Unsanctioned Agency
Risk Profiling, Racialized Masculinity, and the Making of Europe's "Refugee Crisis"

Veronika Zablotsky

When unprecedented numbers of displaced persons began to arrive in Greece by boat in late 2014, fleeing from escalating violence in Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, and elsewhere, via Turkey and the Aegean Sea, images of washed up rubber boats and discarded life jackets proliferated in the European press. Camera teams and bystanders captured young and old, exhausted but relieved to be alive, disembarking by day and by night. Before continuing on their journey, some reportedly took a moment to document their survival with a digital photograph for relatives and friends. Either alone or in groups, they were captured by onlookers as some posed to snap a "selfie" with smartphones, mounted on handheld monopods, also known as "selfie sticks," that allow one to adjust the angle of the self-portrait.

Amid ongoing debates about the proper response to unsanctioned border crossings, these images did not generally elicit sympathy from online commentators. Instead, they seemed to surprise and incense their critics on social media. Why did a seemingly vernacular sight prompt such outrage? Taking the negative reception of so-called "refugee selfies" as an analytical point of departure, this chapter interrogates the implicit assumptions that were challenged by these images in order to critique the constitutive exclusions of humanitarian discourse. By asking why some refugees appeared in excess of the passive roles that were assigned to them in public and international discourse, I illustrate how the incessant repetition and circulation of visual media depicting their alleged transgressions produced a new kind of subject.[1]

Based on an analysis of relevant policy documents, international advocacy, and international media reporting between 2015 and 2018, I unpack the gendered and racialized scripts that govern the construction of unaccompanied men, in particular young men and minors, as suspiciously agential and therefore less likely vulnerable. This chapter brings transnational feminist thought and postcolonial studies to bear

1 Among the vast and largely anonymous archive of "refugee selfies" circulating on social media, the case of Anas Modamani's selfie with German Chancellor Angela Merkel in 2015 may be the most publicized. After the image appeared in reports that falsely linked Modamani to terrorist attacks in Berlin and Brussels, the young Syrian refugee sued the social media platform *Facebook* in a German court for failing to prevent libel. The high-profile case was widely covered in the mainstream media. He lost the lawsuit in 2017. See, for example, Reinbold, "Hallo Facebook, dieser Mann is kein Terrorist."

on activist and academic discussions of humanitarianism, whiteness, and neoliberalism in Europe to problematize the production of the "single male refugee" as a racial profile that facilitated the consolidation of more restrictive and increasingly deadly European border regimes.[2]

It begins with a discussion of the debate surrounding "refugee selfies" to illustrate how racist tropes about sexual and religious excess were projected onto mobile technology in the hands of displaced persons, particularly young, able-bodied men from the Middle East, often assumed to be heterosexual and Muslim. During the so-called "European refugee crisis" of 2015, the smartphone became a signifier of unsanctioned mobility through media reports that portrayed groups of refugees as "crowds" which coordinated their cross-border movement through social media, geo-positioning, and mobile messaging applications. Giving a brief overview of asylum law in Europe, I unpack why the use of technology by refugees was perceived to stand in contradiction to claims about vulnerability.

In order to demonstrate how the racial profile of "the refugee," as an "unconscious prototypical figure" in the Western imagination, was informed by this emergent image regime, I analyze how its framing operations were canonized in Ai Weiwei's *Human Flow* (2017), a documentary film in wide digital release, and Brandon Bannon's "Ifo 2, Dadaab Refugee Camp," a photo taken at the border of Somalia and Kenya in 2011. The latter was selected as a frontispiece for *Insecurities: Tracing Displacement and Shelter*, an exhibition that entered the permanent collection of the Museum of Modern Art in New York City in 2017, which aligned images of displacement around the world to construct the idea of "the refugee" in a global frame. Amplified by high-powered institutional platforms, both works conjure a paradigmatic global aesthetic of displacement through technologies such as airborne drones, handheld devices, and the internet. Despite the explicit intent to raise awareness about the refugee condition, dominant modes of narration in humanitarian discourse—the bird's-eye view of the refugee camp, crowds photographed in extreme wide angle, representations of unnamed individuals in extreme close up, and the frog-perspective, a voyeuristic angle that does not allow to return the gaze—erase the agency of the displaced in the popular imagination of forced displacement.

In order to think through the "refugee selfie" as a genre that restores the possibility of political action, I draw on Hannah Arendt's critique of human rights in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* and her conception of freedom in *The Human Condition*. As Arendt observed in her remarks on the effects of mass displacement after World War II, *de facto* stateless persons lose a world to act upon in which they are regarded as particular individuals. Since "selfies" are by definition photographs that are taken by the subject of an image, they inevitably reflect how the photographer intended to be seen and encountered. After revisiting the genre's potential for self-representation, I complicate

2 Insofar as the racial profile is an "imago" that "orientates [a] subject's way of apprehending others" (Laplanche & Pontalis *The Language of Psycho-Analysis*, 84, in Han, *Letters of the Law*, 77), it constructs racialized others as figures that are always already suspect and criminalized. In line with this logic, the German parliament asserted in 2018 that racial profiling was permissible on a case by case basis. According to §23 of the Federal Police Act (*Bundespolizeigesetz*), racial profiling is legally sanctioned in border zones or inland areas declared to be "dangerous." See Deutscher Bundestag, "Schlussfolgerung aus der neuen Rechtsprechung zu verdachtsunabhängigen Personenkontrollen durch die Bundespolizei."

its emancipatory promise through a closer look at the alienating effects of the materiality of mobile technology.

Secondly, I examine the discursive strategies through which sympathetic advocates and consultants have attempted to reframe the digital literacy of refugees as an economic resource for host societies. I draw on Michel Foucault's late lectures on neoliberalism to critique representations of refugees as enterprising subjects that make rational choices in uncertain circumstances. Since legal title to protection is predicated on proof of vulnerability, the discursive generalization of human capital theory in the humanitarian field undermines the space of asylum. Through an analysis of the German debate about "lane switching" (*Spurwechsel*) between parallel asylum and immigration "tracks," I argue that the application of economic logic in the humanitarian field obliterates the key legal distinction between asylum and immigration.

Lastly, I draw on Banu Bargu's framework of "biosovereignty" and Achille Mbembe's articulation of "necropolitics" to reconsider the European Union's "war on human trafficking" as a calculated exposure to death at Europe's external and "liquid" borders. Drawing on a report by *Frontex*, the private border agency of the European Union,[3] I chart how border policies are reduced to a technical matter through calculations of risk that represent young, unaccompanied men as a security threat. When refugees are reframed as economic agents, however, this projected risk is effectively transferred onto the individual.

Beyond declarations of good will, the structural denial of human freedom and dignity faced by *de facto* stateless and racialized peoples calls for an abolitionist response. Over six decades ago, Hannah Arendt argued that humanitarianism was fundamentally flawed from its inception in a world of nation-states. Its constitutive exclusions are missed by neoliberal advocates that seek to improve "refugee management" through "better" design. I revisit the emancipatory demands of refugee activists in Germany during the "refugee strike" of 2013 to reflect on the ways in which the antiracist politics of transnational solidarity are threatened to be eclipsed by the exclusive focus on border enforcement.

3 The acronym *Frontex* (short for French *frontières extérieures*, "external borders") is the name of the "European Agency for the Management of Operational Cooperation at the External Borders of the Member States of the European Union" that was established by Council Regulation (EC) 2007/2004. Vested with a larger budget and expanded powers to collect biometric data, coordinate deportations, and destroy the boats and equipment of human traffickers, the agency was renamed "The European Border and Coast Guard Agency" in 2016. Its stated purpose is to integrate European border management in order to "better manage growing mixed migratory flows" (preamble 1), a category denoting the alleged presence of individuals that are believed to pose a "high-risk" among persons assessed to be vulnerable and therefore "low-risk." This reflects a shift in emphasis from the vulnerability of asylum seekers to the "vulnerability" of states (preamble 21). See "Regulation (EU) 2016/1624 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14 September 2016 on the European Border and Coast Guard and amending Regulation (EU) 2016/399 of the European Parliament and of the Council and repealing Regulation (EC) No 863/2007 of the European Parliament and of the Council, Council Regulation (EC) No 2007/2004, and Council Decision 2005/267/EC."

The Figure of the "Single Male Refugee"

In 2015, overwhelmed Greek authorities left the displaced to fend for themselves in improvised shelters and makeshift encampments that sprung up at transit stations, in city centers, as well as near border crossings. Instead of remaining in Greece, hundreds of thousands of asylum seekers embarked on a long journey by foot to reach Germany by crossing Greece, Macedonia, Serbia, Croatia, Slovenia, and Austria. The spatial imaginary of a "Balkan route" across the European continent dominated the German news for months on end after Hungary closed its southern border in October 2015. As refugees traveled in groups, images of so-called "caravans" soon became ubiquitous in print, television, and social media. Media reported that "crowds" were coordinating their movement through mobile devices.[4] Animated graphics of maps with arrows offered a daily reminder of the "progression" of a fluid, shifting, and destabilizing force imagined to "sweep" across Europe. Military metaphors entered the mainstream to describe Europe as a "fortress" and refugees as an "army."[5]

In this political climate, images of refugees posing on the beaches of Lesbos, Samos, and other Greek islands to take selfies shortly after landing sparked outrage on social media. To some, these self-portraits seemed to cast doubt on the merit of their asylum claims. They questioned how *forced* the migration of someone could be who thought ahead to bring a "selfie stick." Countering these negative perceptions, the newspaper *The New York Times* declared that the smartphone was an essential of the "21st-Century Migrant."[6] *TIME* magazine invited readers to "See How Refugees Use Selfies to Document Their Journey."[7]

In times of global communication technology, internet-enabled mobile phones, closed-messaging applications, and social media have become features of everyday life across the dividing line of the Global North and the Global South. Yet, Western publics continue to be steeped in imageries that position racial others as outside of time (and thus outside the present's technological affordances).[8] The sight of refugees with smartphones, taking "selfies" no less, raised eyebrows because it unsettled implicit assumptions about the imagined other of Europe. The millennial subjectivity identified with the quotidian aesthetics of the "selfie" disrupted the phantasy of Western superiority vis-à-vis refugees. Its casual display broke with narrative conventions that construct refugees as objects of humanitarian relief.

Despite associations with self-absorption and vanity, the digital literacy encoded in the "selfie" seemed to represent agency, the capacity to act on an environment rather than being determined by it. It inserted refugees as narrators at the center of a story that Western audiences believed *they* should be able to control. Through mobile technology, these selfies symbolically repeated the material assertion of self in relation to a landscape. They also inserted the face, conventionally imagined as the locus of a par-

4 The European Commission Unit on Irregular Migration and Return Policy promptly commissioned a study on the use of digital media in refugees' decision making about secondary movement in Italy. See Sanchez et al., "A study of the communication channels used by migrants and asylum seekers in Italy."

5 See McVeigh, "Temperatures Plunge as Refugee Army Trudges Across Europe."

6 Brunwasser, "A 21st-Century Migrant's Essentials."

7 Laurent, "See How Refugees Use Selfies to Document Their Journey."

8 Fabian, *Time and the Other.*

ticular identity, at the center of a terrain that had only become available as backdrop after the unsanctioned crossing of a territorial border. This self-assertion/insertion, represented by the "refugee selfie," cancelled out rightful claims to protection in the eyes of some observers because it contradicted ingrained assumptions about the presumed passivity and victimhood of refugees. The capacity to act under conditions of uncertainty seemed to cast doubt on the vulnerability of unaccompanied young men in particular.

Through the lens of televised, printed, and online news, pre-existing racist tropes about sexual and religious excess associated with Middle Eastern men layered onto the smartphone as a sign of excessive mobility and agency. Some wondered why able-bodied men would leave behind their dependents, scorning unaccompanied men for "deserting" women and children in conflict zones. Instead of protecting vulnerable others, they appeared to seek protection only for themselves. Race, gender, age, presumed ability, and ascribed religious identity as Muslim, rather than Christian, mediated *whose* unsanctioned mobility appeared suspect. The enabling uses of mobile technology were collapsed with the agential excess projected onto racialized masculinity. This image regime stoked fears about "single male refugees" as potential "terrorists" that might infiltrate the European Union *in disguise*. At the intersections of race, sexuality, and geopolitics, the masculinity of racialized men was questioned because they sought asylum instead of engaging in combat. At the same time, their racialized masculinity was interrogated as a potential threat to public order in Germany and elsewhere.[9] Racialized as a "hyper-masculine" suspect, the "single male refugee" was profiled as a security risk. He emerged as a racialized and sexualized figure that confronted the constitutive exclusions of humanitarian discourse.

Modern humanitarianism first emerged in the aftermath of the genocidal violence inflicted upon the Ottoman Armenian, Greek, and Assyrian communities of Anatolia.[10] After World War I, newly formed international organizations such as the League of Nations and development agencies such as Near East Relief mobilized new technologies and visual media, first and foremost film and photography, to shore up public support for their relief operations in the Eastern Mediterranean.[11] Raising the specter of a world-historical confrontation between Christianity and Islam, this cultural production operated through tropes of gender and sexuality to represent Armenian women and orphans, in particular, as innocent, devoid of agency, and therefore in need of international protection. At its inception, the sexual economy of humanitarian representation secured the phallic status of Western sovereignty in the international arena by positioning European and North American audiences as saviors.[12] The cul-

9 See Abdelmonem, Bavelaar, Wynne-Hughes, and Galán, "The 'Taharrush' Connection."

10 Watenpaugh, *Bread from Stones*.

11 Torchin, *Ravished Armenia*.

12 The Christian genealogy of the relationship between humanitarian subjects and the West as their "savior" has perhaps become less accentuated over time. The desire to "save," however, continues to figure prominently in secular dynamics of foreign intervention and occupation in Southwest Asia and North Africa. The conceptual core of the colonial relationship was famously explained by Gayatri C. Spivak as "White men are saving brown women from brown men" (*A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, 285). This sentence is often cited to critique feminist support for foreign interventions and occupation in the Middle East. See Abu-Lughod, "Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving?".

tural repertoire of humanitarianism generated stereotypical attributes of femininity such as helplessness and passivity as standards of legitimacy that persist in the popular imagination of displaced persons. Films such as *Ravished Armenia* (1918), a silent film that was lauded for its documentary realism, inscribed Orientalist or racial phantasies about Muslim men as predators.[13]

Dominant representations of refugees often center women and conflate them with children (and elders) to produce "womenanchildren"[14] as a victim unit that is presumed to be *essentially* vulnerable.[15] Refugees who are unaccompanied men, by contrast, are constructed as self-possessed and willful agents. During the media production of the so-called "European refugee crisis," the "single male refugee" emerged as a figure whose capacity to be vulnerable or exposed to violence was denied. In order to humanize "single male refugees," advocates emphasized that unaccompanied men could also be care-givers.[16] By pointing out that mobile technology connected "single male refugees" to elderly parents and dependents too weak and vulnerable to undertake the dangerous journey themselves, the smartphone was represented as a life line. Contesting the idea that smartphones were symbolic of excessive agency, advocates resignified mobile phones as a means of caring for others left behind in a *selfless* attempt to reach Europe on *their* behalf.

Yet, as images of young men holding children proliferated, the European Union's private border police *Frontex* declared that "managing" groups of refugees required strategically separating the vulnerable from the suspect. In its report "Risk Analysis for 2016," *Frontex* maintained that "young single men [mixed] with more vulnerable families, including women and children […] to facilitate their progression."[17] By suggesting that "young single men" strategically infiltrated "crowds" to use the vulnerability of others as a *shield*, the vulnerability of young single men was denied and their mere presence profiled as "high-risk."[18] The United States have altogether barred unac-

13 See Zablotsky, "Governing Armenia."

14 Enloe, *Bananas, Beaches and Bases*, 25.

15 Gendered constructions of the essential victimhood of women obscure that men can be victimized as well, and obfuscate the ways in which women may become perpetrators of violence, including sexualized violence (see Moser & Clark, *Victims, Perpetrators or Actors?*).

16 For example, the organization "Jewish Voice for Peace" commissioned a poster in 2015 to counter Islamophobic attitudes about refugees in the public eye. Micah Bazant, a visual artist based in the United States, created a linoleum print of a middle-aged man with large eyes and a prominent nose, short dark hair, and a short beard. An infant's face is peaking through the opening of his wide jacket while a faint smile is playing around the corners of the adult's mouth. He is pressing the child against his body and protecting it with his left arm. While the man's hair is blowing in the wind, the child is wearing a hat. Both directly face the audience. Their black and white outline occupies the bottom half of a vertical rectangle. The upper half is cold blue, evoking the sea. In bold white letters at the top, Bazant placed the all-capitalized message "Refugees Are Welcome Here." Interestingly, the field of gender studies has recently turned its attention to "caring masculinities" as an emerging concept. However, it appears I am the first to note that some representations of men as caregivers are impactful because they invert expectations to counter the dehumanization of racialized men. See Elliott, "Caring Masculinities."

17 Frontex Risk Analysis Unit, "Risk Analysis for 2016," 45.

18 Frontex Risk Analysis Unit, "Risk Analysis for 2016," 61. The heightened visibility of unaccompanied men arriving at Europe's external borders in 2015 also provoked a sex panic that continues to play out

companied men from resettlement schemes for Syrian citizens while Canada exempts only "single male refugees" that position themselves as members of the LGBTQ community.[19] Neither legally entitled to asylum, nor declared regular enemies in combat, displaced persons suspected of terrorist intentions on the basis of race and gender are made, once over, "outlaws by definition."[20]

Vulnerability, Mobility, and Detention

Asylum cases in Europe are determined on the basis of calculations about the vulnerability of petitioners. Only individuals that can prove they are at risk of torture and persecution by their country of citizenship on the basis of political, ethnic, religious, or sexual attributes will be considered eligible for asylum. Economic insecurity or civilian threats of violence are not recognized as valid grounds for asylum claims. By strategically designating this risk as *low*, and labelling states such as Afghanistan as "safe countries of origin," EU officials exploit loopholes in international law to carry out blanket deportations of groups statistically considered "*unlikely* to obtain asylum."[21]

In violation of the European Charter of Fundamental Rights,[22] petitioners from countries other than Syria currently live in fear of deportation because their right to due process and individual case review is not guaranteed. Instead of ensuring that persons are not deported to places where they will be at risk of death, torture, inhuman or degrading treatment, a running roster of countries of origin are declared "safe" by the stroke of a pen. Individuals seeking asylum within the European Union are required to register with local authorities upon first entry to the Schengen zone.[23] As the review process runs its course, which can take several years, the mobility of petitioners is restricted to the administrative districts in which their cases are first filed. After this initial registration, so-called "irregular secondary movement" within the Europe-

in response to isolated but highly mediatized incidents involving young men that have been granted asylum in Germany. More recently, there have been debates about mandatory forensic testing on underage asylum seekers to confirm their "biological" age.

19 This exemption serves to portray Canada as a human rights leader while suggesting that Middle Eastern societies are inherently homophobic. Similar to women and children, LGBTQ subjects are selectively included in order to legitimize the construction of heterosexual Muslim men as inherently dangerous. Jasbir Puar has argued that liberal states routinely "pinkwash" imperialist policies to maintain moral exceptionalism. See Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages*.

20 Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 283.

21 Frontex Risk Analysis Unit, "Risk Analysis for 2016."

22 "Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union."

23 Since 2006, entry and control at internal and external borders of the European Union is regulated by the so-called "Schengen Border Code" of the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union. The document established an "area without internal borders in which the free movement of persons is ensured" (preamble 1) while requiring check points and risk analysis to manage the external borders of the Schengen zone. See "Regulation (EC) No. 562/2006 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 March 2006 establishing a Community Code on the rules governing the movement of persons across borders (Schengen Borders Code)."

an Union is prohibited.[24] This is primarily to ensure that asylum claimants can swiftly be deported if their petition is denied.

For those who cannot afford a visa or plane ticket to their desired destination within the European Union, few alternatives exist to risking their lives at sea and crossing the Mediterranean or Aegean Sea without prior authorization. On the other side, those who survive the perilous passage are registered and, depending on their nationality, either immediately deported or detained in EU-funded camps. These so-called "reception centers" or "hotspots" reportedly fail to provide even basic shelter due to "unsanitary" and "unsafe" conditions.[25] Overcrowded and managed by police, an archipelago of detention centers has spawned across Greece to hold hundreds of thousands of displaced persons until their asylum cases are processed.[26]

In March 2016, the European Union signed a "return" agreement with Turkey that stipulates all new arrivals from Syria are to be immediately deported to offshore detention centers set up on the Turkish side of the Syrian border. Here, in these EU-subsidized zones of *de facto* lawlessness, petitioners are to wait until case workers determine the merit of their asylum cases. Only petitioners that were present in Greece before the agreement went into effect were permitted to remain. The agreement further envisioned that in exchange for each Syrian refugee that is deported after reaching Greece without authorization, one would be approved and relocated from a detention center in Turkey to a member state of the EU. The so-called "one-for-one scheme," however, failed to deliver on its promise of providing "vulnerable people" with a "safe and legal way […] to reach the EU."[27] With "return missions" stalled by the refusal of Greek Appeal Boards to authorize deportations to Turkey, and several member states of the EU blocking the scheme, more and more refugees are funneled into administrative detention in Greece and forced to wait without the prospect of a speedy resolution.

Regimes of Representation

Daily reporting about informal tent settlements "in the middle of Europe" generated anxieties about states losing control of national borders in light of the seemingly unruly "flows and streams" of the displaced. Images of "caravans," filmed and photographed from above, at an angle, or at a distance, became a staple of televised news. Drawing on the visual canon of humanitarianism, the constant repetition of these images constituted a referential regime of crisis that proved portable.[28]

Over the course of the twentieth century, Western publics have become accustomed to bird's-eye views of refugee camps *elsewhere*. Their sight in the outskirts and

24 EU Regulation 2016/1624, preamble 18.

25 "Greece: Refuge 'Hotspots' Unsafe, Unsanitary; Women, Children Fearful, Unprotected; Lack Basic Shelter." *Human Rights Watch* (2016).

26 Mitchell & Sparke, "Hotspot Geopolitics versus Geosocial Solidarity."

27 European Commission, "European Agenda on Migration," 4.

28 This representational regime is mobilized beyond its association with the "European refugee crisis" of 2015–2016. In late 2018, for example, reports about a "migrant caravan" moving from Honduras towards the southern border of the United States provoked a governmental crisis over funding for a federal border wall.

centers of cities throughout Europe provoked a strong response. Associated with mud and tarps, the informal quality of these sites is often presented as evidence of their transient character. Despite their "purposely deteriorating building material,"[29] many of these temporary settlements have become permanent fixtures, housing millions of displaced persons and refugees worldwide. The destabilizing effects of forced migration, further, threaten the appearance of order, fixity, and durability through which modern statecraft is enacted. This imaginary of states as fortified compounds is contrasted by metaphors of liquefaction and dissolution that are often deployed to allegorize forced migration. Refugee camps therefore function as sites of detention that are designed to contain and regularize movement in spaces of enclosure. The effect is boredom, the phenomenological experience of "abandonment in emptiness,"[30] as a calculated outcome of human life forced into the invariable repetition of administrative time.

From above, the order imposed by the humanitarian agency is accentuated. Unlike the angled perspective characteristic of the "selfie," the bird's-eyes view constructs a central point of view from which all life in the camp can be overseen or surveilled as a governable substrate for state-imposed order. This aerial view also dominated reporting on ground-level migrations and "crowds" of refugees in Europe in 2015 and 2016. Soon after, in late 2016, the Museum of Modern Art in New York City opened the exhibition *Insecurities: Tracing Displacement and Shelter*, an interactive installation of images, immersive objects, and artifacts engaging with architectures and infrastructures of forced migration around the world. Between a wall of images and an installation of illuminated boxes, arranged on the floor, hung a photograph taken by photojournalist Brandon Bannon in 2011, enlarged to show an aerial view of Ifo 2, one of four settlements that make up the Dadaab refugee complex in Kenya.[31] It was selected as the cover image of the exhibition. Stretching in neat rows across a clay-colored plain, plastic covered shelters line an arid landscape, leaving room for unpaved thoroughfares and several large, rectangular areas. Instead of the ground-level realities lived by the residents, the angle of "Ifo 2, Dadaab Refugee Camp" recalls "the diplomatic, bureaucratic, and capitalistic work of governments, institutions, and entities elsewhere."[32] This curatorial choice illustrates how the visual discourse of humanitarianism reproduces the aesthetic of the state while responding to the expediencies of refugee management.

29 Herscher & Siddiqi, "Spatial Violence," 276.

30 Agamben, *The Open*, 63.

31 According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHRC), the Dadaab refugee complex was housing 235,269 registered refugees and asylum seekers in January 2018. Dagahaley, the first camp, was established in 1991. Ifo, Ifo 2, and Hagadera were added to accommodate the large influx of displaced persons during the civil war in Somalia. Dadaab refugee complex is one of the largest refugee camps in the world, though it is far surpassed by the Kutupalong refugee camp in Bangladesh which houses close to 900,000 Rohingya refugees from Myanmar, followed by Bidi Bidi in Uganda which hosts 285,000 displaced persons from South Sudan. The oldest, continuously existing refugee camps are situated in Lebanon and Jordan. They were set up by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) after millions of Palestinians were displaced as a result of the creation of the state of Israel in 1948. Mayukwayuka refugee settlement in Zambia was established in 1966 and hosts over 56,000 refugees, asylum seekers, and former refugees who continue to reside in surrounding resettlement schemes.

32 Siddiqi, "On Humanitarian Architecture," 520.

Over the course of 2016, Ai Weiwei, a mixed-media artist exiled from China in 2015, directed the film *Human Flow* over the course of 2016. The feature-length documentary takes its audience on a visual *tour de force* across twenty-three countries on four continents to illustrate that forced displacement is a global phenomenon. In this indexical sense, it expands on the project of the *Insecurities* exhibition. Its aesthetic engagement with spaces of humanitarianism serves as another high-profile example which illustrates the symbolic force of violence which seems to permeate even sympathetic representations of displacement. Through footage recorded by drones and smartphones, the film accomplishes a monumental scale while offering an intimate look at the humanity of refugees worldwide. Opening with a bird's-eye view of an unidentified refugee camp in Iraq, set in an arid desert plain, the film cuts to a sequence of shots from a very low angle, the so-called frog-perspective near the horizon line. Shrubbery, covering most of the screen while appearing out of focus, frames children in the distance. The audience is then teleported into a beige canvas tent where its gaze is directed toward the silhouette of a girl with two braids. Unnamed, she appears as a figure that looks out through the opening of the tent into the glaring sunlight, holding onto a strap and facing her uncertain future.[33] Following this sequence, Ai cuts to a group of women appearing to bake bread in a clay oven lowered into the ground, before moving on to a group of men crouching around a security guard who holds a stack of paperwork. The film thus establishes the gendered division of labor in the camp by depicting women as caregivers of children and men as agents that interact with the state.

Within its first ten minutes, *Human Flow* not only reproduces the visual canon of humanitarianism through the camera perspectives it deploys but also narratively reinforces gendered stereotypes about the Middle East. While bird's-eye views invoke the central authority of the state, the frog perspective positions the spectator as a voyeur that can learn about life in the camp as a seemingly impartial observer whose gaze cannot be returned. Some of the footage filmed at eye-level closely resembles the mugshot, though many interlocutors remain unnamed.[34] Some images captured by drones reproduce the trope of moving "caravans" as if to visualize the metaphor of "human flow" that gives the film its title.

While the title plays with the imagery of "flows" that is often mobilized to describe forced migration, it humanizes its protagonists by inserting Ai Weiwei in the frame, for example when he swaps passports with a Syrian citizen in Idomeni, the site of an infamous tent encampment in Greece. Shaky footage from hand-held devices creates a documentary aesthetic that invites a false sense of identification with the experiences of refugees. Yet, Ai presents this appropriation as a form of "respect." By suggesting that the subject positions of the film maker and the subjects of his documentary are ultimately interchangeable, Ai asserts the shared humanity of displaced persons. However, by obscuring the operations of power that position him as a standard bearer of humanity, albeit racialized vis-à-vis the West, his interlocutors are reduced to generic

33 Etymologically, a "figure" is a "visible and tangible form," from the Old French *figure* "shape, body," the Latin *figura* "a shape, form, quality, kind, style, figure of speech," and in late Latin "a sketch, drawing." www.etymonline.com/index.php?allowed_in_frame=0&search=figure.

34 If *Human Flow* is streamed on *Amazon Prime*, some of the names become available as metadata in a sidebar.

figures that stand in for humanity in general, rather than the particular identities of which they have been stripped due to their forced displacement.

Overall, both Brandon Bannon's photography and Ai Weiwei's cinematography rely on techniques of documentary realism to generate empathy with refugees but fail to make room for solidarity by framing displacement as a universal condition afflicting humanity *in general*.[35] In contrast, the genre of the "refugee selfie" inherently resists homogenization because it is constituted by an irreducible plurality. Despite the visual conventions that govern its form,[36] it offers a unique mode of self-representation that destabilizes the aesthetic regimes that produce the reality effects of central authority. By attesting to the specific identity of those confined to the "huge and nameless crowd,"[37] the "selfie" restores the possibility of political action on the part of displaced and *de facto* stateless persons.

Politics of Representation

Hannah Arendt critiqued the post-war human rights frameworks for failing to remedy the zone of lawlessness in which refugees find themselves when neither their state of citizenship nor any other given state is willing to guarantee and enforce their human rights. She argued that this loss of legality not only stripped individuals of their civil rights but also erased their particularity as specific, rather than generic, human beings. Once reduced to "mere existence," seekers of asylum are stripped of the right to "act in and change and build a common world."[38] According to Arendt, the "right to have rights" derived not from the "abstract nakedness of being human and nothing but human"[39] but from belonging to a "social texture" in which one "established for themselves a distinct place in the world,"[40] in which one's actions mattered, and in which one's opinions were significant. Rightlessness was therefore a function of displacement as "the loss of a community willing and able to guarantee any rights whatsoever."[41]

35 According to the *Online Etymology Dictionary*, "empathy" is a form of appropriation because it "depends on the viewer's ability to project his [or her] personality into the viewed object." The emphasis on empathy over solidarity is by definition unethical in the sense that an ethical relationship requires the recognition of the other as a self, rather than the projection of the self as other. Similarly, advocacy groups in Germany developed "simulation games" in which participants were asked to imagine they were, quite literally, "in the same boat" as refugees. While audiences from students to policy makers reported a shift in perspective, emphases on "empathy" have helped frame the debate about a "refugee crisis" in terms of moral appeals to goodness rather than political solidarity and ethical responsibility to recognize the political agency of displaced persons.

36 By definition, "selfies" center the faces of individuals at an arm's length, or its prosthetic extension by a hand-held monopod. Since these self-portraits are usually taken at an angle, they enlarge the eyes and slim jaw lines to flatter, rather than surveil, the subject. Unlike a mug shot, the visual conventions that define the "selfie" are not structured around identifiable traits, yet they inscribe the particular embodiment of the subject in the frame.

37 Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 287.

38 Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 301.

39 Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 296.

40 Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 293.

41 Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 298.

Instead of being "judged by one's actions and opinions,"[42] for which one is held responsible before the law and by peers, humanitarian discourse frames displaced persons as "nothing but human beings"[43] whose "treatment by others does not depend on what he [or she] does or does not do."[44] In Arendt's conception of the human condition, freedom of action is possible when the outcome of an action is not determined by necessity and words and deeds are remembered by free and equal peers. By emphasizing empathy over solidarity, humanitarian representations of refugees as "thrown back […] on their natural givenness"[45] exclude displaced persons from the "category of people"[46] that are entitled to state-sanctioned agency.

In contrast to the post-war context described by Arendt, realms for the appearance of words and deeds, which she theorized as a condition of political action, have proliferated through mobile communication. Though still confined to a course of action determined by force, displaced persons use smartphones to carve out spaces of freedom from necessity and thereby create political possibilities. Instead of food and shelter, which are basic human needs, access to social media allows displaced persons to "feel human" in connection with peers to whom the individual's actions and words appear and matter. Friends and family remember and engage the displaced person as a particular individual that is acting upon a shared world beyond the purview of any single nation state. It is possible to use the smartphone to assert one's "full" rather than "mere" humanity precisely because battery life and data are not "essential" to physical survival. Enabled by data roaming, geo-positioning software allows for virtual forms of emplacement. "Selfies" communicate physical survival to family and friends while anchoring a particular individual at the center of a given landscape. As a form of self-representation, "selfies" undermine humanitarian constructions of refugees as helpless victims while challenging the exclusionary logic of territorial borders.

Despite this emancipatory promise of mobile technology,[47] the mediation of smartphones is inherently alienating because the hardware itself is a material product of

42 Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 297.

43 Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 295.

44 Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 296.

45 Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 302.

46 Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 297.

47 Drawing on Karl Marx's negative dialectic, alienation (*Entfremdung*) and emancipation (*Selbstbestätigung*) can be heuristically conceptualized as a binary pair. In his 1844 notebooks, Marx argued that neither the individual nor the collective can be fully human as long as any single human's practical energy (*praktische Energie d[es] Menschen*), or labor-power, was alienated (*entfremdet*) or captured by another in the commodity form of private property (Marx *Okonomisch-philosophische Manuskripte*, 94). In *The Human Condition*, Hannah Arendt critiqued Marx for conflating labor and work because her conception of the human freedom to act excluded any form of coercion, including the necessity to reproduce biological life. Unlike Arendt, Marx argued that the being (*Wesen*) of all individuals belonging to the human species was to *appropriate* nature by consciously acting on it, making labor—the human metabolism with nature—the practical tool of our self-generation *as* human. In contrast, Arendt conceived of labor as a form of violence that wore down the world by consuming it. She conceptualized work, in turn, as a creative activity that populated the world with durable objects. These objects, insofar as they are not instrumental or intended for consumption, frame and enable the human freedom to act in their midst. Arendt, *The Human Condition*.

exploitation and extraction elsewhere.[48] If freedom, to Arendt, is action that appears unencumbered by necessity, the commodity form of mobile technology and the binary logic of its operating software, as well as the material mediation of telecommunications infrastructure,[49] threatens to place human freedom—the ability to act anew and in unexpected ways—under erasure. The use of mobile technology introduces layers of alienation and necessity that mediate the subjective will to act insofar as the words and deeds of displaced persons and their allies are processed as information and data. Still, refugees constitute themselves as political subjects, despite the forced nature of displacement, which propels movement by necessity, by acting through digital media that, at any rate, allows for the "*experience* of being free."[50]

Calculations of risk at Europe's biometric borders[51] negate the agency and humanity of asylum claimants because they interpret the actions of refugees, in particular those cast as "high-risk" individuals, as if they were determined by immutable traits. Racial profiling, in particular, reduces "new and spontaneous processes"[52] to a form of "excess" to be captured by apparatuses of security.[53] Despite its administrative veneer, risk profiling is a form of political violence that hinges on racist tropes about sexual and religious excess which, in the Western tradition, are attributed to the East in general, and Islam in particular.[54] I argue that these tropes form the core of social media debates about the role of mobile technology in the unauthorized mobility of refugees.

Some humanitarian advocates have attempted to *reframe* the actions of "single male refugees" by explaining that mobile devices were primarily used to maintain ongoing relationships with vulnerable dependents, thereby containing the agential excess projected onto racialized masculinity *within* the humanitarian script. In 2016, Brian Reich, then managing director at *The Hive*, a US-based data strategy firm contracted by the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), explained in an interview,

> "The phone and the idea of connectivity is critical. They text their family member to say that they arrived safely, or call up some information in a private *Facebook* group that tells them where to go next so that they are not detained or forced to register in a way that they don't want to. The role technology is playing is very different than [during]

48 As technical devices, smartphones contain a long list of minerals and metals such as gold, silver, and copper, among other components, that are mined despite the detrimental effects of extractive operations on public health, social relations, and the environment, primarily throughout the Global South. For an overview of raw materials used in smartphones and where they are extracted, see U.S. Geological Survey, "A World of Minerals in Your Mobile Device."

49 Stryker, "Bodies of Knowledge;" Easterling, *Extrastatecraft*.

50 Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 24 [emphasis added].

51 Amoore, "Biometric Borders."

52 Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 231.

53 Following Michel Foucault, liberal governmentality confronts the problem of security as the principle through which it calculates the "precise extent to which and up to what point individual interest, that is to say, individual interests insofar as they are different and possibly opposed to each other, constitute a danger for the interest of all." Insofar, calculations of risk assess the "economic cost of the exercise of freedom" in order to guarantee freedom in the future, thereby perpetually deferring the possibility of non-instrumental action that, according to Hannah Arendt, allows for the experience of freedom. Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 65.

54 Said, *Orientalism*.

> any refugee crisis before. They have access to the internet, they are using *WhatsApp* and *Facebook* […] to share information about the safest route. This is a connected, educated, capable population that save for the circumstances that forced them to flee is not any different than any other population […] There are stories that you will hear in refugee camps where people will sell their food ration in order to get money to pay for data and not only because they have an emergency situation but because being connected to anything else in the world feels human."[55]

In this statement, Reich confirmed not only that displaced persons use mobile technology to connect to family members, but also that some of them use the internet in strategic ways that allow them to navigate the territorial fault-lines of European border regimes. He asserted that unauthorized mobility was a legitimate choice made by technologically savvy individuals in dire circumstances. While capturing the humanizing potential of connectivity, he signaled that digital skills represent an economic asset. As bearers of valuable capacities, so the argument goes, refugees in the twenty-first century should be reimagined as an educated workforce waiting to be deployed by host societies. Instead of emphasizing the moral obligation to protect vulnerable populations, against which right-wing governments seem to have immunized themselves, international advocates and consultants are increasingly countering calculations of risk with calculations of value.[56]

Melissa Flemming, a spokesperson of the UNHCR, for example, argued, "The simple truth is that refugees would not risk their lives on a journey so dangerous if they could thrive where they are."[57] This reflection on a "simple truth" of forced displacement locates a peculiar "choice" at the level of the individual. Once forced displacement is reimagined in terms of a preference for life, refugees appear to act as economic agents who allocate scarce resources while bearing the risk of death. In this scenario, exposure to death becomes the responsibility of the individual, rather than that of the state which decides on the exception.[58]

As Michel Foucault predicted in his 1979 lectures on neoliberalism, all human behavior that "responds systematically to modifications in the variables of the environment" may become "susceptible to economic analysis."[59] This is the case insofar as life and death are understood as "competing ends […] which cannot be superimposed on

55 See Fitch, "Smartphone Use on the Refugee Trail." The partial transcription of the video above is my own.

56 This shift in humanitarian discourse has motivated efforts to integrate refugees in the labor market of so-called third countries. In 2016, the European Union signed an agreement with Jordan that offers access to the European common market for commodities produced at factories that meet employment quotas for Syrian citizens in special economic zones in Jordan. However, this so-called "Jordan Compact" has so far failed to deliver the hoped for results. See Lenner & Turner, "Making Refugees Work?" This policy was proposed by Alexander Betts and Paul Collier, two UK-based scholars, who argued in 2015 that refugees should be helped to "help themselves." See Betts & Collier "Help Refugees Help Themselves." On economic zones as a technology of power, see Easterling, *Extrastatecraft*. See also Betts & Collier. *Refuge*. I am grateful to Anne McNevin for alerting me to this new scheme in the humanitarian field.

57 UNHCR, "Europe Situation."

58 Agamben, *State of Exception*.

59 Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 269.

each other" and "between which we must choose."[60] Deciding to act despite uncertain outcomes, refugees are cast as economic agents that accept the risk of death in order to "thrive" elsewhere. Instead of remaining in a war zone, seeking to "obtain some kind of improvement"[61] is presented as a rational choice. From this perspective, the figure of the "single male refugee" becomes intelligible as an entrepreneur that "invests in an action, expects a profit from it, and […] accepts the risk of a loss."[62]

When neoliberal theories of the subject are introduced in the humanitarian field, the apparent technological savvy of refugees translates into evidence of an "abilities-machine" formed through "investments […] made at the level of man himself."[63] As argued by Theodore W. Schultz, one of the founders of the Chicago School of Economics, "people can enlarge the range of choice available to them […] by investing in themselves."[64] Rather than a security risk, the unsanctioned mobility of "single male refugees" may now appear as a form of entrepreneurial risk-taking. The application of economic analysis to forced displacement, however, blurs the distinction between refugees and economic migrants. By suggesting that persons in both categories "decide" to "improve" their lives, the normative core of asylum law is hollowed out by economic logic which anchors shared humanity in the capacity to invest in oneself as human capital.

From the standpoint of cognitive capitalism and the so-called "sharing economy,"[65] time is a scarce resource and a valuable asset that could be remotely matched with the needs of distant consumers. Considering the deadly boredom that permeates everyday life in administrative detention, some humanitarian aid experts have problematized enforced inactivity as a waste of time and skill of those condemned to perpetual waiting. Neoliberal logic supplies a new framework that humanizes refugees, albeit as human capital.

If displaced persons currently residing in Germany can demonstrate employment and language skills, they might soon be able to opt out of the asylum process and "switch" into a newly created immigration track. The German debate about so-called "lane switching" (*Spurwechsel*) represents a concession to employers that demand the right to profit from the investment they already made in refugees as extremely motivated employees. However, critics of a possible bifurcation in the asylum process fear that "rewarding" skill might incentivize further unsanctioned migration to Germany. The subtext of the public controversy, not so thinly veiled, was that offering a way out of the asylum process, regardless of eligibility, might lead to an increase in Germany's racialized population. In this context, a new quota system has been recently introduced to minimize family reunifications (*Familiennachzug*) for recognized asylees that are currently residing in Germany. Low quotas and administrative backlog effectively deny displaced persons the right to ensure that their children and spouses are also in

60 Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 222.

61 Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 230.

62 Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 252–253.

63 Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 229.

64 See Schultz, "Investment in Human Capital," 1.

65 Acquier, Daudigeos & Pinkse, "Promises and Paradoxes of the Sharing Economy;" Tadiar, "City Everywhere."

safety. This measure is intended to put pressure on refugees to return to their countries of origin even if they are formally entitled to stay.

By suggesting that refugees are entrepreneurial subjects, this neoliberal turn in humanitarian discourse merely supplements the biosovereign formation of a European power intent on policing the symbolic borders of whiteness.[66] By representing forced displacement as a choice at the level of the individual, the profiling of racialized masculinity as always already suspect is not only left intact but reinforced.[67] Instead of embracing neoliberal logic, advocates must interrogate the gendered and racialized scripts that govern the recognition of vulnerability in order to push back against dehumanizing calculations of risk that will only respond to economic calculation.

Calculated Exposure

Europe's external borders and their expanding buffer zones—geographical, ideological, and in relation to the bodies of racialized others[68]—have become sites at which "migratory circuits" are regulated, and "irregular flows"[69] "disallow[ed] to the point of death."[70] Banu Bargu argues that biopower has not supplanted sovereignty but that it has imbricated it as a power "concerned with efficient regulation [of flows] and the optimization of circulation."[71] In a like manner, the language of risk management deployed by *Frontex* justifies exposure to death as a technical matter which "ensure[s] that interventions are focused on high-risk movements of people, while low-risk movements are facilitated smoothly."[72] Biosovereignty, as Bargu calls this hybrid power, links up the "politics *of* life (and death) and a politics *over* life itself"[73] in an "ongoing process in formation."[74] While biopower invests in subjects to construct "the very agent who will act,"[75] its sovereign core exposes racialized others to death through divestment.

Achille Mbembe describes this "division of space into compartments for the purpose of control" as a necropolitical "terror formation"[76] that rules "in absolute lawlessness"[77] over those who it defines as "disposable."[78] In tandem with states that

66 Eggers, Kilomba, Piesche & Arndt, *Mythen, Masken und Subjekte*.

67 El-Tayeb, *European Others*; Haritaworn, *Queer Lovers and Hateful Others*.

68 Amoore, "Biometric Borders."

69 Frontex Risk Analysis Unit, "Risk Analysis for 2016."

70 Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 138.

71 Bargu, *Starve and Immolate*, 47.

72 Frontex Risk Analysis Unit, "Risk Analysis for 2016," 61.

73 Bargu, *Starve and Immolate*, 50.

74 Bargu, *Starve and Immolate*, 52.

75 Bargu, *Starve and Immolate*, 46.

76 Mbembe, "Necropolitics," 27.

77 Mbembe, "Necropolitics," 24.

78 Mbembe, "Necropolitics," 27. Michelle Pfeifer also draws on Mbembe's theorization of necropolitics to critique the erasure of "colonial experiences [that] were crucial to formations of German citizenship [and] that still operate in discourses and policies around asylum and migration today." Pfeifer, "Becoming Flesh," 463. However, by normalizing the idea of a dyadic relationship between racialized

displace their own citizens, member states of the European Union are complicit in the "creation of death-worlds" in which "vast populations are subjected to conditions of life conferring upon them the status of living dead."[79] The funneling of asylum seekers into border territories that are not conducive to human life, such as the Sonoran Desert at the southern U.S. border, or the Mediterranean and Aegean seas that separate the European Union from its southern and eastern neighbors, functions as a "Prevention Through Deterrence (PTD) strategy."[80]

The management of "risk" has taken precedence over any morally founded duty to protect. Since 2014, thousands of refugees who attempted to reach safety by boat have effectively been left to drown just a few miles off the European coastline after the patrolling grounds of coastal guards were reduced from 150 kilometers to only five kilometers.[81] Meanwhile, civilian search and rescue missions are criminalized for providing emergency assistance at sea.[82] This constitutes a calculated exposure to death that leaves refugees to attempt the journey at their own risk.

Biopower effectively marks the racialized masculinity of the "single male refugee" as a limit that cancels out vulnerability and international title to protection. Going by the pseudonym Abu Jana, or "father of Jana," a Syrian refugee in Egypt told a reporter for the British newspaper *The Guardian* that his decision to cross by boat was *neither* a choice *nor* an investment. To him, it was the only way to escape the "bureaucratic no-man's land" of *de facto* statelessness:

> "Even if there was a decision to drown the migrant boats, there will still be people going by boat because the individual considers himself dead already. Right now Syrians consider themselves dead. Maybe not physically, but psychologically and socially [a Syrian] is a destroyed human being, he's reached the point of death. So I don't think that even if they decided to bomb migrant boats it would change peoples' decision to go."[83]

Another young Syrian man identified as Ahmed Abu Zeid confirmed that he was "past the point of caring." He explained, "I'll go whether or not a boat rescues me. If I have life in me I'll get there, and if I die, I die. […] we're out of the phase of fear, there's

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refugees and white Germans as "benevolent saviour[s]" (465), her critique inadvertently disappears Germans of color and thereby reproduces the imaginary whiteness of the German body politic. By presuming that the "sympathy" of white Germans is elicited through displays of "spectacular suffering," she misses that racialized populations may identify with the displaced as peers whose "suffering" is intimately felt as one's own, propelling many to act in solidarity. The radical left in Germany continues to exist in tension with anti-racism and migrant justice. See Azozomox and Gürsel, "The Untold Story of Migrant Women Squatters."

79 Mbembe, "Necropolitics," 40.

80 De Leon, *The Land of Open Graves*, 29.

81 Since late 2014, Frontex has replaced the Italian *Mare Nostrum* program which extended over 150 kilometers into Libyan waters. As of 2019, Frontex is patrolling only five kilometers off the Italian coast, leaving hundreds to die at high sea while persecuting the crews of civilian boats for providing emergency assistance. The decision to discontinue *Mare Nostrum* without extending Frontex's patrolling grounds amounts to a calculated exposure to death at high sea. Since July 2016, Frontex and NATO vessels are patrolling in the Aegean Sea under joint maritime command.

82 Stierl, "A Sea of Struggle."

83 Kingsley & Diab, "Passport, Lifejacket, Lemons."

no more fear in our hearts." Both men described the experience of "civil death"[84] as equally if not more unbearable than the risk of physical death.

Indeed, the European Union's 2015 declaration of a "fight against smugglers and traffickers"[85] is a "powerful demonstration of the EU's determination to act."[86] While targeting the unsanctioned mobility of asylum seekers, the EU's "war on human trafficking" has in effect failed to quash "criminal networks which exploit vulnerable migrants."[87] Instead of the vulnerability of persons, border police focus on the "vulnerability" of states, which is defined as the "capacity and readiness of Member States to face upcoming challenges, including present and future threats and challenges at the external borders."[88] A new regulation, passed in 2016, vested *Frontex*, renamed "European Border and Coast Guard Agency," with a legal personality, a stand-alone budget, and an expanded mandate to act.

The actions of this new agency, essentially, aim to disallow the decentralized and unsanctioned agency of the displaced. The requirement, for instance, that a fundamental rights officer internally review all complaints is grounded in the so-called "right to good administration,"[89] rather than any notion of "freedom and justice" as guaranteed to EU citizens, residents, and legally-sanctioned visitors.[90] Despite lip serve to international conventions and fundamental rights, risk profiling not only fails to guarantee due process and individual case review (*non-refoulement*) but it subjects displaced persons to administrative violence.

While *Frontex* conducts limited search and rescue missions during border surveillance operations at sea,[91] it is only expected to "protect and save lives *whenever and wherever so required*." This chilling pronouncement minimizes the horror of the deaths of displaced persons at high sea and depoliticizes the question of freedom and justice for all. Although *Frontex's* 2016 charge takes care to spell out that the power to *decide* on protected status remains with sovereign member states, it vests border police with unprecedented executive powers to not only assist and coordinate border control measures, but also to deploy its own personnel and equipment to launch "rapid border interventions." (article 8.1e). *Frontex* may now also *initiate* "return interventions" and manage "return-related tasks" (article 36.4), including the "acquisition of travel documents for returnees" (preamble 32), traditionally a prerogative of sovereign states. Since its creation in 2004, *Frontex*' role has significantly shifted from a coordinating institution to an EU body that not only implements but also *makes* operative decisions. States delegate sovereign license to EU bodies that exist to exclude racialized and displaced populations from access to common infrastructure space.[92] As the power to act devolves to *Frontex*, its status as a quasi-sovereign body is formalized.

84 Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 302.

85 European Commission, "European Agenda on Migration," 8.

86 European Commission, "European Agenda on Migration," 3.

87 European Commission, "European Agenda on Migration," 3. For more on the discourse of trafficking, see Lynes, "SOPHIA" in this volume.

88 EU 2016/1624, article 13.4.

89 EU 2016/1624, preamble 50.

90 EC 2000/C 364/01.

91 EU 2016/1624, article 14.2e.

92 Larkin, "The Politics and Poetics of Infrastructure;" Easterling, *Extrastatecraft*.

After declaring a war on human trafficking in 2015, the European Commission laid out a detailed action plan to "transform migrant smuggling into a high-risk and low-profit operation."[93] By confiscating and destroying vessels that are suspected to facilitate the unauthorized passage of refugees, multiple agencies are engaged in a coordinated assault designed to diminish the returns of brokers. However, the discourse of "prevention through deterrence" fails to acknowledge that the "high risk" is ultimately borne by vulnerable persons whose forced mobility is disallowed to the point of death.

By using roaming data, geo-positioning software, end-to-end encryption, and social media platforms to facilitate their own mobility and connect to legal counsel and adequate shelter, unsanctioned border crossers act with and through infrastructures of the state such as roads, satellites, and glass fiber cables. This unauthorized use destabilizes the sovereign logic of the exception.[94] Since mobile technology enables persons to make informed decisions about their movement, the European Commission also seeks to establish "closer coordination"[95] with private internet service providers and social media companies.

In addition to the consolidation of the Common European Asylum System, the European Union's "fight against migrant smuggling" also set the stage for ongoing negotiations about a Common Defense and Security Policy that would enhance "operational coordination" and "capabilities"[96] across existing and planned EU agencies and information technology (IT) systems.[97] The implementation of this plan would entail even greater executive powers for *Frontex*, the European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Coordination (*Europol*), and other security, surveillance, and intelligence providers engaged in joint-military operations. In light of the projected goal of "interoperability," the European Union is no longer limiting itself to economic and legal cooperation. Its continental-scale alignment of agencies and supporting infrastructures heralds the constitution of Europe as a bio-geo-sovereign power that seeks to regulate and manage life within a territory designated as its "area of freedom, security and justice."[98]

Insofar as neoliberal theories of the subject presuppose that economic man, as a *particular* figuration of the human, necessarily follow the principle of a preference for pleasure over pain,[99] they reduce all observable actions to the pursuit of "private" interest in bodily integrity rather than the political interest to actualize the freedom to act in a shared world. By positing refugee's capacity to labor as a source of human dignity, neoliberal advocates generalize the market mechanism of exchange to valorize and thereby depoliticize the agency of refugees as a form of capital. By integrating humanitarian discourse with human capital theory, they fail to account for the racial

93 "A European Agenda on Migration," 1.

94 Agamben, *State of Exception*.

95 European Commission, "European Agenda on Migration," 6.

96 European Commission, "EU Action Plan Against Migrant Smuggling," 3–4.

97 "Under Watchful Eyes."

98 This area coincides with the Schengen zone which guarantees freedom of movement to EU citizens and permanent residents. The European Agency for the Operational Management of Large-Scale IT Systems in the Area of Freedom, Security and Justice (*eu-LISA*) coordinates security and surveillance apparatuses to ensure "situational awareness."

99 Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 272.

profile of the "single male refugee" as a limit of biopolitical investment at which vulnerability is denied and protection withheld. Although a comparatively small number of displaced persons arrived in Greece since 2014, the term "refugee crisis" centers Europe, yet again. Instead of the fundamental right to human dignity, *Frontex* is defending the borders of whiteness. Instead of globalizing the Western gaze, humanitarian discourse must be decolonized, first and foremost by attending to the coloniality of militarized border regimes and contemporary crises of displacement around the world.

Abolition Democracy

In contrast to neoliberal constructions of the subject as a self-possessed agent, grassroots solidarity groups leverage private property or possession of physical assets to assist refugees with shelter, safe passage, and data connectivity. An active squatting movement continues to mobilize legal frameworks that bestow relative inviolability on EU citizens to not only aid and host but also accompany and shield undocumented claimants of asylum from state violence. Over the past decade, autonomous refugee movements have staged collective actions that ranged from organized caravans, occupations of public squares and empty buildings, and frequent hunger strikes[100] to demand freedom of movement, freedom of residency, community control, and legal status for all.

During a solidarity visit in Berlin in 2015, Angela Y. Davis characterized the refugee movement as "the movement of the 21st century."[101] After being denied access to an occupied school by district authorities, she walked with organizers and allies of the occupation before coming to a halt at the closed gates of the school. Filmed with a hand-held camera, she listened attentively to the refugee activists, asked questions, and witnessed the gathering of supporters in the street that opposed the pending eviction of the school. One young man explained, "Even German animals are living better than we refugees, I'm telling you." Another emphatically agreed, "Yes." She identified herself as one of the activists that set up the "International Women's Space," a wing of the occupied school reserved for refugee women.[102] "They evicted us very badly, on a rainy day," she shared. After losing access to the school, several refugee activists were forced to seek refuge at a nearby church. Scandalizing the dehumanizing treatment of refugees at the hands of police and wider German society, one refugee activist shared a message,

> "We [Black people] are not criminals, we are refugees. And what I want to tell the German government [is] that being a refugee is not something that we choose by ourselves. Anyone could be a refugee. Today I am a refugee. But I don't know about tomorrow, somebody else has to be a refugee. […] Before we became refugees, there were thou-

100 See Vrasti & Dayal, "Cityzenship;" Mudu & Chattopadhyaya, *Migration, Squatting and Radical Autonomy*; Bargu, *Starve and Immolate*; Mitchell & Sparke, "Hotspot Geopolitics versus Geosocial Solidarity;" Stierl, *Migrant Resistance in Contemporary Europe*.

101 Tosco, "Angela Davis."

102 Mudu & Chattopadhyaya, *Migration, Squatting and Radical Autonomy*, 207–221.

> sands of refugees. So today, is our time. We don't know, next day, it will be somebody else's time."[103]

Unlike the assimilationist "We Refugees" Hannah Arendt described in her 1943 essay of the same title,[104] the "we" pronounced by autonomous refugees and their allies in Berlin, Calais, Athens, and elsewhere describes a political collectivity forged through conscious resistance to racism and state violence through media activism. As the above statement illustrates, refugee activists act out of a sense of historical responsibility for others. Despite a lack of individual choice, they find ways to engage in "purposeful, politically motivated act[s] of protest"[105] and hail a "new relation of self to self (and to others)."[106]

Gabriela, identified as a queer woman from Chile and one of the organizers of the "International Women's Space," explained to an interviewer that she needed collaborators, not help. "In my opinion, people should get together when they empathize with others, when they share the reasons to fight together, when they think the struggle is also for them."[107] She emphasized, "they should fight not because they feel guilty or have pity."[108] Insofar as people claiming asylum in Europe struggle to "create bonds of solidarity, friendship, [and] autonomy"[109] by opposing the *Lager* system of administrative detention,[110] refugee activists "invent novel practices of common life and subjectivities, from the ground up, insisting on a new imaginary that is independent from the politics of life and death signified by sovereignty itself."[111] By opposing border regimes with a practical "will to live together,"[112] they model an ethics of resistance to death-worlds that threaten to engulf most of us, eventually.

No longer aligned with the dominant rationality of self-interest, practices such as lip-sewing and hunger striking function as "embodied truth-acts"[113] that forge a "*relational* mode of subjectivation."[114] By "doubly" withdrawing from speech and nourishment, argues Bargu, refugees reconstitute themselves as political agents in an extremely constricted field of action.[115] Their unsanctioned acts of protest negate the negation of shared humanity—dehumanization, that is—in border zones and detention centers across EUrope. The demands and actions of refugees call for practical forms of solidarity that exceed the compassionate stance of humanitarian advocacy. They further displace the neoliberal logic of choice and investment. Instead, the analy-

103 See Tosco, "Angela Davis." The partial transcription of the video above is my own.

104 Robinson, *Altogether Elsewhere*.

105 Bargu, "The Silent Exception," 5.

106 Bargu, "The Silent Exception," 13.

107 Mudu & Charropadhyaya, *Migration, Squatting and Radical Autonomy*, 213.

108 Mudu & Charropadhyaya, *Migration, Squatting and Radical Autonomy*, 213.

109 Mudu & Charropadhyaya, *Migration, Squatting and Radical Autonomy*, 62.

110 Pieper, *Die Gegenwart der Lager*.

111 Bargu, "Another Necropolitics," 15.

112 Bargu, "Another Necropolitics," 14.

113 Bargu, "Another Necropolitics," 24.

114 Bargu, "The Silent Exception," 22.

115 Bargu, "The Silent Exception."

ses of activists facing down the dehumanizing forces of security and surveillance, not least through the quotidian act of snapping a "selfie," require those of us who are no longer, or not yet, refugees to listen closely. In the cracks and crevices of racist border regimes, abolitionist imaginaries are flourishing.