for Asylum?" Accessed April 21. <https://help.unhcr.org/greece/applying-for-asylum/how-do-i-apply-for-asylum/>.

<sup>86</sup> Ministry of Migration and Asylum. 2023. "Η Αίτηση για Άσυλο." Accessed April 21. <https://migration.gov.gr/en/gas/diadikasia-asyloy/i-aitisi-gia-asylo/>.

boat disaster<sup>87</sup>. This article comes under the umbrella of one of the fast track procedures to quickly channel the applicants.

Automatically, all the positive decisions were redirected to further asylum procedures, the people with negative decisions are given a chance to appeal the result with the right to a lawyer, provided their availability. In mid June 2016, the architects of the hotspot were under grave concern by the volume of appeals getting astronomically high (Papoutsi et al., 2018, 80). The intention to rapidly process people saw the fast track procedure crumbling even faster alongside with the increase in uncertainty of the people and their faith in moving on. An amendment followed once on 22 June, 2016 where in Law (4399/2016) "modifying the composition of Appeals Committees and the right of asylum seekers to be heard in appeals against negative decisions"<sup>88</sup>.

Under the Dublin Regulation<sup>89</sup>, in June 2017, there were several provisions made to allow people falling under the category of family reunification along with vulnerable Syrian nationals allowing them to travel to the Greek Mainland. It's important to note here that most the individuals getting processed under such amended laws were either present on the hotspots on the Islands of Lesbos, Samos, Chios, Leros or Kos or on the main land near the Turkish border hundreds of miles away from major urban centres i.e. Thessaloniki or Athens, where many could find the opportunities as well as resources to go up north to claim asylum in other European countries. However, as I would illustrate further with Dublin Regulation and Eurodac's fusionary operation, under the command of EASO to stop the applicants gravitating towards countries that were thought to provide better procedures, facilities along with 'social benefits' (Papoutsi et al., 2018, 40) to the asylum seekers.

At this point it could be observed that the entire infrastructure and its components; the bureaucracies, policies, technological infrastructure like digital registration and databases, law enforcement, EU's Departments, all seemingly unconnected entities are all undergoing a structural transformation, still are, will *continue* to do so, till they cover all the gaps of the puzzle. The *infrastructure of the border regime* thus learns and implements, from the value extracted from the data of vulnerable people. Such an adaptation and evolution of the laws are an intense example of exploitation of vulnerabilities under the guise of experimentation in a highly sensitive and fragile environment and gets justified under the context of the emergency. This case of compounding of laws, learned from knowledge (or data) produced by technologies, followed by creation of classifications of populations is an ultimate precedent to witness the reworking of inequalities produced by colonial relations and are deeply entranced in the *coloniality of power*.

The reworking of these colonial relations are thus the reworking of the 'imperial debris' (Stoler, 2013) and as per Madianou, occurs in a number of ways: extraction of value from vulnerable population (data of asylum seekers), value extraction from experimentation (either social or legislative) in fragile situations disguised as a benefit for the stakeholders, as well as my the materialisation of intangible practices or 'ruins' of colonial legacies like discrimination, which

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<sup>87</sup> European Database of Asylum Law. 2016. "EN - Law 4375." Accessed April 21. <https://www.asylumlawdatabase.eu/en/content/en-law-4375-organization-operation-asylum-service-appeals-authority-reception-identification>.

<sup>88</sup>European Union Agency for Asylum. 2016. "Joint Press Release: The pre-registration of asylum seekers in the Greek mainland is starting today." European Union Agency for Asylum. Accessed April 22. <https://euaa.europa.eu/news-events/joint-press-release-pre-registration-asylum-seekers-greek-mainland-starting-today>.

<sup>89</sup> The Dublin Regulation, that is responsible for determining which EU country is responsible for a person's claim for asylum, here is seen as being activated to block people from claiming asylum in other countries.

contributes to the production of social order (Madianou, 2019) thus continuing the power asymmetries and an absolute control over the new, the uncertainty, the empire has find itself being in. The following example highlights this harsh reality yet again:

March of 2016 marked a turning point of the European Union's border regime expanding its geographic control by signing the EU-Turkey deal. It was aimed to decrease migration to Europe by implementing admissibility<sup>90</sup> procedures, having Turkey control borders, and offering them financial aid of EUR 6 Billion and concessions from the EU<sup>91</sup>. For the asylum application to be deemed admissible, they should be under threat if they are returned to Turkey. This procedure prioritised applications from Syria which meant that their claims processed by GAS could allow them to move to mainland Greece. However, for non-Syrians, it gets complicated as the introduction of recognition rate<sup>92</sup> became the main determinant of the processing. A specified ratio of 25% appeared which meant that if the recognition rate for certain countries (Iraq and Afghanistan) is higher than 25%, their admissibility is considered. However in case of ineligibility, they are given a chance to appeal against the first decision. Nationals from countries like Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia and Pakistan fell under another category, as their recognition rates were below 25% which meant they had to go through an in-merit processing<sup>93</sup>. However, as mentioned above in the amendment in the Law (4399/2016), shifted the entire landscape of the application acceptance and the appeal results.

Upon a negative decision, the appeal goes to the Appeals Committee composed of Greek Officials<sup>94</sup> and at the time of the amendment, positive decisions were being given on admissibility thus refusing to consider Turkey as a safe third country for migrants. After the intervention of Yannis Mouzalas, a Greek minister of migration policy, the issuance of positive decisions dropped rapidly and just in two years, the ratio of rejection of cases rose to 93.63% (Papoutsis et al., 2018, 50). While it is understood that Greek Asylum Services were under considerable pressure and EU departments like EASO and CEAS were there to alleviate this stress, positive decisions however meant that individuals could (potentially) move further up North. But the involvement of EASO officers in admissibility interviews, as per Lena Karamanidou, infringed the exercise of power by Greek civil servants on the sovereign Greek territory which falls under a grander agenda of "the Europeanization of Greek asylum and migration policies, and more specifically the transposition of the CEAS."<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> This is the legal concept that someone's claim for asylum cannot proceed in Greece. This can be for 2 reasons: 1 - because another country is responsible. In the Greek context, it is Turkey, Albania and Macedonia that are presumed safe - the Greek state's logic is that the person should have stayed in or could return to these border countries, so their claim for asylum cannot proceed in Greece. 2 - when people make subsequent claims for asylum, if they do not present new information or the case is too weak, their claim is deemed 'inadmissible' - essentially the authorities do not reopen their case and do not make a new decision, because what they have raised does not amount to a subsequent/new claim for asylum

<sup>91</sup> Europarl. 2016. "Carriages preview | Legislative Train Schedule." Accessed April 21. <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/legislative-train/theme-towards-a-new-policy-on-migration/file-eu-turkey-statement-action-plan>.

<sup>92</sup> Recognition rate in Greece's admissibility law refers to the percentage of asylum claims deemed valid. A higher rate indicates more asylum seekers are granted protection or refugee status in the country.

<sup>93</sup> In-merit refers to the evaluation of asylum applications based on their individual merits, usually due to a low probability of the applicants being granted refugee status, given the country's overall low recognition rate.

<sup>94</sup> Papageorgiou, Ioannis, and Maarten Verwey. 2017. "International Protection in Greece." Accessed April 22, 2023. [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2017/583145/IPOL\\_STU\(2017\)583145\\_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2017/583145/IPOL_STU(2017)583145_EN.pdf).

<sup>95</sup> Karamanidou, Lena, and Thomas Hammarberg. 2021. "Migration, Asylum Policy and Global Justice in Greece." ResearchGate. Accessed April 22, 2023.

Such an intricate set of procedures, rapidly changing laws, thrusting of amendments, cut-off dates and new policies applying arbitrary criterias, appears to have predominantly deployed to govern, channel and deter migrant mobilities. Furthermore, it is another glimpse of how many stakeholders, infrastructure, bureaucracies aka. regimes join forces together just to keep people longer somewhere. Or make them move somewhere else. Make them stop. And now make them wait. Waiting in this separate hope that they can send them back somewhere. While they waited, contradictory to the hope of the border regime. Let them pass through one or another filter as the data suggest. Another ratio appears that halts them again. Or makes them move again. New recognition rates compounds with even newer policies that just popped up. Unpredictable changes from the ground that are witnessed. Under the guise of emergencies, bodies become part of a play. On land, a testing ground. To fool proof the future from any erratic movements that are outside the control of the order. The land turned into an immense laboratory for social experimentation to be justified. To justify as well as to conceal the debris that has been there, sitting for a while, awaiting reactivation.

no one leaves home unless home chases  
you  
fire under feet  
hot blood in your belly  
it's not something you ever thought of doing  
until the blade burnt threats into  
your neck  
and even then you carried the anthem under  
your breath  
only tearing up your passport in an airport  
toilet  
sobbing as each mouthful of paper  
made it clear that you wouldn't be going  
back.

you have to understand,  
that no one puts their children in a boat  
unless the water is safer than the land

Excerpt from 'Home' by Warsan Shire, 2017.

### 3.6 Biometrics: rationalising identity and violence

Necropolitics thus gets embodied in the brutality of the border regime's Eurodac system. As per Mbembe, necropolitics is the 'ultimate expression of sovereignty... where the power and the capacity to dictate who is able to live and who must die is performed' (Mbembe, 2011). Such social sorting for the control of mobility and the power and agency to 'kill, to let live or to expose to death' (Mbembe, 2011) is central to the working of the Europeanized borders of Greece and continues getting strengthened; as the *debris* recommences its operations.

As explained earlier, the social sorting is predominantly conducted on the same lines of the classification of the 'deviant' or 'dacoit' in the earlier 19th century to keep the society 'clean' from all the deviances from the social order. Whether it was Theresa May's hostile environment policy targeting undocumented migrants in the UK, or by rolling out Admissibility procedures, the intention is the same. And in the latter case, it could be observed that the 'hostile procedure' evolved with more provisions and changes in recognition rates showed the adaptability and flexibility of the border regime to adjust to uncertainties. The evolution of such systems are based on their learning mechanism where the border regime is reinforced by the unquenchable quest for more and advanced knowledge of the risk for a more accurate and efficient identification of the 'deviants'<sup>96</sup>. The knowledge of the risk is thus extracted today from the use of various information technologies and information driven procedures like biometrics, big data, cloud infrastructure, sensors, mapping, machine learning amongst other internet of things<sup>97</sup>.

Borders have become virtual as they remotely contain, channel and sort people from populations using automation as a tool to speed up the process. Digital infrastructure here plays a crucial role in such swift processes of slowing down and obstructing. Recognition and identification centres (RIC) all over Greece typically are the platforms of such initiation of mobility controls. They employ digital identification systems like biometric identifiers mainly fingerprinting, facial patterns, Iris scanners with other Personal Identification Information (PII)<sup>98</sup> for a greater accuracy for identification. This effort for accuracy increases the body's role as an

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<sup>96</sup> Haggerty, Kevin D., and Richard V. Ericson. 1997. *Policing the Risk Society*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

<sup>97</sup> Kitchin, Rob, and Claudio Coletta. 2017. "Algorhythmic governance: Regulating the 'heartbeat' of a city using the Internet of Things." Rob Kitchin. Accessed April 22, 2023. <https://kitchin.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/BDS-2017-algorhythms.pdf>.

<sup>98</sup> Sooriyakumaran, Dhananjayan, and Brice Jegan. 2021. "Race, technology and the necropolitics of border militarism - Corporate actors profiting from refugee and migrant abuse." OHCHR. Accessed April 22, 2023. [https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Issues/Racism/SR/RaceBordersDigitalTechnologies/Sooriyakumaran\\_and\\_Jegan.pdf](https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Issues/Racism/SR/RaceBordersDigitalTechnologies/Sooriyakumaran_and_Jegan.pdf).



entity for information collection, and thus the body becomes the passport itself inhibiting or enabling movement within a particular terrain.<sup>99 100</sup>

European Dactyloscopy (Eurodac) is a large scale information system interoperating with other databases of eu-Lisa to keep the data of migration and asylum seekers amongst other, storing fingerprints of all all asylum seekers and irregular migrants apprehended by EU border officials. Part of Dublin convention, it blocks individuals in peripheral countries of the EU and bars them from making multiple asylum claims in other countries, trapping them in countries with limited access to resources. I would use this as a departure point to illustrate that its expansion has an inverse relation with urban asylum seeker population. And as the system's use marks a paradigm shift in migrant mobility flows the concern is not anymore to keep the individuals inside camps but the performance of such technologies sets an immense geographical restriction.

It all starts with the sheer act of putting your finger on the glass screen where the optical sensor and detector captures the patterns of the finger, where the image is then sent to image sampling and processing. Here an algorithm detects unique patterns and ridges by measuring the lightest and darkest areas. Milliseconds later, a highly detailed model of the fingerprint is constructed and sent to one of eu-Lisa's databases: the Eurodac.

One of the main functions of biometric here is to, as per eu-Lisa's official statement, to reduce what they call as 'Asylum Shopping'<sup>101</sup>. Operations since 2003, its obstructing mechanism got activated during the closure of Greece and Macedonia's border (Reuters, 2016) trapping many on the mainland Greece. As the border closed itself on them, their only option now was to claim asylum in Greece or to return to their country of origin via International Organization for Migration's return scheme.

As the EU-Turkey deal struck and the border with Macedonia closed down, many migrants moved into Athens in 2016 inside 18 squats hostling about 1500 migrants<sup>102</sup>. Many were located in Exarchia, a self-organised anarchist district in the city centre. Finding it difficult to move them out of the urban spaces using traditional police evicting methodologies, biometrics served as an integral tool. The process of pre-registration was quickly rolled out where applicants were required to go back to the RIC for fingerprinting<sup>103</sup>. This dispersed many out of the urban centres back to the peripheral camps.

Pre-registration turned Greece into a country-sized version of a camp where migrants were allowed to move into Greece but any transnational movements were criminalised. Once (pre) registered after fingerprinting, the data was sent to the Eurodac database which prevented any attempt to leave Greece to claim asylum up North. Many left Greece but as they got

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<sup>99</sup> Krauze, Adam. 2013. "Colonial oversight." Red Pepper. Accessed April 22, 2023. <https://www.redpepper.org.uk/colonial-oversight/>.

<sup>100</sup> Lewis, Nancy. 2005. "Chapter 7, Expanding surveillance: connecting biometric information systems to international police cooperation." In *Global Surveillance and Policing: Borders, Security, and Identity*.

<sup>101</sup> eu-LISA. 2019. "Eurodac." Accessed April 22, 2023. <https://www.eulisa.europa.eu/Publications/Information%20Material/Leaflet%20Eurodac.pdf>.

<sup>102</sup> Moving Europe. (2016, June 25). 24.06.2016: Refugee-Squats in Athens – Moving Europe. Moving Europe. Retrieved April 22, 2023, from <https://moving-europe.org/24-06-2016-refugee-squats-in-athens/>

<sup>103</sup> EUAA. 2016. "Joint Press Release: The pre-registration of asylum seekers in the Greek mainland is starting today." European Union Agency for Asylum. Accessed April 22, 2023. <https://euaa.europa.eu/news-events/joint-press-release-pre-registration-asylum-seekers-greek-mainland-starting-today>.

fingerprinted again, their data turned up within the Eurodac's database and were sent back. Here Eurodac, combined with Dublin Regulation, worked to subjugate asylum seekers to harsh immobilisation, suspending them in a limbo within the borders of Greece. The modern manifestation of colonialism further saw Greece's transformation into a country-sized camp, where the entire population of asylum seekers experienced their agency to move getting inhibited. This denial of the right to mobility impeded the imaginaries of many who sought to find protection in the EU instead got pushed to the state of bare survival.

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S. Stayed in Elaionas camp in June 2016 and still has a clear recollection of the memory when he travelled back to the Turkish border feeling the anxiety that they would be pushed to Turkey if the application got rejected. 'There was a long line alongside the metal wall which was hot but the guard (identifying him from a private security firm) kept on pushing them to form a line, sometimes also yelling 'animals' in 3 different languages', which S mentioned that he recently learned as his accent could tell. 'Sometimes, a few people would laugh too and he would get angry and leave. I couldn't get the ticket to get into the line and many had to wait for 5 to 6 months to get into it'. S. also mentioned that many would leave to go down to Thessaloniki where they got to

know later that the (pre-registration) process was closed (for them)." S. 2023.<sup>104</sup>

There is another arbitrariness of cut-off dates where people with their application getting processed before the passing of the law gets processed while those who apply afterwards need to apply for pre-registration. A computer glitch on March 19th, 2016 mixed up the arrival dates for many as others tried to prove they arrived earlier (Papoutsi et al., 2018, 55). Such arbitrariness, confusion and injustice offer a new kind of disciplinary control over mobilities; a systemic hurdle that puts urgency to secure one's fingerprinting. This also puts one in a state of uncertainty; where unpredictability of an ever-fluctuating administrative landscape is experienced as a constant.

One person from Pakistan, now works in Athens in a restaurant. They mentioned that they are still awaiting their fingerprints to be deleted so that they can apply for asylum again in Germany where a few people could help them get work. Upon asking about how much time is left, a very precise figure of several months and minutes came abruptly<sup>105</sup> from them, though they felt doubtful if their application could get accepted again there. Such an awareness of the infrastructure alongside the time adds another layer of uncertainty and immobility for those who are stranded not only in the physical geography, but also in the 'system'. Furthermore, upon a conversation with a lawyer, it was mentioned that the family reunification under the Dublin Regulation ever since 'it all started' has been very slow and people have to wait for months or years just to be able to provide their fingerprints and get registered in order to move. Germany, in particular, received many requests for family reunification in 2015 and signed a deal with Greece in spring 2017 to slow down the process of reunification (Papoutsi et al., 2018, 56).

Imposed as an essentiality for registration, biometrics not only serves as a tool for registration of refugees and authenticates their presence in other countries but blocks them from moving to mainland Europe. It further creates a 'digital identity' inside the servers of databases which shifts the mobility control from physical to digital space. Madianou identifies these practices as techno-colonisation of bodies, people, populations which acknowledges and subsequently works in the phenomena like displacement, migration, refugee camps, humanitarianism (Madianou, 2019). Such techno-colonialism further contributes to the production of social orders to maintain hierarchies as well as power asymmetries that are deeply entrenched in the coloniality of power. Eurodac as well as eu-Lisa, as I claim, are thus the most pure and genuine reincarnations of historical colonial legacies.

Biometric devices thus separates the race from the being and pushes it into the digital environment where these legacies *reside*. The extraction thus gets instrumentalized by the

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<sup>104</sup> Personal conversation with S., Athens, January 20, 2023.

<sup>105</sup> According to the Eurodac Regulation (Regulation (EU) No 603/2013), the retention period for fingerprints varies depending on the individual's status: Asylum seekers: Fingerprints are stored for 10 years. If the person receives refugee status or another form of protection, their data will be deleted earlier, upon the granting of the status or reception of residence permit. Irregular border-crossers: Fingerprints are stored for 18 months. If the person is granted a residence permit or leaves the EU during that period, their data will be deleted earlier. Individuals found illegally staying within a member state: Fingerprints are stored for 18 months. If the person is granted a residence permit or leaves the EU during that period, their data will be deleted earlier.  
<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2013:180:0001:0030:EN:PDF>

border infrastructure to 'administer life'<sup>106</sup> by bureaucracies and staticization using advanced tools. Screening interviews, mixed with biometric recognition devices, fused with policies and amendments are thus executed either by force; physical or data; digital, in the servers. Despite different forms and functions, necropolitics exists and circulates in this infrastructure, exerting itself in statistical perfection. Deploying strategies and tactics, laying down the foundation of operations, to reduce certain populations, as per Mbembe, into reprehensible states or to put an end to their existence at the behest of governmentality of advanced democracies, that have deemed them to be less than living.

Biometric scanners, deployed by this *union*, thus hold immense power to reduce people to mere data points and numbers, decontextualizing humans from all the attributes in all contexts, thus annihilating their identities, reducing them into digital objects. The first interaction with the scanner, a person is turned into a series of data, is the main contact with the necropower, that from this point on, for many, would prevail and grow. While this fragmentation of a person into different data elements and the deconstruction of the identity happens when the *Union* decides to socially sort populations, the databases like Eurodac (part of eu-Lisa) fractures the relationship between the populations and the geographic terrain. The fracture is the repercussion, of interoperations, exchanges and communications, between data sets across databases for digitally recreating the identities with new traits, characteristics and attributes. Interoperability strengthens the European Union's migration governance by reinforcing centuries old power asymmetries. Interoperations, as I would expand in the next chapter, reconfigures the relationship between populations, territories along with socio-spatial and political rights. Removing entry from exit, work from employee, movement from stagnancy. Depriving many to even have the 'right to have rights' (Maestri & Hughes, 2017).

As borders become digital, so does the necro into digital necropower. The implication of such fusion becomes evident in the experience or the awareness of the database, the storage of the fingerprint, the time which the data has spent resting inside the servers. The experience is the experience of the 'otherness' or othered, the 'deviant' or the system that created it as such. It keeps on reminding the megabytes stored in the ubiquitous maybe grey or black metal or plastic containers in a cold dark room located somewhere in sometime. The experience of otherness also

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<sup>106</sup> Meintjes, Louise, and Achille Mbembe. 2003. "Necropolitics." University of Warwick. Retrieved December 12, 2022.

becomes ubiquitous, wherever you go. It will follow you. In fact it will be *there* when you reach. The experience of everything merges with *everywhere*, as time and space has collapsed. No longer is this impact of the border limited to physical confines. Increasingly, the border is everywhere. It has been there ever since. Like those ideologies. Interoperating across timelines.

Being tracked isn't the concern anymore.  
Have the concerns transcended beyond the spectre of being tracked?  
Data extraction isn't the concern anymore either.  
Neither is surveillance.  
On who?  
It's not necessary anymore.  
Is it not necessary anymore?  
It's not necessary anymore.  
The trans- in Atlantic slavery has changed into inter- in operability.  
It feels confusing.  
It also feels much more.

### 3.7 Interoperability<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> 'Interoperability: the ability of information technology (IT) systems and of the business processes they support to exchange data and to enable the sharing of information and knowledge'  
[https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2017/607256/EPRS\\_BRI%282017%29607256\\_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2017/607256/EPRS_BRI%282017%29607256_EN.pdf)

One of the chief characteristics of the technocratic border regime where many institutions and agencies along with the data centres are interconnected and operate together in registration and processing of refugees and in doing so collect, process as well as produce new data. Here I would be discussing agencies like eu-Lisa more critically in controlling the mobility of the refugee population. My main intention is to not only look at the *interconnectedness* of information systems from migration governance but also interrogate what it means to see, experience and witness technologies like a migrant, and in particular those who increasingly face rejection of asylum applications, thus getting trapped by (and in) the *system*.

In the section of asylum procedures, a pattern could be recognized. The procedures kept on transforming as parameters that governed its functioning kept on changing, adapting and thus evolving. Here we stumble across the *system* learning; from the knowledge gathered from data over time. It grew on feedback as more and more refugees lodged their asylum applications. The feeding of data into the *system* allowed it to comprehend, one could say, to comprehend what is uncertain, to dissect the emergency and to grasp the situation to bastion the fortress of predictability.

According to Niovi Vavoula, migrants are not fingerprinted for the sole purpose of enforcing the Dublin Regulation. Fingerprints are officially taken and stored also for anti-terrorism purposes as well as for general security reasons (Vavoula, 2014). And yet, biometric technologies are today systematically adopted for determining migrants' eligibility to asylum and to set the geographical restrictions about where they can lodge an asylum application, as explained earlier on the operations of Eurodac.

Eurodac, which has been operational since 2003, along with its parent organisation eu-Lisa, is the digital heart of the European Asylum system. Deterring from its original intent to assist member states, later in the wake of the *emergency*, saw an enormous transformation where Eurodac was used to block *asylum shopping*. However in May 2019, Regulations 2019/8172<sup>108</sup> and 2019/8183<sup>109</sup> were implemented, creating a *framework* for interoperability between information systems mainly for non-EU citizens. Interoperability brings together the existing and forthcoming information systems keeping data of third-country nationals. The regulation brought Eurodac in contact with the following systems<sup>110</sup>:

Schengen Information System II – SIS II  
Visa Information System – VIS  
Entry/Exit System – EES  
European Travel Information and Authorization System – ETIAS,  
European Criminal Records Information System for third-country nationals – ECRIS-TCN

These systems were connected to create four interoperability components; a Biometric Matching Service (BMS), the European Search Portal (ESP), a Multiple Identity Detector (MID) and a Common Identity Repository (CIR)<sup>111</sup>. Much of it was done to:

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<sup>108</sup> Regulation (EU) 2019/817 [2019] OJ L135/27 (collectively Interoperability Regulations).  
<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32019R0817>

<sup>109</sup> Regulation (EU) 2019/818 [2019] OJ L135/85 (collectively Interoperability Regulations).:  
<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/en/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32019R0818>

<sup>110</sup> Voronova, Svetlana, and Katrien Luyten. 2019. "Interoperability between EU border and security information systems." Accessed April 22, 2023.  
[https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2018/628267/EPRS\\_BRI%282018%29628267\\_7\\_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2018/628267/EPRS_BRI%282018%29628267_7_EN.pdf), 5.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.,.

*“improve the Union's data management architecture for border management and security. The Communication initiated a process towards achieving interoperability between EU information systems for security, border and migration management, with the aim to address the structural shortcomings related to those systems that impede the work of national authorities and to ensure that border guards, customs authorities, police officers and judicial authorities have the necessary information at their disposal.”<sup>112</sup>*

The official reasoning of initiating interoperability illustrates an entire reorganisation of the structure of the border regime under the pretext of improvements; to close every gap and loophole. Harvesting the prospects offered by the installed technological infrastructure, the pressure of achieving “an effective and genuine Security Union.”<sup>113</sup> The Regulations intend at enhancing security in the EU, empowering more (efficient) checks on identity, enhancing capabilities of multiple identities detection and, as per the report, the most emphasis goes for “the fight against irregular migration”<sup>114</sup>. Such transformation of border regime's practices driven now by data collection and processing creates more difficulty for border crossers to manoeuvre the system, legalities as well as the geographies of the European Union and its major urban centre, thus “hampering the transformation of the border from below”<sup>115</sup>.

The deployment of such large scale use of centralised EU databases to control migrant mobilities at first glance appears to be complex. Nevertheless, when considering how colonial empires utilised various tools to control and process populations and territories, 'new' to them, there is a significant similarity in the application of these advanced technological systems. And as mentioned in the section: Historical Interrogation, this novel use of technology when looked from colonial historical legacies appears to be and exist in a *continuation*. Here multiple patterns appear when looking at the discursive response of the European Union's 'migration crisis' through a decolonial lens which allows modern imperial forms of oppressive control to become conspicuous in such emergences. This right here is the excavation of the *debris* that has been residing here for a while, concealed in the disguises of 'security' and 'management'.

One of the patterns that becomes strikingly visible between emergence and normalisation of technologies like European information systems<sup>116</sup> and Colonial survey 'modalities' (Cohn,

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<sup>112</sup> Official Journal of the European Union. 2019. "EUR-Lex - 32019R0817 - EN - EUR-Lex." EUR-Lex. Accessed April 23, 2023. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32019R0817>.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.,.

<sup>115</sup> Ferraris, Valeria. 2022. "Entangled in the technology-driven borderscape: Border crossers rendered to their digital self." Accessed April 24, 2023. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14773708221086717>.

<sup>116</sup> From this point onwards, I would denote European information systems as databases as they are a collection of information that is organised so that it can be easily accessed, managed, and updated. And under interoperability different European information systems become interoperable.

2002) (as part of centralised colonial information order) follows a linear, predictable trajectory. These technologies appear, expand and get distributed across socio-spatial geographies. And over time find them becoming normalised and thus get consolidated in their use. With this frame the development of databases and interoperability see's three distinct stages. In this thesis, I further claim this to be one of the ways in which *imperial ruins* are reactivated in advanced industrial societies of the Global North.

- Initial stages of exercising different technologies to manage by gathering knowledge (from RIC's operations); *a part of techo-solutionist framework*
- Intermediate stage of systemization of tools (such as databases and advanced biometrics), alongside their progressive utilisation and expansion; *a post-experimental phase*
- present stage of their normalisation; *departmentalization*

While much of the past implementations and transformations of the border regime could materially manifest themselves in physicality, digitization of migration governances allows such expansion and consolidations, deeper into the lives (and minds) of those they subjugate. In doing so, they remain obscured, hiding behind the protective cloak of rationality, justification, emergencies and in particular; the collapse of space/time that IT provides. The illustration of these processes thus reveals not only the occlusion of imperial debris, reworking the imperial legacies, but also the active role of digital practices in hiding or revealing not only the relationships of inequality but also sustaining the power asymmetries and colonial racial taxonomies.

*'Compartmentalisation Is Dead! Long Live Interoperability'* (Vavoula, 2020)

In the post 2015 era, the idea of implementing a 'Security Union' gets coupled with the increased necessity of filling in the supposed 'information gaps' and centralization of databases that were perceived to be disentangled from asylum, border or law enforcement roots. Such centralization aims at expanding the number of databases by increasing the categories and amount of personal data collected<sup>117</sup>. The data that is getting stored in Eurodac is "names, dates of birth, nationalities, identity details or travel documents, and facial images of individuals"<sup>118</sup>. The same report further states that data assists in enhancing the information within the system to enable immigration and asylum officials to effortlessly "recognize irregular third-country nationals or asylum applicants without needing to separately obtain data from other Member States, as is presently required" with the intention of preventing, detecting, or investigating serious criminal or terrorist offences. At this point, it is alarming to observe the asylum seekers along with criminals and terrorists not only being mentioned together but that the same set of protocols will be discerning one from the other.

Niovi Vavoula, witnesses that the original purpose of systems (like Eurodac) ment to determine which member state assists in asylum applications now stores data of of 'irregular border crossings' amongst other things find (Interoperability) as 'Unnecessary and disproportionate development to EU law (Vavoula, 2016). It is further mentioned in the same talk that such storage coupled with a new addition to the biometric identification that includes facial images

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<sup>117</sup> Europarl. 2023. "Legislative Train03.2023 5 Promoting Our European Way of Life." Accessed April 23. <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/legislative-train/carriage/jd-recast-eurodac-regulation/report?sid=6801>.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.,.



allows further processing which feeds data for future control, adding a second layer of processing which marks the initiation of deep surveillance (Vavoula, 2016) and even deeper control. Interoperability hence marks an astronomical growth of data collection of people coming into the block, which in turn diverts the European Union's connotation as a reception area to a region that sorts people out under discriminatory ground.

Interoperability can be understood as a concept which embraces different ways in which data can be interconnected, though they were developed in a compartmentalised manner, but with interoperability, they are no longer in silos. They interact with one another. The European Commission defines interoperability as is the ability of information systems to exchange data and enable sharing of information ... authorising users (such as police officers, migration officials and border guards) to have faster, seamless and more systematic access to the information<sup>119</sup>. As mentioned earlier, they will create new portals and repositories of information which comprises of:

European Search Portal (ESP)<sup>120</sup>  
shared Biometric Matching System (BMS)<sup>121</sup>  
Common Identity Repository (CIR)<sup>122</sup>  
Multiple Identity Detector (MID)<sup>123</sup>

All these databases exist in hierarchy to smaller ones, and can be accessed by any authorized personnel ranging from visa officer to border guard.

### 3.8 Automation Bias

The digitalization of migration control has (more or less) accelerated the governance of asylum seekers. There has been unnecessary and disproportionate development to EU law , as techno-solutionism allows more data collection for processing of individuals. Different data in the future will be grouped together to formulate new databases to have a further in depth account of an individual entering the EU border. Databases coming out of a database, as it happens, uses algorithmic decision making based on previous decisions, thus bypassing many EU laws regarding sensitive or personal data collection, making predictions or in many cases accurate descriptions of individual's ethnicity, sexual orientation, property and trade union memberships, race, ethnic origins or religion. This, as I would explain later, leads to potentials for indirect discrimination by placing groups with certain characteristics at a disadvantage. Such algorithmic thinking in migration governmentality would put many 3rd country nationals in a weaker position.

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<sup>119</sup> European Commission. 2017. "Frequently asked questions - Interoperability of EU information systems for security, border and migration management." European Commission. Accessed April 24, 2023. [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/de/MEMO\\_17\\_5241](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/de/MEMO_17_5241).

<sup>120</sup> This tool will enable authorised users (for instance an authorised police officer) to carry out a single search and receive results from all the systems they are authorised to access, rather than searching each system individually. This will ensure that relevant and authorised systems are systematically and automatically checked. MEMO/17/5241

<sup>121</sup> This will allow users to more efficiently search and crossmatch biometric data (fingerprints and facial images) stored in the systems that they are authorised to access. MEMO/17/5241

<sup>122</sup> This will allow authorised users to more easily access biographical information about non-EU citizens stored in relevant systems, so that they can be more reliably identified. MEMO/17/5241

<sup>123</sup> This will verify whether the biographical data that is being searched exists in multiple systems, helping to detect multiple identities. It has the dual purpose of ensuring the correct identification of bona fide persons and combating identity fraud. MEMO/17/5241

A major issue related to the execution of interoperability is the discreet creation of new, above-mentioned, databases, which are formed by merging and aggregating data from diverse sources. As further noted by Niovi while analysing FRONTEX's reports: the use of decorated wording like 'component and 'repository' are carefully selected and should not deviate one from the reality of producing a massive catalogue of non-EU national at EU level who are 'either administratively or criminally linked to the EU that will store personal data over a significant period of time' (Vavoula, 2020, 10). Thus with the implementation of interoperability significantly alters the landscape of European information processing through centralised databases. Its operations by default disrespects the significance of maintaining distinct domains and bypasses the protective boundaries that separate them<sup>124</sup>. Compartmentalization, that was once hailed to protect privacy and personal data rights, when looked through the rationale of interoperations is deemed as a problem, a gap in data collection, that needs to be glued together.

It could also be described as 'Panopticon', though throughout the thesis, I have been trying to replace bio- with necropower, since it falls short to describe the contemporary relations of subjugation of life to the power of death. Mbembe argues that Foucault's analysis of biopower is limited by its Eurocentric focus as it neglects the experiences and contributions of non-Western societies in shaping modern biopolitics (Mbembe, 2003; 2017,). However, Panopticon, assisting in comprehending the impacts of interoperability, is derived from the Greek word 'panoptes' meaning 'all seeing'<sup>125</sup> originating from Argos Panoptes, depicts the presence of a hundred eyes either on his head or distributed across his body<sup>126</sup>. Interoperability continues on the line of Greek Mythology, with having created a massive digital archive of identities to see all different groups of migrants, refugees and other non-EU nationals. With the repeated use of the phrase 'blind spot', interoperability's deployment indicates the century old yearning: to see and *know it all*.

As ESP, BMS and CIR joins forces together, and with the introduction of advanced facial recognition as part of Eurodac's enhancement described earlier, Niovi Vavoula raises the alarm on the authority and power given to an official who could indiscriminately conduct searches by having access to all the databases and that 'the lack of common criteria and purposes (of conducting checks) may lead to highly divergent rules and practices at the national level, whereby third country nationals, or EU nationals looking like foreigners, may find themselves being subjected to different practices depending on how proactive a police authority in a Member State is...' (Vavoula, 2020, 16).

And with an excessive power of conducting extensive identity checks, authorities, Niovi warns, may fuel already existing discriminatory practices based on suspicion towards particular *sorts* of people. This may lead to identification scrutiny on various populations, right on the spot entirely on the grounds of extensive (racial) profiling<sup>127</sup>. This not only produces, or reproduces the precarious status of certain people on a particular territory but sustains a hostile environment, wherever they go.

Interoperability of the databases could then raise serious concerns for the potential of indirect discrimination as it algorithmically profiles (certain) individuals and (certain) populations.

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<sup>124</sup> De Hert, Paul. 2016. "Introduction to Enforcing Privacy." ResearchGate. Accessed April 24, 2023. [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/301486005\\_Introduction\\_to\\_Enforcing\\_Privacy](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/301486005_Introduction_to_Enforcing_Privacy).

<sup>125</sup> Briskin, Alan. 1998. *Stirring of Soul in the Workplace*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers.

<sup>126</sup> Britannica. "Argus." Encyclopedia Britannica. Accessed April 24, 2023. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Argus-Greek-mythology>.

<sup>127</sup> Quintel, Tim. 2018. "Interoperability of EU Databases" ResearchGate. Accessed April 24, 2023. [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/329524163\\_Interoperability\\_of\\_EU\\_Databases\\_and\\_Access\\_to\\_Personal\\_Data\\_by\\_National\\_Police\\_Authorities\\_under\\_Article\\_20\\_of\\_the\\_Commission\\_Proposals](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/329524163_Interoperability_of_EU_Databases_and_Access_to_Personal_Data_by_National_Police_Authorities_under_Article_20_of_the_Commission_Proposals).

Categories titled as specific risk indicators, created by FRONTEX, combines one or several categories:

- age range, sex and nationality
- country and city of residence
- Level of Education (Not VIS, only ETIAS)
- Current occupation
- Member state of destination, or 1st entry + purpose (only VIS)

These categories as per Niovi, using interoperable exchanges, could then either be turned into or constructed into more indicators of risk (Vavoula, 2016) like:

- Designation of sex may often indicate sexual orientation
- City of residence may reveal ethnicity and colour
- Level of education and occupation will indicate property and trade union membership
- Nationality may be a proxy for race, ethnic origin or religion,

Though, as per Opinion 1/15 and La Quadrature du Net, protect direct discrimination with the former requires for pre-established models and criteria (algorithms) to be 'specific and reliable', non-discriminatory and limited to what is strictly necessary, applications needs to be subject to review (by a human officer) and mandates and individual examination when a hit<sup>128</sup> is done while the latter insist "models and criterias"<sup>129</sup> cannot be based on sensitive data in isolation (Vavoula, 2022). However, one such example which could lead to potentials for indirect discrimination is not by reference to a certain protected criteria in particular but by placing groups with the same 'protected' characteristics at a disadvantage (Vavoula, 2016). This places automation biases on non-EU rendering *them in a weaker position*. Thus the concern of privacy and data protection are downplayed by the prominence of discrimination that starts appearing in the system. Now with machine learning, any algorithmic decision making based on previous decision making will have a chance of replicating implicit and inherent biases of earlier decisions (Vavoula, 2016). The system would thus continue to identify individuals more deeply and *continue* to consolidate the learned *knowledge*, as eu-Lisa continues to train algorithms and synthesis data for future decisions.

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<sup>128</sup> The Hit-Flag procedure checks migrants' information against databases to help identify potential security risks or immigration violations, with flagged individuals subject to further investigation or action. The end-user performing a search with biographical data (last name, first name, date of birth, travel document number) or biometric data (set of good fingerprints and/or good-quality facial image) could search various central systems at the same time (in parallel, no 'cascade') while the only returned results would be a 'hit-flag' in the case where this data existed in a particular system. For more see: COM(2017) 793 final, 5.1.7. Streamlining the rules on access to EU information systems for law enforcement purposes: flagging.

<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:52017SC0473&rid=5>

<sup>129</sup> European Commission. 2022. "Regulatory framework proposal on artificial intelligence." Accessed April 24, 2023. <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/policies/regulatory-framework-ai>.

*Interoperability is a tool by the technologically<sup>130</sup> charged regime, driving the governmentality of advanced industrial democracies. Bringing in a deeper layer of necropower in administering life, I see it coercing digital populations, or in the case of refugees seeking asylum, mandating upon them the systematised procedure of applications.*

*As this neocolonial institution of civil population control has transitioned from physical geographies, tightly bounded by coordinates on the x-axis of Cartesian plane into the 'politics of verticality'<sup>131</sup>, where (neo) colonial occupations are not solely located on the ground but have seeped into the underground as well as the skies (Mbembe, 2003, 20).*

*Here I see Interoperability empowering the Union/regime to transcend time and space, under and above ground, extending its control into a dominion of discrimination. Does it denote time, somewhere in the future where predictions of future crime are made in the present? Where the identity of a person can be determined solely by their gender, religion, nationality as well as the date of birth coupled with whatever the algorithms could discern from facial image?*

*However, interoperability introduces a technological dimension, where occupation happens in the processing of*

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<sup>130</sup> Various stages of imperialism involved development of some key technologies (gunboat, quinine, steamship lines, submarine telegraph cables, and colonial railroads). See for further detail: Daniel R. Headrick, *The Tools of Empire: Technology and European Imperialism in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981).

<sup>131</sup> Weizman, Eyal. 2002. "1. Introduction to The Politics of Verticality." openDemocracy. Accessed April 24, 2023. [https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/article\\_801jsp/](https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/article_801jsp/).

*data collected from refugees, analysed and synthesised; all in the digital world. The high-tech here marks the superiority of the Union over refugee bodies, demonstrating its ability to synthesise virtual identities with just one impression of the finger on the sensor. Interoperability assumes the rest; to socially sort, to categorise, to staticize, to profile. To synthesise the digital being, only to be controlled by the digital border guard.*

*Not only to identify (risks), or to apprehend or to prosecute, but also to predict, block and restrain. While all the databases, as publicly stated by eu-Lisa, were existing in "silos", have moved towards "new holistic approaches"<sup>132</sup>. It is a chokehold over all the erratics and uncertainties; of bodies, of terrain, of the subsequent, the unknown, that were the concerns of bygone empires.*

*Interoperability here speaks to the ways of not only predictive future policing, but the exercise of power and control beyond the physical realms of time and space: in the digital where time and space collapse. It is where the physical body's virtual identity finds itself colonised in the detention camp of databases. The control on these identities is absolute. There is no agency left. Agency for an individual ceases to exist here. There is simply no space for contestation and negotiation. The modalities as well as ruins have shifted. Shifted for a deeper domination.*

*Is it The Minority Report real-life implementation? Though it's too early to validate, but not too early to predict the predictions of the algorithms that work within these databases. They will continue to exist and work in the continuum, passing on the colonial legacies from one data set to another, as the databases will glow and evolve, to close every gap of the puzzle. To create new puzzles for the future and to fill their gaps too and so on... till maybe it collapses within itself? Or till it makes sure that the other collapses within it.*

*Is it premature to express this concern? Has this system not been active for centuries? Slowing down, hindering, injuring people while simultaneously collecting, staticizing, synthesising. Maintaining long standing racial hierarchies and power structures, thrusting them, with the power of digital technologies, into the yet-to-come time. Does it not get implied by the adaptable, flexible and dynamic nature of technologies that govern databases? Is it not the re-rise of fortress Europe with Big Brother-esque EU presiding at the top? I think it is screaming this outloud.*

*How can they claim that the imperial project has ended when it has merely transitioned into the digital space?*

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<sup>132</sup> eu-LISA. 2019. "Eurodac."

But,

Does it not terrify you that it's feeding and growing, in the present with its one leg into the future? While it continues to synthesise humans like me and you into less-humans? Discursively rendering us more-humans to be protected from them? Or maybe me from you or you from me? Or maybe me or you will manage to escape from its categories or fall into one. Lets then see who will run from who. Maybe we will fall into one of those that Harsha Walia describes as 'the racist, classist, heteropatriarchal, and ableist construction of the legal/desirable migrant' and then rationalises 'the criminalization of the illegal/undesirable migrant' (Walia, 2013, 7). Or maybe my skin's colour or genitalia would save me from having to pass straight through the eternal fires of hell? Or maybe the entire opposite. Which line do we usually take at the airports btw? Or which path you or I are pressed to take?

## 4. Deathworlds

Mbembe, drawing on the work of Michel Foucault, reexamines the ways in which power is exercised through biopolitics, and in particular, the regulation, management and governance of life, and necropolitics, the administration of death. As he argues; necropolitics is a defining feature of contemporary societies (Mbembe 2003), particularly those marked by histories of colonisation and racialized violence. In such societies, marked by their advances in industrialization and technological developments, power is exercised through the creation of 'death worlds', spaces or sites where certain populations are exposed to systematic, bureaucratized violence and exclusion. While the death is not corporal, it is the social death, also in the digital, a living condition that falls short of opportunities for agency as well as hope. Where uncertainty prevails alongside with long waiting for appointments, not knowing if the deciders will let them in or send them back.

The state of mind, for those who experience the border regime's vast oppressive powers, remains uniform everywhere. Moving away from Foucault's more Eurocentric concept of 'biopolitics,' necropower here explains the harsher aspects of such neocolonial migration governance where *race* serves as the primary indicator of subjectification. Mbembe (2003) suggested that necropolitics can be employed to describe new forms of social existence in which enormous populations are subjected to living conditions that relegate them to the status of the living dead (Mbembe 2003: 40). In these cases, disposable 'Others' are not often directly killed, but rather maintained in a state of injury, dehumanisation, and exclusion, often through the intentional and detrimental inaction of the state.<sup>133</sup> Although the explicit violence of colonial governance has diminished, the refusal to recognize humanity and even the allowance of death for certain populations persist in more subtle and concealed ways. Within the context of forced migration into Europe, it is the refugees seeking asylum that have been made subordinate, who are subjected to this necropolitical governance. Similar to Agamben's argument that the production of bare life grows beyond the borders of the conventional confinements of the Camp, one can then also see necropolitics expanding beyond the spatial and temporal boundaries of the Colony and of the camp.

This becomes particularly relevant and observes its manifestation in the experiences felt by those stuck in and by the system. While the conditions within the refugee camps, or hotspots, often involve the administration of life through various means, such as the provision of food, shelter, and healthcare. At the same time, the uncertainty, violence, and exclusion faced by refugees can be seen as a manifestation of necropolitics proliferated further by the digital worlds where many find their data trapped in. However, as I argue,

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<sup>133</sup> Davis, Lewis. 2017. "Immigration and the Rise of Far-Right Parties in Europe." ifo Institut. Accessed May 1, 2023. <https://www.ifo.de/DocDL/dice-report-2017-4-davis-deole-december.pdf>.

Death worlds are also these digital sites, as flexible as the working of an interoperable border regime that can exist beyond the confines of time and space. At any particular moment, the spatial geometry and relationship of the individual with the terrain changes when the decision comes, when a thought or past moment gets revisited, when the awareness of the resident permit's expiry reappears and the feeling of reapplying, again and again, run pasts by. And thus, at any given moment, a death world is created when the experience is not only felt by an individual but by an entire population, *dispersed* across the EU.

A. had lived in Malakasa camp, around 42 km away from Athens city centre, said that "they stopped asking 'how are yous' and 'how are you doing' questions 'as we knew everyone is doing the same as I am or he is... there was no point in asking. I wanted to leave but they didnt let me so I had to run away. It was not like prison but it's your own will to stay or leave. But if you leave, your (visa) card doesnt work and then you have to come back again and again to give interviews or (thumb) prints or to fill in a form or to talk to the officer". Despite knowing that it would hamper their asylum application A. left the camp and waited for almost 2 years in the hope that their fingerprints would get deleted and they will find a way to leave for Italy or Germany to apply for asylum again. However, they were caught by Italian authorities as they took a ferry from Patras to Bari and sent back to Greece. A. (currently as of the writing of this thesis in April 2023) applied for asylum again and got rejected and is currently applying for an appeal. They further mentioned that one of the people he met was sent back by the Italian Authorities in Anek ferry, inside a small prison cell in the parking bay of the ferry where they were locked inside for an entire day with 3 other people.

A.D, January 2023 <sup>134</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> A.D, Conversation with the author in Milan Airport, 25 January 2023.



In such worlds, refugee camps established as temporary solutions to the 'crises', turn into a crisis itself for many, as they transform into long-term or even permanent spaces of confinement. While in these camps, refugee bodies may experience systematic violence, marginalisation, and precarious living conditions, in *their* databases, their digital synthesis undergoes the same algorithmically unabled discrimination. This is the socio-digital locality where the *death world* of the border regime manifests.

The use of high-tech applications, digital systems, and biometric data in the management of refugee populations further illustrates the interplay between biopolitics and necropolitics. Biometric technologies, such as fingerprinting, facial recognition, and iris scans, are increasingly being used to register, track, and control refugees' movements and access to services. While these technologies intend to streamline *processes* and ensure efficient aid distribution, they systematically induce many into a de facto state of uncertainty, by trapping them inside Greece.

Moreover, the reliance on digital systems and biometric data exacerbates these feelings of uncertainty and vulnerability experienced by refugees. Digital biometric systems may fail, malfunction, or be subject to hacking, potentially resulting in the loss or exposure of sensitive personal information. A computer glitch in Greece's asylum application system in 2016 failed to store the dates of refugee's arrival causing many to reapply again under new laws and restrictions that, as explained earlier, made them pre-book an appointment by skype (Papoutsi et al., 2018, 53). Furthermore, refugees may feel trapped within these digital systems, with their identities reduced to mere data points and their lives subject to constant monitoring and control.

Thus the experiences of refugees in camps and their exposure to high-tech application systems and digital biometric traps highlight the complex interplay between biopolitics and necropolitics, as theorised by Achille Mbembe. In these worlds, the lives of refugees are regulated and controlled by various forces, where the feeling of being marked by violence, exclusion, and uncertainty proliferates. The following entanglements that constitute a major part of the urban experience of many are consequently responsible for the creation of such sites of social-spatial and digital extinction.

#### 4.1 Tangled in the highs and lows of tech

In migration governmentality, the incorporation of digitalization and biometric technologies in asylum application systems have also gained prominence in academic and political debates. There is a plethora of literature available on the topics of drivers of technologization of borders, private companies lobbying with governmental agencies along with critical analysis of surveillance and tracking migrants. However, as I have illustrated above, much of the use of such technologies directly or indirectly control, bridle and manage (channel) mobilities of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers and mainly affects the latter two as they apply and await for application procedures to operate. And as the procedures operate, they impact on the subjectivities and the lived (Lefebvre, 1974) experience in everyday life.

Tracing the genealogy of the use and deployment of border technologies in migration governmentality and investigation of low tech, like detention camps, barbed wire and police, shows a strong nexus which can't be disjointed from digitalization of border technologies. Thus with the intention of revealing the underlying processes of asylum application and the

technologies that administer these procedures, I argue that the analyses should shift away from probing into a state-gaze view, which as per Tazzioli, incorporates predominantly looking at surveillance and privacy (Tazzioli, 2023) as I pivot towards an investigation into how low/high tech impacts migrant's lives. This also undoes presentism, which instead of witnessing the development and deployment of technologies in contemporary context sees it as part of a historical *continuum*. Techno-solutionism in refugee governance is in fact not without historical continuity as expressed by here; "To avoid technological exceptionalism, more attention is needed to historical lineages and precedents"<sup>135</sup>. Francis Leo Collins also notes that although a significant amount of migration research has primarily focused on contemporary patterns of migration industries and infrastructure, there are numerous historical aspects of their functions and impacts that have not been adequately explored to date<sup>136</sup>. In doing so, this fusion of past and present, low and high tech, movement and stasis, digital and non-digital, allows the border to seep further into the domain of everyday life, marking a novel precedent in the fluidity of the border, and needs more attention in critical social theory.

This aligns with research in mobility studies, which propose that the state functions as a mobile entity that enables it to deter, reflect and channel the mobility of transnational subjects in their regulation and management<sup>137</sup>. Thus seeing such technologies as an infrastructure to manage, channel and bridle mobilities opens up the possibilities to take into account the disruptions that are enhanced by technologies along with migrants attempting to subvert this disruption. Though very minute compared to the technological infrastructure they are up against, during our student-led course in Athens 2023, I observed a subversive practice that migrants use to reclaim their agency. This is based on my experience of listening to the experiences of those who went through the journey of coming to the EU and then through the asylum application system.

Upon talking to multiple people awaiting asylum registration, their use of applications like Whatsapp, Maps.me and Viber to communicate along with finding information Facebook groups either created by migrants themselves or by NGOs, to help people seek relevant information and ask questions for specific situations. As one person mentioned, they have actively used Facebook (groups) to seek information on the topics of registration, application procedures as well as looking for support like residences and work. They got in contact with a group that sent them a pdf where all the steps to register as an asylum seeker in Greece were written. They later mentioned that it was difficult to apply online (on Greece's migration websites) so not only the pdf. helped but they also circulated it amongst other whatsapp groups. Maps.me and google maps were frequently mentioned for finding safe routes either in the cities or though terrains they had crossed. Someone mentioned that (digital) maps have saved them a great hassle to find routes while navigating in cities as they have almost (tried) stayed in many cities (in Greece and Italy).

The presence of ad hoc collection of information thus constitutes a database set by individuals from the bottom up, contesting the hard to navigate digital procedures. This, one could say, is the migrant's claim over technologies creating tactics in dodging an omnipresent border and avoiding fingerprinting. Digital intermediations, like websites, also became mandatory in asylum

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<sup>135</sup> Seuferling, Patrick. 2021. "Histories of humanitarian technophilia." IDEAS/RePEc. Accessed April 26, 2023. <https://ideas.repec.org/a/taf/rmobxx/v16y2021i5p670-687.html>.

<sup>136</sup> Collins, Fiona L. 2022. "Geographies of migration I: Platform migration." ResearchGate. Accessed April 26, 2023.

[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/347623149\\_Geographies\\_of\\_migration\\_I\\_Platform\\_migration](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/347623149_Geographies_of_migration_I_Platform_migration).

<sup>137</sup> Gill, Nick, Javier Caletrío, and Victoria Mason. 2011. "Introduction: Mobilities and Forced Migration."

application procedures. Greece introduced Skype in early phases to book appointments. People arriving by sea at the islands have to go to 'hotspots' to register; however, those who arrive via land or directly to mainland Greece are required to use Skype for communication<sup>138</sup>. However, due to understaffing, many calls in the initial phase went unanswered. In 2018, approximately 30,000 asylum applications were filed on the mainland but the Greek Asylum Service reported that only two staff members from the Asylum Service, along with an interpreter, were responsible for managing the Skype application system daily<sup>139</sup>.

To contest this imposition, many asylum seekers squatted in a building in Exarchia, Athens in 2018 protesting the implementation of Skype for registration. They were later evicted by the police which framed the eviction as an 'anti-drug' campaign<sup>140</sup>. Furthermore, another earlier protest marked many going on a hunger strike for poor living conditions in the camp of Elliniko. Their demands included 'opening up the city' to allow people to find accommodations there along with the end of skype's use to pre-register<sup>141</sup>. Many protests up till this day in Athens have repeated similar demands. In January, while on the course, we were met with a similar protest for the proposed demolition of the Prosfygika Refugee Apartment Complex in the city centre of Athens.

Isn't it inevitable for those getting subjugated by the system to not show up in the same space, i.e. right in the centre of the urban area, to protest for the very access the system strips them away from? While the urban spaces are the arena for (re)negotiations and contestations (Hughes & Maestri, 2017), the protest mentioned in the end of last paragraph was mainly organised by *Athenians*, with a very minute presence of inhabitants of the Complex. This stresses a significant reality: the agency to contest lies more often in the hands of *legally residing inhabitants*, while the refugees remain unheard... a position that reflects the enduring patterns of

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<sup>138</sup> AID. 2022. "Registration of the asylum application." Asylum Information Database. Accessed April 26, 2023.

<https://asylumineurope.org/reports/country/austria/asylum-procedure/access-procedure-and-registration-registration-asylum-application/>.

<sup>139</sup> AID. 2022. "Identification." Asylum Information Database. Accessed April 26, 2023.

<https://asylumineurope.org/reports/country/greece/asylum-procedure/guarantees-vulnerable-groups/identification/>.

<sup>140</sup> Stroux, Sotiria. 2019. "'FOR THE RIGHT TO A SAFE HOME'." Infomobile. Accessed April 26, 2023. <http://infomobile.w2eu.net/2019/04/19/four-refugee-squats-evicted-in-athens/>.

<sup>141</sup> OPlatz. 2017. "Greece: Hunger Strike in Elliniko Camp in Athens." OPlatz — Berlin Refugee Movement. Accessed April 26, 2023.

<https://oplatz.net/greece-hunger-strike-in-elliniko-camp-in-athens/>.

colonial oppression and power asymmetry.

Within this context, it becomes clear that the deployment of technologies at the periphery are not only used for controlling asylum seekers but for the creation and enhancement of their socio-political destitution. The consequence of such destitution is a chronic state of political poverty as the neocolonial technologies systematically obstruct access to asylum as well as social rights (Tazzioli, 2023, 6) stripping them away from the agencies and possibilities for resistance.

## 4.2 The spatial management of mobility.

What we are witnessing today at the periphery is driven by the necessity of consistency in the *flows* of goods and people within the borderless market of the central European Union, that keeps the *other* away (Papoutsi et al., 2018, 51) further pushing the violence of exclusion and control onto migrants and refugees. This distinct experiential border, judged by one's assumed contribution to the flow, is facilitated and amplified by the digital divide; either by opening up (deterritorialize) or *hardening up* (re-territorialize). Mobility; under this framework, could hence be an indication of the potential to travel across time and space or to have such a potential for movement, becoming a 'differentiated regime' (Papoutsi et al., 2018, 52) in a digitally social-sorted continent. And as I previously stressed, these *formations* of social sortments reflect the historic colonial dominance once exercised over territories and the populations that inhabited them.

Within literature on mobility, there is a tendency to understand it as an increased agency<sup>142</sup> and power<sup>143</sup> for an individual within the globalised world. However it is not witnessed as a facility that is available to everyone, rather it serves as an instrument of power which can be used or experienced punitively. Richard Sennett looks at this idea as a privilege which is associated with hypermobile middle class Western workers where the excess of mobility is seen as a trade that creates additional burden rather than freedom<sup>144</sup>. Is this excess of mobility then stripped away from *many* and given to very specific contributors of the *flow*? And does enabling interoperability assist in such facilitation?

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<sup>142</sup> Cresswell, Tim. 1999. *Embodiment, Power and the Politics of Mobility: The Case of Female Tramps and Hobos* Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers.

<sup>143</sup> Skeggs, Beverley. 2004. *Class, Self, Culture*. In *Class, Self, Culture*, London: Routledge.

<sup>144</sup> Sennett, Richard. 1998. *The Corrosion of Character: The Personal Consequence of Work in the New Capitalism*.

In wake of such questions, I claim that the sovereign EU as a supranational state possesses such absolute authority on entire populations and uses it for employing necropower. Done by punitive measures, it gives more agency of mobilities to those who adhere to the status quo or fall under its criteria while taking away from those who challenge it. And while these criterias have been facilitated and swelled by the use of digital technologies, they nevertheless have existed since the dawn of colonialism.

Such exercise of necropower in its true essence happens in refugee camps. Comparable with the punitive mobility control of a prison, necropolitically governed refugee camps become pseudo-protection zones in a digital guise. Necro-camps are exactly these digital (death)worlds, existing in a EU's liminal territory. While the physical bodies could potentially roam free under the illusion of freedom beyond the physicality of the camps, the virtual population are not only trapped but undergo persecution.

By inflating and deflating the statistics, populations can be made visible and invisible, as done by Greek Authorities in 2016 in order to maximise the population stranded inside the Greek Territory because the supply of valuable EU funds were predicted upon this number<sup>145</sup>. While many examples showed people being physically moved to other camps during the visits of members from the EU commission, false statistics of refugees by Greek authorities have been provided on many occasions<sup>146</sup>. While these are literal examples of movement of entire populations by Greek Authorities, as explained earlier, the processes of registration, pre registrations, waiting, rejection and geographic restriction are all parts of the mobility regime.

As per Noel B. Salazar, it is worth noting that the parameters and boundaries between forced and voluntary movements, constraints and choices are not always clear<sup>147</sup>. For example, when asylum seekers are granted legal status are subjected to restrictions to a certain place, while those without any formal/legal status might experience a 'higher' degree of mobility<sup>148</sup>. However none of these conditions are pleasant or acceptable and adds uncertainty along with frustration to those subjects.

The underlying power dynamics of mobility can also be seen as the politics of movement, as it involves more than just determining who can move and who cannot. Feminist geographer Doreen Massey, speaks of this in relation to movement that exists in respect to power geometries:

*' groups have distinct relations to... differentiated mobility: some are more in charge of it than others; some initiate flows and movements, others don't; some are more on the receiving end of it and others are effectively imprisoned by it.'* (Massey, 2004).

Thus the differentiated mobility regime actively segregates the populations, distributing them at the far edges of the *techno-physical spectrums*; 'at one end there is a group who can effectively use it and turn it into advantage; and at the other end of the spectrum there's this advantage group who although are doing a lot of physical movement yet are not 'in charge' of the process

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<sup>145</sup> Howden, Daniel, and Apostolis Fotiadis. 2017. "Where Did the Money Go? How Greece Fumbled the Refugee Crisis." The Guardian. Accessed April 26, 2023.

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/mar/09/how-greece-fumbled-refugee-crisis>.

<sup>146</sup> "The New Humanitarian. 2017. "Full Breakdown of What Money Went Where in Greece 2015-2016." Refugees Deeply. Accessed April 26, 2023.

<https://deeply.thenewhumanitarian.org/refugees/background/full-breakdown-of-what-money-went-where-in-greece-2015-2016>.

<sup>147</sup> Salazar, N. B. (2011). Anthropological Takes on (Im)Mobility. Retrieved April 26, 2023, from [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/256439291\\_Anthropological\\_Takes\\_on\\_ImMobility](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/256439291_Anthropological_Takes_on_ImMobility).

<sup>148</sup> Block, A., & Sigona, N. (2014). Sans Papiers: The Social and Economic Lives of Young Undocumented Migrants. Retrieved April 26, 2023, from <https://library.oapen.org/handle/20.500.12657/54142>.

in the same way' (Massey, 2004, 61). The differential mobility, as asserted by Massey, is also about power geometries which become all the more intricately governed by the architects of the digital borders. The spatial practices as seen in the predecessor colonial technologies of social sorting have now metamorphosed in digital realms of spatial management in an era of techno-colonial migration management.

Who is the architect? Does the architecture of the digital border regime close every gap in *potential* which could be leveraged by the refugees? Is it the entire working of the digital fortress enforced by FRONTEX? Or the interoperability that *criminalises* movement beyond its own desire? Does this architecture push people in the manufactured category of the disadvantaged? Or maybe the colonial legacies left behind the demand to preserve the power asymmetry; prioritising certain groups over others based on *imperial ruins* of racial taxonomies? Whatever it is, socially sorting populations, based on *racial taxonomies*, maintains these continuous intra-Schengen *flows* while using the modulus of differentiated mobilities... slowly, very slowly, allows or prevents the *others* to enter the preserved space of the EU. The sovereign of the *Union* here is the architect; which wounds, bruises, injures and slows down the movements from the peripheries to the centre. Either the peripheries could be of the Union or Elaionas camp, or the centre could be the Refugee Housing in the centre of Athens. The architects of the *interoperating-oppression* have the capacity to dislocate such centre/periphery imaginary with the absolute power to peripheralize any locality.

### 4.3 The matter of mobility and mortality

I have discussed the operations of the border regime for migrant management from different perspectives. The last aspect that is left is the effect of the regime on the person itself. What happens to the state of the matter, of the mind, of the body that undergoes such oppressive

subjugation? Here I resort to Mbembe again who denotes the working of necropower under such sovereign oppressive rule; '*sovereignty thus means the capacity to define who matters and who does not, who is disposable and who is not*' (Mbembe, 2003). The matter here also can be reframed as whose matter? In the context of human 'matter', one can consider how some bodies are perceived to have more value or significance than others. Cambridge dictionary defines matter as: "physical substance in the universe; a substance of a particular kind" or "to be important; the reason for pain or worry."<sup>149</sup> If the definition of matter can be expandable, so could be the definition of a body that constitutes such matter, along with the inhabitants of such bodies. Where humans are reduced to *just-living*, being stripped off from all the political and social worth they could have, rendered naked, legally by an omnipresent sovereign power. The infrastructure, either the colonial modalities (Cohn, 2002) or the technologies of interoperable border regime, is the fundamental to the being of such rendering.

As necropolitics is expanded in the workings of the EU border regime, necropower becomes exerted in screening and sorting migrants along with their reduction as a by-product of the working of the system but simultaneously the main function of the working of the system on the ruins. It reduces people to death. Reducing them to nothing. Assisting them be eliminated, either from their being, or the spaces where they want to reach. Yes, I see this as a very polemic statement in my thesis and I stand by it.

But how does one get killed or eliminated materially or otherwise by the sovereign? It is by the very functioning of the range of operations either by the system of asylum applications or by the bureaucracies or by the underlying imperial institutions that govern such systems and bureaus. How does one stop being? By the very reductive nature of the governing underlying ideology. The supremacy that in the first place gave birth to the *distinction*. It is in the very nature of the technologies of the

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<sup>149</sup> Cambridge Dictionary. (2023). MATTER | English meaning - Cambridge Dictionary. Retrieved April 27, 2023, from <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/matter>.

modern state that reduces people to nothing. Stripping them of their attributes, titles, nationalities, values that they carry. Reducing them to being in statistical data and numbers. I wonder if you reduced people to that level of being, could it be called being at all? Does it not make you, or me or them susceptible or vulnerable to cease? Either the social or spatial existence or the mobility. Or cease the rights to have rights? Is it not death that entangles a living person?

*Life in Death* is Mbembe's conception of the working of the advanced democratic societies, where living individuals are considered 'free and equal', and witnesses the necropolitics of migrant governance. Life in death thus exists in a direct binary opposition to the *free and equal*. Such expanded definition encompasses not only those who face death but also those subjected to social or political captivity and unequalness. This is orchestrated by subjugation or submission to those procedures (of asylum). According to Mbembe, an individual who cannot determine their own boundaries due to social or political constraints is not genuinely alive, as they have lost sovereignty over their own body (Mbembe, 2003). This gives rise to areas of existence for the *living dead*—localities of *multi-dimensional oppression* where those who have lost control over their own bodies find themselves under the absolute absence of techno-physical sovereignty. Awaiting the removal of either their data from the servers or their bodies from the camps, they find themselves subservient to the rules/procedures/applications. The sovereignty hence lies in the hands of the sovereign, in their handlings of mobilities. Here in the migration management and its spatial strategies, which works in either the physical or the digital *worlds*, providing or restraining the allocation of the right to have mobility while at the same time letting migrants be mobile or roam *freely* in a large geographical camp of Greece.

“For a rich person from a rich country the border has become an embarkment formality, a point of symbolic acknowledgment of their social status to be passed at a jog-trot. For a poor person from a poor country, however, the border tends to be something quite different. Not only is it an obstacle which is very difficult to surmount, but it is a place they run up against repeatedly, passing and repassing to it as and when they are



expelled or allowed to rejoin their family.”<sup>150</sup>

In such a hostile infrastructure created for controlling and governance, it becomes important to look at the social world of the asylum seekers by looking through the lens of movement, speed and temporality instead of observing techno-hyped domains of surveillance and tracking. Control over mobility, agency and freedom of some, *for some*, thus becomes central to the mobility regime. Contemporary democratic societies and their border regimes in the *multidimensional infrastructures of oppression* have stopped working in conventional ways. While they keep migrants and refugees, they also let them roam free without freedom. Such is the spatial and temporal uncertainty, an existential experience felt by many.

The hotspots of the refugee camps are not prisons anymore - they really don't need to be. The border police don't stop people from moving into the fortress - they don't need to anymore. They are now confronted by the technologies of industrially advanced, yet deeply colonial, nations and their oppressive powers that keeps people de facto immobile and mobile at the same time. That keeps them in a limbo of uncertainty and placelessness while providing them with accommodations either social, spatial or temporal, located close yet very far away. That keeps them waiting for longer with swift tools of identification and registration. That keeps them under a bigger geo-digital trap with a tiny fingerprint. While the databases make sure that these conditions proliferate for a longer duration of time. It is much more than an infrastructure and a set of

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<sup>150</sup> Balibar, É. (2002). *Politics and the Other Scene*. Verso.

operating procedures. It is an ideological institution that has been running for centuries now. One integrates into another in their working and re-working. The consequence of such is the potential spatial management of refugee mobility which reaches further than their implementations.

#### 4.4 Absencing as the Spatial Contract

Absencing as a spatial contract marks the deliberate act of excluding or erasing a range of people from space, be it material or immaterial as a direct or by-product of the working of the techno-charged border regime and its migrant govern-mentality. It highlights how power dynamics and systemic structures can shape and dictate; accessibility from inaccessibility; visibility from invisibility; representation from lack of it. This is a spatial contract as I conceptualise it, one of the many forms of exclusion experienced by migrants as they enter or attempt at entering *urban spheres*. The spatial contract is thus an urban experience of the *interoperable oppressive* realities many find themselves into, produced and reproduced time and again in an attempt to control and regulate their reaches, movements as well as activities. While broad geographic restrictions come as part of this spatial contract, it further proliferates by limiting their access rights. Starting from the confinement to designated hotspots or camps, temporary housing, it expands into the exclusion from *protected* spatial order of the major urban centres, severely curtailing the ability of migrants to integrate into local communities, access essential services, or find stable employment.

As a consequence of the performance and growth of the border regime, different forms of subjugating practices like; spatial, economic, environmental and legal injustices, emerge intersecting and often compounding each other. As the perpetuating (as well as self-perpetuating) in urban environments, they make access to resources and opportunities difficult for asylum seekers and many migrants alike. Much of the yielded experience is punitive in nature.

Gaja Maestri and J Edkins, in their paper 'Contested spaces of citizenship: camps, borders and urban encounters' introduced the 'non-citizen' as the complex relationship between citizenship, space, and power dynamics in the context of displacement faced by migrants. As citizenship is "inextricably and irreducibly spatial and have strong links with the material and discursive dimensions of different geographical place and scales" (Hughes & Maestri, 2017, 626), the allotment of certain populations at the limiting end of such spectrum produced 'non-citizens' (Hughes & Maestri, 2017) and in turn creates much widely understood narrative of urban as a space for citizenship; as a continual process of contestation and (re)negotiations.

I contest this *contestation* and lay importance to recognize that those under crushing necro-conditions have a sheer lack of capacity to engage in such contestation and (re)negotiations. This is severely limited due to their lack of political rights and agency. Such contestation can be seen in the *margins* where the existence in the centre becomes central to the struggle. This also allows the opening up of regimented urban narrative as a space of politics i.e. disruption of the inequalities, of the status quo. The urban area has historically been a space of exclusionary processes and discrimination against certain

ethnic minorities<sup>151</sup> but also a space of claims and everyday practices for citizenship that is enacted by marginal subjects.

However, as I have argued in the previous chapter, refugees lose their rights away to even have such claims/rights to the urban, and its concentration of resources. The sheer agency for contestation and re-negotiation is effectively stripped away from such worlds of absolute control, many are forced to live in. The consequent condition is *their* invisibility from urban spaces.

The idea of in-visibility here refers to not only the physical or psychological absencing of refugees but also the structural and digital disappearance in data and statistics, as also explained in the example earlier in the spatial management of mobility where Greek Authorities deliberately expanded or deflated the numbers of refugees in camps to get EU funding . Here immobility organically gets compounds with invisibility to perpetuate the conditions for a new form of *multi-dimensional* exploitation of refugees. Having enormous infrastructures to statisticize bodies, these practices can make certain populations, mainly the disadvantaged, visible or invisible, inflating or deflating the body counts, either in the physical or digital, both have their own atrocious consequences on the realities of many. in-Visibility thus illustrates the final spatial product of the political instrumentalization of technologies for migration management. Such exercise of power can be deeply problematic, yet normalised, in governmental structures that are predominantly oriented around data-driven decision and policy making that also happen to be at the core of Europeanization of borders.

## 4.5 Tracing Absencing

The operations continue to increase the absences from the urban. The urban, similar to an organism, is affected by everything occurring within its unseen territories, and these are the concealed localities from where a few gets pushed away, as further as possible. This process, as I have insisted, does not exist in isolation but appears as part of a broader socio-technical and historical context. The intangible realm (and *ruins*), reacts to the perpetual influx and fluctuation of information, thereby adding to the city's numerous dimensions of absencing.

The synopsis, outlines, or the narratives of the people mentioned above simply were not lyrical descriptions of their experience but reveal *other* existences that, like them, are also hidden from the urban spaces, from the popular narrative as well as the academic and political discourses. Asylum seekers often experience significant trauma before and during their journey to Europe, including exposure to violence, torture, and other forms of persecution. The stress of the asylum process, coupled with the challenges of adapting to a new country and culture, can exacerbate existing mental health issues or contribute to the development of new ones.

Such an existence of the populations being under a constant state of injury or intentional wounding which is the result of systematically introduced procedures to stop or slow down non-Europeans into settling down. The system in particular doesn't act in such a way but such subjugation to injury and absence is as a byproduct of its operations. One could also see it as a creation of the death world, sites where such existence becomes the status quo.

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<sup>151</sup> Canepari, E., & Rosa, E. (2017). A quiet claim to citizenship: mobility, urban spaces and city practices over time..

The long waiting periods in order to gain an appointment either by Skype or by lodging one in hotspots, the uncertainty of what the decision of the application result is going to be, which comes prior to the state of uncertainty where one gets pushed into, for securing asylum application appointment in the first place. It is proliferated by the collective experience of a huge number of people undergoing the same process in the camps which in the first place are located at the outskirts of the city if not inside it. The ones that are inside appear to be heterotopia's clear manifestation in themselves. This existence marks the segregation of those who are considered to be the others from the population that are considered to be more human than *them*.

At certain points it also becomes irrelevant as to where the refugee camps are located. Whether they're located inside the cities or at the cities or countries on the continent's periphery, the border regime finds itself now empowered enough to govern the mobility of the people beyond the domain of physical constraints. Interoperability, empowered by the digital omnipresence of a global scale information technology infrastructure, is now omnipresent. The state of mind, for those who experience its vast oppressive power, remains the same everywhere. Although the explicit violence of colonial governance has diminished, the refusal to recognize humanity and even the allowance of death for certain populations persist in more subtle and concealed ways. Within the context of forced migration into Europe, it is the refugees and asylum seekers that have been made subordinate to, that have been made to obey; this lawful subjugation of necropolitical governance. Thus the production of such existence grows beyond the borders of the conventional confinements of the Camp, one can then also see necropolitics expanding beyond the spatial and temporal boundaries of the history into the ever present absencing in the urban.

*Absence here is a visual injury.*

## A horizon, bleak

Masturbation as a taboo exists predominantly in many parts of the world and also gets socially stigmatised in many South Asian societies. A frowned upon act, in Pakistan its stigmatisation also gets influenced by religious beliefs in Islam that somewhat characterises it as a sin as well as social norms where myths related to it affecting your mental and physical health along with the strength of bones continue to exist. I started thinking about it days after my encounter with a Pakistani I met in Athens who mentioned that those you masturbated remained in Turkey, yet I did not and I made it to Europe.

My ignorance and naïveté in the moment made me think of it as a light hearted, yet vaguely vulgar comment but it kept on running through my mind for a while. It hit me days later as to what he meant. It meant a journey through an impassable mountain where your every joule of energy gets squeezed out to make your way up. This crossed with another thought, where another Pakistani man I met in Lisbon laughed at his wound saying 'even their dogs bite considerately' while reiterating his encounter with Hungarian border forces. I at this point have no position to interpret these comments further but what I feel behind this laughter is a traumatic experience. A trauma that even after years continues to exist, and doesn't seem to go away.

It is much like the *ruins* of imperialism that have continued to find its way to the present day, and much like my pessimistic opinion, will continue to do so in the future. The situation doesn't seem to be improving and I at the time of writing this conclusion (in mid-May of 2023) feel that it will not in the future either. The grounds have been prepared for the further strengthening of the borders. And in between such consolidation, I see the colonial legacy's continuation as well as nourishment. They would continue to shape contemporary border regimes and in the wake of actual emergencies of climate change along with the proliferation of conflict in Sudan, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran, along with other parts of the Global South, would act even more rapidly.

The thesis firstly demonstrated how the *abandonment* by governance and management of refugee mobilities in Europe has led directly to many *beings* subjected to structural forms of violence. I illustrated this by mechanisms of registration and documentation that begins at the very instant someone enters the European Union's territory and as I argued, that the beginning of such processes are directly tied to the same practices and ideologies that enabled slavery and eradication of indigenous population in the first place.

Secondly, with the working of colonial ideologies in migration governance, it coerces the realities of refugees in the EU Member States, forcing them to live under intense subjugation and oppression. In the end, Inhabitation in refugee camps, hotspots and urban areas in Athens is marked by a contract to be disenfranchised as 'other' and thus opens up

an argument to look inside the European Union's spaces to examine the continuation of colonialism. And see how its stealthier and more violent form stays close to their localities of origin, hidden in plain view.

In the study, the anecdotes from structural violence reached their apogee in Greece while I witnessed people experience the necropolitically governed asylum application system. It also made me reach the stage to self-contradict the claim where I attempted to expand on the heterogeneity of refugee and asylum seeker's experiences, which I failed to do so. At this point, I lack the sheer emotional, psychological and intellectual <sup>152</sup> resources in the setting of this academically enclosed *institution* as well as the framework of Master's thesis to even partially capture the heterogeneity of a small group under such uncertainty.

Reluctant to close the thesis on a grim note, I call for the accountability of the European Union's *continuation* of historically concealed yet persistent brutalities inside its spaces. For the trauma it inflicted on societies a century ago, as well as the inherited trauma it will produce on the generations to come. By those who have or will, for which I desperately hope, find their way out of the system.

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<sup>152</sup> Or whatever it is in the first place.

*For life will find ways. It will. It has to.*

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