
***DISOBEDIENT MOVEMENT: THE BIOPOLITICAL
SUBJECT AND PUSHBACKS IN THE GREECE-
TURKEY BORDERZONE***



DEBRIS FROM BOAT CROSSINGS ON A BEACH ON SAMOS ISLAND, GREECE (PHOTOGRAPH THE AUTHOR'S OWN).

Melissa Pawson
2188383
Utrecht University
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Name of supervisor: Luuk Slooter

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Content warning: the subject matter of this thesis, and some of the experiences relayed by interview and testimony respondents may cause distress to the reader. It was not the intention of the author to include any distressing material simply for its shock factor. However, the nature of the subject matter necessitates the relaying of some potentially distressing content in order to reflect the true nature of the case and do justice to the experiences of survivors.

It is there in the white men and women who do not understand, to the point of frustration, why we still walk with the noose of our ancestors around our necks, as we cannot comprehend how they do not carry the indignity of their ancestors tying it there.

Chimene Suleyman, 'My name is my name', in *The Good Immigrant*

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In solidarity,

Melissa Jane Pawson

ABSTRACT

In the year 2020, pushbacks across the Greece-Turkey border, a practice by which Greece and the EU unlawfully expels people on the move from the territory, increased and intensified (Refugees International 2020, Legal Centre Lesvos 2020). Despite many making lawful requests for asylum, or being in possession of valid residency documentation, people on the move continue to be expelled in high numbers via violent and unlawful means. This study is based on remote research conducted with fieldworkers and people on the move with lived experience in Turkey, Greece and Norway, through six in-depth interviews. Additionally, 107 testimonies of pushbacks in 2020 were coded and analysed, all of which are published on open-source websites. Drawing from theories of biopolitics (Foucault 2003), thanatopolitics (Agamben 1995) and structurationism (Giddens 1986), this thesis establishes a new analytical frame to elucidate the empirical case of pushbacks in the Greece-Turkey borderzone: *disobedient movement in a rightless zone*. This frame informs an understanding of the “mutually constitutive” relationship between structure (the sovereign state of Greece and the EU) and agent (the person on the move) in the borderzone (Giddens 1986, xxx). The borderzone is defined in the thesis as both a physical space and an everywhere space which operates as a rightless zone, implemented by the biopolitical sovereign state. *The rightless zone* forms the first part of the analytical frame, which examines how people on the move, and those perceived to be on the move, are subjected to illicit and violent practices by the sovereign state. This is analysed through the following indicators: revoking papers, borderzone detention, expulsion and making die. The second part of the frame, *disobedient movement*, examines how people on the move move disobediently through the borderzone, shown through three indicators of persistence, ingenuity and solidarity. In doing so, they defy and challenge the sovereign power which attempts to control them. This is one of the first papers to systematically research pushback practices and people on the move’s responses to them. In doing so, this study offers a significant academic and social contribution through the addition of a new analytical frame, through the exposing of brutal and unlawful state measures exercised at the EU’s borders, and through a long-awaited recognition and examination of people on the move’s agency and disobedience in the borderzone.

Keywords:

Greece, Turkey, EU, Frontex, border, pushbacks, migration, people on the move, asylum seekers, disobedience, biopolitics, thanatopolitics, structurationism, racism, violence, human rights.

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INTRODUCTION

“Getting beat or hit, it’s not a problem anymore, because it happens every day. I know it’s illegal and it’s inhuman to face that but it’s better than – what’s heartless and what hurts you more is the way they humiliate you.”
(Interview #2, Turkey)

“I see Europe as a humanitarian place that cares for human rights, and that idea won’t change for me.”
(Interview #3, Turkey)

On the 8th September 2020, two unaccompanied children arrived on Samos island, Greece, with a group of 17 adult Afghan asylum seekers (GLAN Law 2021). The boys entered the Reception and Identification Centre (RIC) on Samos, where they presented themselves to the authorities in order to apply for asylum. Instead of being registered, they were “abducted” by officials who took them to the port, handcuffed them and forced them aboard the Hellenic Coast Guard ship. The minors were taken out to sea, forced onto a life raft with no engine and left to drift; they were rescued later that same day by the Turkish Coast Guard. The next day, on the 9th September 2020, a 50-year-old man from Afghanistan was escorted off a bus in Thessaloniki by three Greek police officers: he was handcuffed and taken to a police station, after having his temporary residence permit ripped up (BVMN, 09/09/2020). He and other detainees were beaten, denied food and water, stripped of their clothes, money and valuables, and held naked for up to seven hours. They were then loaded into a windowless van, which took them to the Evros river, which marks the border between Greece and Turkey. The man from Afghanistan, along with 120 other people, was then forced into a dinghy to take him across the river: he reports that one of these overcrowded dinghies capsized, and he saw two men drown in the river.

The 8th and 9th of September 2020 were not unusual days. Cases such as these are part of the near daily practice of “pushbacks”, which have become a systematic part of the biopolitical border control at the edges of the European Union (EU). These violent practices occur not only at the edges and outskirts of EU member state territories, but also reach far within their boundaries. At the easternmost edge is the Greece-Turkey border, a vast and varied geographical area which covers an almost 200km-long land boundary, and a far greater maritime boundary (Britannica 2021). The Greece-Turkey border has long been a crossing point for travellers, migrants, asylum seekers, holidaymakers, merchants, soldiers and pilgrims. Since 2015 however, this geographical area has come into sharp focus in relation to the so-called “migrant crisis”, with 2015 being described as “the year that changed a continent”, with regards to migratory movement (Evans 2020). This recent history has emphasised that the Greece-Turkey border is not simply a natural fact of geography: like all borders, it is rather a manifestation of socio-political relations, an arbitrary dividing line (De Genova 2016, 44-46; Brah 1996, 625). One glimpse of the political reliance on this border was seen in March 2020, when Greece was described by the president of the EU commission, Ursula von der Leyen, as the “European ‘aspida’”, meaning Greek for ‘shield’ (EuroNews 2020). In fulfilment of its status as Europe’s “shield” against the perceived threat of migration, Greece and supporting EU

agencies have been practising an increasingly repressive and illegal policy against people on the move¹ in recent years (Barker and Zajović 2020). Reports tell of the extreme, violent, and unlawful measures taken in order to deter, detain and expel people on the move from Greek and European territory – often termed as “pushbacks” (Refugees International 2020). According to a definition from the European Centre for Constitutional and Human Rights (ECCHR), pushbacks are a “set of state measures by which refugees and migrants are forced back over a border”, on foot, by boat or other means, in violation of the prohibition of collective expulsion in the European Convention on Human Rights (ECCHR 2021). Pushback practices also violate several articles of the 1951 Geneva Convention, including an asylum seeker’s right to access courts of law, and the principle of non-refoulement (Articles 16 and 33, UN General Assembly 1951). Pushbacks have also been reported to have been conducted against people holding regular EU papers and permit cards, which suggests a campaign based not on documents, but on race (Barker and Zajović 2020).

Illegal pushbacks occurring in plain sight is the first part of the research complication which drives this study. This part of the complication gives some suggestion of the extreme biopolitical and sovereign power held by Greece, the EU and supporting agencies, which is enacted against people on the move. I explore the terms “biopolitical” and “sovereign” further on in this introduction. Approaching the core of my research topic, there is a further complication to consider: that people on the move, despite the extra-legal force of the EU and the Greek state, continue to attempt the irregular crossings. They persist as individual, agent humans attempting to move, many of them fleeing persecution and shattered lives in their home countries. They walk for days on end with no food; they strategise on routes and timings to cross; they raise awareness of their struggles; they assist one another against overwhelming odds; they defy their victimhood. This research project asks how, on one of the most violent and rights violating borderzones of our planet, people continue to disobey the biopolitical and sovereign control, violence, and criminalisation they face. By examining the extent to which people on the move cross disobediently across the rightless zone of the border, I attempt to both uncover the biopolitical subject in the borderzone – the person on the move who is both the target of control mechanisms and a disobedient agent – and to lay bare the violent bordering practices which make them thus, the biopolitical subject.

PUSHBACKS IN 2020

The year 2020 saw several events unfold almost simultaneously on the Greece-Turkey border, including the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, which spread across the globe with unprecedented impact, and remains a major feature of life in 2021. Along with other political developments, 2020 saw the pandemic act as a potential catalyst for pushbacks and border violence, with at least 26 non-governmental organisations (NGOs) claiming that pushback practices increased in frequency and violence during the first year of the pandemic (Legal Centre Lesvos 2020, Mare Liberum 2020, Refugees International 2020, BVMN 2020, GLAN Law 2020, Alarmphone 2020). While the pandemic

¹ I use the term “people on the move”/ “person on the move” to describe anyone moving from one geographical location to another, but particularly those who choose to or are forced to move irregularly across borders (without papers or visas – this is not the same as illegally). The term ‘people on the move’ acknowledges that people have complex reasons for making journeys, and entails less of the assumptions or connotations that terms such as ‘migrant’, ‘refugee’ and ‘asylum seeker’ carry, terms which also denote a perceived legal status.

did not cause pushbacks, it rather acted as a likely factor in the intensification and increase in pushback incidences. Another particularly effective catalyst for the intensification and increase in pushbacks was a major political event which occurred a month before most countries announced national lockdowns and closed their borders to mitigate effects of the pandemic. In February 2020, Turkey's president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan announced that Turkey's western borders were "open" for migrants to cross into Europe: tens of thousands of people subsequently gathered at the border, with reports of the Turkish state also providing buses to transport people to the border (Busby and Smith 2020). Greece subsequently implemented a policy to "repel" people from the border area and from within Greek territory; violence ensued, with teargas, beatings, shooting, and at least two fatalities (Amnesty International 2020). Shortly after this event, and as the threat of the coronavirus pandemic grew, Greece made the unlawful decision to suspend all asylum applications for a month from 1st March 2020 (Human Rights Watch 2020). Alongside these developments, concern from NGOs grew in relation to the unsanitary conditions for migrants in the island camps during the pandemic, and the violent and unlawful expelling of both asylum-related migrants and hundreds of registered asylum seekers at the land border of the Evros river and the Aegean Sea border (Refugees International 2020). These intersecting events occurred and continue to occur in what some scholars have identified as the biopolitical site of the "borderzone", "where human rights are suspended in favour of sovereign practices" (Topak 2014), with Covid-19 also playing "a significant role in irregular migration from Turkey to Greece" in 2020, through both its impact on asylum-related migrants and the geopolitical use of migrants as a threat in relation to the pandemic (Jauhianen 2020). In this study, I focus specifically on the year 2020 for data generation and analysis – which I will discuss in depth in Chapter One. However, the developments in 2021 remain important context, which I refer to during this thesis when relevant.

As well as sharing a common location, many of the events which occurred in 2020 are also marked by the dubious legality and accountability of the perpetrators. Greece and EU agencies' pushback practices in particular are at the centre of a growing accountability gap. Despite the extensive factual evidence documenting the illegal pushback practices at the Greece-Turkey border, the Greek Prime Minister, Kyriakos Mitsotakis, and Greek state representatives have almost always consistently denied accusations and questioned the validity of evidence (@Tineke_Strik 2020; The Pappas Post 2020). Various media investigations have revealed a different, unofficial narrative, with one Freedom of Information request by the online newspaper EUobserver in November 2020 demonstrating that Frontex and Greek officials are fully aware of the practices, with documents stating that the Hellenic Coast Guard received orders to conduct a pushback on 2nd March 2020 (EUobserver 2020). Political and legal attempts to enforce accountability have most recently seen a resolution passed in the European Parliament in July 2021, calling for an end to illegal internal border controls, the upholding of individual rights at the external borders, and for more stringent evaluation of the operations of Frontex (Statewatch July 2021). For the first time, legal action has also been taken against the agency Frontex, initiated at the European Court of Justice in May 2021, by organisation Front-Lex (Front-Lex, Legal Centre Lesbos 2021; Statewatch May 2021). While these investigations demonstrate the resistance against pushback practices and their perpetrators, pushback practices still continue to strip people on the move of their rights with no, or very little, legal basis. This lack of legality and transparency has fuelled a *rightless zone* in which the sovereign state exercises control through violent pushback practices over people on the move. In the next section, I set out my research puzzle and its significances.

BIOPOLITICAL BORDERS

This is one of the first papers to systematically generate and analyse empirical data relating to pushbacks and border violence at the Greece-Turkey border, and is one of the first papers to connect biopolitics to the specific case of pushback practices. Biopolitics is a theory first developed by Michel Foucault, which details the ways in which a sovereign state exercises control over its subjects. Along with its various developments, including Giorgio Agamben's theories of thanatopolitics and the state of exception, biopolitics has been applied and examined in the context of bordering practices by many scholars. A deeper exploration of various biopolitical theories is laid out in Chapter Two. In this study, I continue this dialogue and exploration between biopolitical theory and bordering practices. In order to do this, I have drawn from key concepts in biopolitics and related theories in developing the analytical frame of *disobedient movement in a rightless zone*. Throughout this study, I bring this frame up to the light of the empirical data I have generated through semi-structured interviews, survivor testimony, videos, images, and official reports. This frame subsequently forms the basis for my research puzzle:

How did people on the move move disobediently in the face of biopolitical control mechanisms exercised by the Greek and EU authorities in the Greece-Turkey borderzone in 2020?

This puzzle is significant to ask and to research when considering the glaring lack of academic insight and empirical research into pushback practices, particularly in light of the rightlessness enacted over the biopolitical subject by the sovereign state, and the subsequent disobedience of that subject. As well as filling a particular gap in the academic field, I also contribute a new operationalisable analytical frame, which adds significantly to the understanding of the case of pushbacks and the biopolitical subject as mutually constitutive entities: I explain this frame in detail at the end of Chapter Two. In terms of the societal significance, this case is particularly important to research in light of the urgent and shocking nature of the practices, which continue without impunity and entail injury, psychological trauma, unlawful exclusion, long term emotional damage and fatalities. The case is also pertinent when considering the countless ways in which people on the move continue to strategise and demonstrate agency in the face of overwhelming abuses – and how often this fact is overlooked in favour of a centring of victimhood. It is, however, essential to emphasise that many continue attempting to cross the Greece-Turkey border out of desperation rather than choice – I return to this point in Chapter Four. Throughout this project, I strive to be led by the data, and by the people who are at the heart of this complication, those people moving disobediently through the borderzone. Ultimately, this thesis aims to further expose those biopolitical bordering practices, and the violence and control exercised against people on the move in the borderzone. By doing this in the context of an in-depth academic study, I bring a greater understanding of pushbacks and sovereign state control to both the academic and wider world, with hopes of making some small contribution to raising awareness of the practice and eventually changing the status quo.

The following is an overview of the subsequent chapters of this study. To elucidate my method and process, Chapter One discusses methodology, including sampling, data collection, interviews, coding, and ethics. Chapter Two, Biopolitics: A Theoretical Overview, explores biopolitical theory and its

relevant developments, as well as examining critiques of the research and introducing my analytical frame and key theoretical foundations. Chapter Three, Control Tactics, brings us to the empirical case, and asks what the biopolitical and thanatopolitical mechanisms of control are in the Greece-Turkey borderzone, and how the rightless zone is established. Chapter Four, Disobedient Movement, addresses the biopolitical subject and how people respond to their experiences. This chapter examines how – or if – the biopolitical subject makes choices and acts as an agent person in the borderzone. Chapters three and four both shed light on the empirical case as well as advancing biopolitical theories. I finally conclude the thesis by addressing what these findings mean for biopolitics and for the on the ground situation, with a brief consideration of avenues for further research and outlooks for the future.

CHAPTER ONE: METHODOLOGY

Biopolitics is the core theory which informs this study, and is integral to both the argument and method of the research. As the founder of the theory, Foucault's methodological approach focused on "the material practices and effects of power rather than narratives about power" (Topak 2014, 818). At the heart of biopolitics is this analysis of power: how power operates and what its impact is. This analysis is also at the heart of this research. While biopolitics remains a core theoretical part of the study, it serves more as a guide or "flexible frame" than a "fixed frame": it is not the sole theory which governs the study, nor a theory which I rigidly set out to test (Ragin 2000, 74). I also allow my data to guide me in directions towards other theories, which help to elucidate the information generated through this research project, and to form my own unique analytical frame. This has allowed me to limit the restrictions of my own assumptions regarding potential findings, while still testing theories in relation to social life in a deductive manner. In line with this, I draw influences from several theoretical advancements of biopolitics, including from Giorgio Agamben, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri and Maurice Stierl. In particular, Stierl's work on "resistance as method", a response to the systems of global power which influence the world of research, has had an important impact on my methodology, positionality and approach to this research (Stierl 2019, 15). In connection with an analysis of power and its effects, my argument and method are also informed by Anthony Giddens' structuration theory (Giddens 1986). Structuration theory offers an important contribution here, through its consideration of structure and agency as mutually constitutive rather than one being dominant over the other: agent actors influence and produce the structures that make up our social world, and equally, those structures produce and effect the actors within them (Giddens 1986, xxx). Structuration theory, biopolitics and its more recent theoretical incarnations, have all guided the questions I asked in data generation, and methods of data analysis. In this chapter, I explain the methodology for my research in relation to these theories, through sections on my research puzzle, sampling and data generation, data analysis, ethics and positionality.

RESEARCH PUZZLE

As referenced in the introduction, the research puzzle driving this project is as follows:

How did people on the move move disobediently in the face of biopolitical control mechanisms exercised by the Greek and EU authorities in the Greece-Turkey borderzone in 2020?

Within this research puzzle are the three sub-questions which have guided my data generation and analysis:

1. What mechanisms of biopolitical control were exercised (officially or unofficially) by the Greek government and EU agencies in the Greek-Turkish borderzone in 2020?
2. What were the effects of Greece and the EU's regulatory and disciplinary mechanisms on people on the move during 2020?
3. How did people on the move (the biopolitical subject) resist or defy pushback practices and border policies in 2020?

I consider the role of these sub-questions in the sections on data generation and analysis, and here lay out the ontological and epistemological foundations for the puzzle. In this study, I am seeking to *understand* events, processes, systems and experiences, an approach which acknowledges the subjective nature of our lived reality as seen by those who encounter it. This study maintains its subjects, the people affected, as being of primary importance, but is centred on an essentially processual puzzle. A processual puzzle is defined by Jennifer Mason as being “about how something works [...] how things change, interact and influence each other” (Mason, 12). In relation to my empirical case, the processual puzzle is the interaction between different actors and events: people on the move are affected by bordering practices, which are in turn influenced by the global pandemic and political crises, which are themselves responded to by the actions of people on the move. The ontological nature of this puzzle is structurationism, which considers both agents and structures to be mutually constitutive in our social world, by which “individual actions can reproduce structure” and vice versa (Giddens 1986, 23). The epistemological approach of this puzzle is that of “actor network, object relations, ecological”, which looks at the interrelation of actors and events, as well as “the ‘agency’ of actors” – in this case, the agency of people on the move themselves, as well as the decisions made and put in place by Greece and the EU (Mason 2017, 9). In keeping with these epistemological and ontological features, the theoretical nature of the research puzzle hinges largely on biopolitical theory, in which Foucault and many of those influenced by his work focus on practices, mechanisms and effects (Topak 2014, 818). While discourses and experiences are also key to this study, I am not conducting a discourse analysis, and maintain practices and effects as the foundation for the thesis, with discourses and experiences assisting me in understanding those practices and effects of the border regime. These approaches are also consistent with my research strategy, since they consider questions pertinent to the discoveries made during qualitative research, about agency, connections, decisions and practices, and do not rely on asking “how much” of something has occurred, as in a large-N study.

SAMPLING AND DATA GENERATION

The data used for this research has been “generated” rather than “collected” (Mason 2017, 21). This language distinction acknowledges that my position as a researcher can never be fully neutral, and

that I have an influence over the data that I find and use. I return to questions of positionality later in this chapter, focusing here on an explanation of my sampling and data generation. The core primary data that I generated consists of six semi-structured interviews: three interviews with fieldworkers working closely with those experiencing violence at the Greece-Turkey borderzone, and three interviews with people on the move with direct experience of violence at the Greece-Turkey borderzone. Four of the interviewees were operating in Turkey at the time of speaking, with the remaining two operating in Greece and remotely from Norway. Only one of my interviewees, Tommy Olsen, head of the NGO Aegean Boat Report, is identified by name in this study: the other five interviewees chose to remain anonymous due to concerns of safety and legal reprisals. There was a crossover of the two categories (fieldworkers and lived experience), where two interviewees from the second category were also volunteering with organisations providing aid and support at the time of the interviews, meaning they provided relevant input for questions from both categories – also defying a common narrative of victimhood. I additionally generated data by searching through and analysing a total of 107 testimonies recorded by fieldworkers, who had spoken directly to people who had been pushed back by authorities at the Greece-Turkey border during 2020. These testimonies are available on open-source websites run by charities and NGOs in the field (I clarify each source below). I further generated secondary data through NGO and government affiliated reports, newspaper articles, videos and images published on NGO websites and on social media, online events, and through informal, unrecorded communications with fieldworkers.

Interviewing was primarily a data generation technique designed to address sub-questions two and three, about the effects of pushbacks and people on the move's responses and resistances. Because the interviews were in-depth, and participants included both people on the move and fieldworkers, I also gained an understanding in relation to sub-question one, about mechanisms and practices. The interviews I conducted were made possible by contacts that I had built up in the field remotely, primarily in Turkey. I conducted all the research for this project remotely, due to travel restrictions in place during the coronavirus pandemic: this left me heavily reliant on those contacts in order to meet potential interviewees. I therefore adopted a snowball sampling strategy for interviews, where I gained further contacts through contacts established previously. This was also the most common-sense technique for the type of people I wanted to speak to: most fieldworkers' direct contact information is not publicly available, partly due to the level of harassment that activists and fieldworkers can receive in this area, as well as the criminal charges being pursued by the Greek government against a number of humanitarian workers, including some of the interviewees I spoke with. Recent criminalisation campaigns have targeted both people on the move and the organisations supporting them, forcing many to be especially careful about who they speak to and trust. This meant that random selections from a sampling frame was not an option. As well as the two categories of people, I had originally been aiming to speak with officials such as border guards and police officers working in border force work. However, as a heavily criticised sector which also under investigation, I was just as reliant on good contacts and trust as I was with the former groups, but which I was not able to establish. While this means that my study is skewed towards a side of the picture which represents people on the move more than any other actor, I was never attempting to build up a representational study. Additionally, a focus on those with a personal experience of border violence, and those working directly to support them, arguably offers a deeper understanding of the human effects of the border regime, and the agency of the people closely familiar with the violent impacts of that regime.

Each interview I conducted lasted between 40 and 90 minutes. The interviews were semi-structured, meaning that I had a topic list specific to each category of person (see Appendix II for topic lists and Appendix III for interview list), which guided me in the interview but also allowed space for my interviewee to talk about issues relevant to them. This approach served me well, since the consistent themes which I asked about gave me space for comparison between interviews, but equally, the allowance for a free narrative meant that I was not fixed to my own assumptions about what was essential to talk about. My questions largely focused on practices (asking what is happening, where, who, when, how, and how it has changed) and effects (what was the impact, how does the respondent feel/ what human effects have they seen, how has the experience changed them/ others), in line with Foucault's methodological approach to biopolitics. I video recorded four out of the six interviews, with consent from the interviewee, which allowed me to transcribe them accurately. The last two interviewees preferred for me to take notes, so I took detailed notes during the interview and wrote out a transcript based on those notations.

Of my six interviewees, one was a woman (a fieldworker) and the remaining five were men. Of the people with direct experience of pushbacks, I only conducted interviews with men. This was not my intention, however, several factors made interviewing women a near impossibility. Demographically, there are many more men than women crossing both the land and the sea border from Turkey to Greece, so to start with, it was more likely that I would have access to interviews with men on the move (UNHCR 2021). One of my main contacts in the field was also a man, so I was limited by the fact that it was also harder, and less ethical, for him to attempt to gain the trust of women in a potentially vulnerable/ precarious situation on my behalf. In following the principle of do no harm, I ensured that any potential interviewee gave their full informed consent before speaking. The fact that I was interviewing remotely, and therefore relying completely on my contacts in the field, left me unable to build relationships with people on the move and to gain their informed consent without my contacts' assistance. In light of this, I acknowledge that the absence of female voices with lived experience provides a limited perspective on pushbacks and border violence, particularly considering the allegations of sexual abuse and harassment in several testimonies (see page 29). There also exists an absence of LGBTQI+ voices and those of other minority groups, for many of the same reasons as listed above. This compounds the limited perspective which I am able to present here, and leaves further areas for research on this topic, such as an examination of the intersection between sexual violence and border violence, and the lived experience of women and minority groups trying to cross the Greece-Turkey border during the coronavirus pandemic.

I generated data from testimonies in order to address the practices and effects of pushbacks and border violence, pertaining to sub-questions one and two (see Appendix IV for the list of testimonies). Of the 107 testimonies I gathered data from, 52 were published by the Border Violence Monitoring Network (BVMN) on their online testimony database. The remaining 55 testimonies were published by the NGOs Alarmphone, Aegean Boat Report and Legal Centre Lesvos, the law practice GLAN Law, and the online forum Just Security. The testimonies published by Aegean Boat Report were available via their public Facebook page, with the remaining accounts published on the sources' respective websites. BVMN testimonies are collected by several of their partners in the field, meaning that they are also generated by more than one source. All sources are registered NGOs whose work has been cited elsewhere. The testimonies published by BVMN were the most

detailed, as BVMN have a dedicated database and their own standardised methodology, which incorporates collecting hard evidence (locations, times) with a narrative interview style, allowing for the respondent to offer extra information (BVMN 2021). All sources supported testimonies with corroborating details of locations, images, videos and other reports. As base criteria for the whole data set, all the testimonies I selected contain key information about the crossings: the date, location of departure, location of arrival (if applicable) and number of people (some numbers were estimations due to extenuating circumstances). All accounts related to incidences which occurred between 1st January 2020 and 31st December 2020. While I take significant events beyond this timeframe into consideration throughout this study, narrowing the dates down for my analysable data set helped me to both be selective about my data and to focus on the specific issues occurring in 2020.

I collected 43 testimonies for land pushbacks and 64 testimonies for sea pushbacks in 2020. This, however, does not accurately reflect the numbers, as much more evidence exists for land pushbacks than sea pushbacks. The BVMN database alone contains 77 testimonies of pushbacks at the land border for 2020, affecting an estimated 4,531 people; by contrast, the database only contains 9 testimonies of pushbacks at the sea border for 2020, affecting an estimated 250 people (BVMN 2021). I therefore only supplemented testimonies of pushbacks at sea with accounts from other sources, and relied on the BVMN database as my only source for land pushbacks. As I was not able to analyse all 77 BVMN testimonies of pushbacks at the land border, I strategically sampled a “relevant range” by selecting between 4 and 6 testimonies per month, and the maximum amount where the testimonies in the chosen month numbered less than four (Mason 2018, 58). I used “time” as a selection criterion primarily as a means of narrowing down the data into an analysable number. In line with theoretical or “purposeful” sampling, I selected those testimonies which pertained to some of the more extreme experiences at the border, including sexual harassment, deaths, and violations of children’s rights (Glaser and Strauss 1967). This allowed me to assess the events at the border via a “relevant range” of their most extreme incarnations, rather than being limited by an approach which levels out extremities in favour of representation (Mason 2018, 58). This left me with the 43 testimonies I finally collected, with an average of 3.5 per month. I also aimed to collect testimonies from as wide a range of locations as possible, in order to provide some form of representation with regards to different practices occurring in different places. Therefore, my criteria for sampling were (in order of priority):

- Intensity/ extremity
- Geographical location (diverse)

I also generated data through searching through relevant NGO reports, government press releases, newspaper articles and social media posts. This data helped me to answer sub-question one, in relation to the mechanisms of control being practiced at the border. I narrowed internet searches down through the use of keywords: “migrants”, “refugees”, “asylum seekers”, “people on the move”, “EU”, “Europe”, “Frontex”, “Greece”, “2020” “Covid-19”, “coronavirus pandemic”, “border”, “pushbacks”, “expulsion”, “violence”, “human rights”, “human rights violations”. I also adopted a snowballing strategy after beginning to collect evidence, through which relevant reports led me to further relevant reports, and so on. I kept abreast of the news and changing events as I progressed with the study, and kept notes of significant events and things I noticed as I went on. Being involved

with several activist networks in the UK and three countries across the Balkans (I explore the implications of this involvement in the positionality section below) also allowed me to keep up to date with news and developments – some of which were not otherwise publicly available – through regularly updated messaging groups, online platforms and virtual meetings.

DATA ANALYSIS

In order to conduct a thematic analysis of the testimonies I collected, I inputted the text from each pushback incident into a file in the data analysis programme NVivo12, to code them according to indicators from my analytical frame and common themes. I adopted the same technique with the interview transcripts which I had transcribed from the recordings and interview notes. As the transcriptions were long, I opted for coding them manually. I did this by highlighting the relevant section and noting the node in a comment in a word document, before recording the corresponding indicators, the number of files and references, and any relevant notes, in an Excel spreadsheet. Going through this process on NVivo12 with the testimony data previously, helped me to do this quickly and effectively for the interview data manually, without need for the software. As Boeije (2009, 98) states, “some researchers prefer using a paper and pencil” when coding. In order to identify my codes, I created a base list of indicators which corresponded to my analytical frame, before adding to this list according to the common themes and issues which arose in the accounts. This took me through a process of open, axial and selective coding as described by Boeije, which I explain further below (Boeije 2009, 93-121). The indicators all relate to one of four umbrella categories, which eventually led me to a “core category”, which eventually became my working analytical frame (Boeije 2009, 116).

The four umbrella categories, and a brief description for each, are as follows:

Control tactics

- This category stems largely from Foucault’s discussion on biopolitics, which sees a sovereign entity implement “state control of the biological” through disciplinary and regulatory mechanisms (Foucault 2003, 240). This includes surveillance, physical and mental punishment, and extends to the practices of exclusion described by Giorgio Agamben in *Homo Sacer*.

Endangering life

- This category assesses the outcomes of sovereign control tactics which put human life at risk, including thanatopolitical governance through death (Squire 2017, 515). It reflects the danger people on the move are placed in – indirectly and directly – by state border controls, such as through physical violence or the denial of food and water. This category draws from Agamben’s theory of thanatopolitics and developments of the theory.

Unofficial policies

- This category relates to the way in which many illegal practices are essentially undeclared state policies through their systemic and well organised but clandestine nature. This includes the use of incommunicado detention sites, indiscriminate beatings, the confiscation and destruction of legal documents and residence permits, and the undeclared multi-agency

coordination with international and EU agencies such as NATO and Frontex. The category draws on Giorgio Agamben's theory of the state of exception.

People on the move (POM) strategising

- This category entails actions and decisions made which relate to the agency of the biopolitical subject. It considers how people on the move make independent decisions about their actions, such as by changing or reconsidering their route, hiding, or raising awareness of their situation. This category draws from the work of Vaughan-Williams (2015) in advancing theories of biopolitical subjectivity and agency of people on the move, as well as Hardt and Negri's (2000) conception of the biopolitical subject.

The initial indicator list pertaining to these categories (created in the early stages of data generation) and the longer indicator list developed in the later stages of data analysis, can be found in Appendix I.

During the analysis, I followed a method of moving from open coding to axial coding to selective coding, as set out by Hennie Boeije (Boeije 2009, 93-121). I started with collecting all data and coding according to general themes, some relevant and some irrelevant, before making connections between categories through axial coding (this is where my umbrella categories began to appear), and then finally selectively coding by identifying a core category and relating this to the other categories (Boeije 2009, 96, 108, 115). The core category which arose from this process is *disobedient movement in a rightless zone*. This category – which acts as an analytical frame in this study – captures two key elements which arose from the data: extreme sovereign control, and people on the move's agency. While the early stages of the data analysis process yielded four categories – control tactics; endangering life; unofficial policies; POM strategising – I later refined these categories to make up the two key components of the core category: *disobedient movement* and *the rightless zone*. I then split this category into its constituent indicators: in the rightless zone, *the zone*, and *rightlessness*; for disobedient movement, *persistence*, *ingenuity* and *solidarity*. I explore these indicators respectively in Chapters Three and Four. The two halves of this complication interact and reproduce each other in a way that is mutually constitutive. This interaction reflects Giddens' "duality of structure", in which "the structural properties of social systems are both medium and outcome of the practices they recursively organize" (Giddens 1986, 25). While I recognise that there are other and sometimes more complex processes at play in this case, I have identified the core category and its indicators in order to better understand a particular angle of the case, entailing sovereign control practices and disobedience in the rightless borderzone.

ETHICS

Ethics in research is of utmost importance, regardless of the subject matter. Special attention must be given, then, when the subject matter concerns extreme violence and trauma. It must also be given when the research produced has the potential to implicate its subjects in further harm or reprisals. Hence why five of my six interviewees remain anonymous, and the names and specific locations of the organisations that they – and I myself – are involved with, remain undisclosed. Hence also why any information about specific routes or tactics were deliberately not asked, or if given, not published in this thesis. As a baseline, I abide by the American Anthropological

Association's (AAA) ethical principles throughout this project, which include do no harm, to be open and honest regarding my work, and to maintain respectful ethical and professional relationships (AAA 2012). However, I agree with others in the research community who assert that these values should be an ethical minimum rather than a gold standard. Richard Hugman et al. state that:

While the baseline of 'do no harm' is recognised as an important starting point, there is a growing sense that research into human suffering ought only to be justifiable if it contributes to the ending of that suffering (Hugman et al. 2011, 1272).

This is part of a "resistance as method" approach that I adopt, which Maurice Stierl derives from Foucault's work on resistance (Stierl 2019, 15). I explain this approach in the section below on positionality.

During data generation, I approached informed consent as "a process rather than an event", which I ensured in several stages along the way: before the interview date, at the start of the interview, after the interview, and again during any post-interview contact (Hugman 2011, 1278). However, as Mason says, "there are limits to how adequately you can inform all interviewees about all these aspects [of ethical concern]" (Mason 2018, 95). Considering this, I informed interviewees to the best of my ability, regarding the purpose of the project, what I planned to do with their interviews, and how their data would be stored. I asserted each participants' right to decline for the interview to be recorded, and indeed took notes for two out of the six interviews. It is worth noting that both the unrecorded interviews were with white Western fieldworkers. The reasons given were due to an ongoing legal case, but it was arguably easier for my white interviewees to refuse a recording than my non-white interviewees, particularly when considering the power dynamic in this scenario. A power dynamic can exist between researcher and subject, particularly when the researcher is white, from the Global North, and holds a strong passport, and when the subject has precarious resident status and is considered "illegal" by authorities. Language barriers and existing prejudices and expectations can also exacerbate these dynamics. Informed consent in a context of "stark power differentials" can therefore be "highly problematic" (Hugman et al. 2011, 1278). These dynamics were very likely a factor in my interview and data generation process. This is especially important when considering the position of privilege and power that I hold, as a white woman with a UK passport, both in the research and wider world context. In light of this, I made every effort to ensure my interviewees felt they had agency in the process, and believe that I generally achieved this. However, there were factors which meant that, despite my efforts, I inevitably held more power in the interview situation than some of my participants. I attempted to counteract this through the process of informed consent, through the narrative style element to my topic list and by ensuring participants knew they could withdraw at any point in the process, including after the interview itself. Additionally, keeping in touch about the project with participants who wished to maintain contact, and having the assistance of some participants in establishing further contacts, potentially helped to level out this power dynamic.

In reference to the preservation and protection of my work, I abide by the ethical expectations and responsibilities as set out by the AAA (AAA 2012). AAA do not make particular recommendations for how to go about this, but state that "the interests of preservation ordinarily outweigh the potential benefits of destroying materials for the preservation of confidentiality" (AAA 2012). With this in

mind, I am storing all raw data collected from interviews, including recordings, handwritten notes, digital notes and any related online conversations, in password protected files on my computer for the limited time of one year after they were recorded, after which I will destroy the data. Any notes made that do not directly link to the original interview or the anonymous participant's identity, and of course, the thesis itself, which does not include any identifying information for anonymous participants, will not be subject to this. I informed all participants of this commitment before the interview, along with asserting their right to anonymity.

POSITIONALITY

As has been established in the research community for decades, no researcher is entirely neutral (Mason 2018, 21). Indeed, a researcher is "already a part" of their subject matter simply due to their researching it (Giddens 1986, xxx). Beyond this, my personal, political and professional positionality is important to acknowledge. I am the grandchild of immigrants, and would not have been born were it not for the laws and norms that made immigration to the UK a possibility for many – including my grandparents – in the 1950s and 1960s. This family history makes the subject of immigration important to me personally – however, it does not equate to personal experience. As a white researcher from the Global North, border violence and illegal expulsion will almost certainly never be a personal experience of mine. While perhaps allowing me the wider perspective of an outside observer, this means that I will never fully understand the experiences of the people who I am writing this thesis for, about and because of. Additional to the implications of my position in relation to my participants, is my political position. I am and have been an active member of several of the activist and humanitarian organisations whose work pertains to the subject matter in this thesis. I am currently a volunteer with two organisations in the Border Violence Monitoring Network, the same network which is the source of much of my primary data. I am a volunteer campaigner for a UK based organisation which advocates and campaigns for refugee family reunification, and have additionally spent various periods of weeks and months volunteering in Greece and Calais with grassroots organisations supporting people on the move. The experiences and connections that I have formed over the last five years have been essential to this project. It would have been virtually impossible for me to have gained the insights, understanding, contacts and trust that I gained during this research study, without being involved in these networks and organisations. I also believe that this positionality is an important aspect of my study's contribution to the change that an ethical and conscientious researcher should be striving for, beyond simply doing "no harm" (Hugman et al. 2011, 1272). This plays out through the thesis project being a part of my broader efforts as a researcher and activist, and these efforts also in turn informing my research.

In his work *Migrant Resistance in Contemporary Europe*, Maurice Stierl proposes to "go one step further" than simply acknowledging positionality and intentions, but to "*become of the struggle*" through "*resistance as method*" (Stierl 2019, 15, 19, emphasis in original). Stierl asserts that the topic of migration is intensely political, and the use of "supposedly value-neutral and objective research [to fertilise] the work of national or supra-national border enforcers, including EUrope's border agency Frontex" must be addressed (Stierl 2019, 19). Because of this, it has been proposed that the researcher should exercise a

disobedient gaze, which aims *not to disclose what the regime of migration management attempts to unveil – clandestine migration: but unveil that which it attempts to hide – the political violence it is founded on and the human rights violations that are its structural outcome* (Lorenzo Pezzani and Charles Heller 2013, 294, emphasis in original, cited in Stierl 2019, 21).

For this reason, I have done my best to protect any information which may empower the EU's violent border regime and equip authorities in furthering the repression they conduct. For this reason, I adopt a "disobedient gaze" and resistance as my method. In doing so, I seek to uncover that which the border regime "attempts to hide". Importantly, this does not mean that the empirical or academic strength of this study is undermined. This thesis is first and foremost an academic research project, providing extensive empirical evidence which has been gathered in a systematic and transparent manner. This includes six in-depth interviews and 107 testimonies, combined with a wealth of academic and empirical literature, as well as my own qualified academic analysis. Acknowledging my responsibility as a researcher to my subject matter, and my refusal to allow this research to feed further harm, is simply part of what I see as an essential ethical due diligence.

CHAPTER TWO: BIOPOLITICS: A THEORETICAL OVERVIEW

In this chapter, I provide a theoretical overview of biopolitics and its connected theories, which form the building blocks for key concepts in this research study. This overview provides the foundation for the frame *disobedient movement in a rightless zone*, as well as allowing me to elucidate the theoretical debate in later chapters, in relation to the empirical case. I first give an overview of biopolitics from its inception to more recent developments of the theory, including discussions about the biopolitical subject, and the related theories of thanatopolitics and necropolitics. I then focus specifically on the connection between biopolitical theories and migration, including existing studies linking biopolitics to the border regime, border violence and migrant rightlessness. Next, I discuss critiques of the literature, including what is yet to be said about biopolitical theory and its connection and relevance to the empirical case of pushbacks across the Greece-Turkey border. Finally, I present my own analytical frame of *disobedient movement in a rightless zone* as a way to tie together the work of various biopolitical theories in relation to data from the empirical case.

THEORIES OF BIOPOLITICS

Both the term 'biopolitics', and the concepts surrounding biopolitical theory have been in use for at least a century. The term 'biopolitics' has had various different meanings throughout its life: it was used within the fields of political science and biology in as early as the 1920s, and was used by the Nazis to describe their racist concept of a state in the 1930s (Liesen and Walsh 2012, 5). The current definition of biopolitics is, converse to its previous incarnations, rooted in works such as Hannah Arendt's reflections on stateless people and universal human rights in the 1950s (Campbell and Sitze 2013, 23). Term and concept were brought together by Michel Foucault in his various works in the

1970s, through which he developed the theory of biopolitics as it is most widely known. Foucault's definitions of biopolitics are, at times, slippery, and have been reformed and reinterpreted by other scholars since. In his 1975-1976 lectures, he describes biopower as a "new technology of power" entailing "state control of the biological", which emerged in the second half of the eighteenth century (Foucault 2003, 240, 245). This was the moment at which systemic racism was inscribed as a mechanism of power in the modern state (Foucault 2003, 254). This shift saw the emergence of a sovereign power that not only controlled death by letting live and making die (through pardons or executions), but that also controlled biological life itself: a power "to 'make' live and 'let' die" (Foucault 2003, 241).

Biopolitical mechanisms divide into two main strands: discipline and regulation. Mechanisms of discipline largely control individuals through measures such as surveillance, training and punishment (Foucault 2003, 242). Regulatory mechanisms control populations and large numbers of people through measures such as "forecasts, statistical measures", and interventions to adjust those figures and maintain averages, for example to increase birth rates, or to manage disease and mortality (Foucault 2003, 242, 246). Foucault has at times termed the control of individual human bodies "anato-politics", with the control of the wider human population as "biopolitics", and the overall power encompassing both mechanisms as "biopower" (Foucault 2003, 243). However, it has been noted that the three terms are often indistinguishable in Foucault's writings, and have been used interchangeably by recent scholars of biopolitics: for this reason, I do not differentiate between biopolitics and anato-politics, nor between biopolitics and biopower, except only to refer to biopower as the power at the disposal of biopolitics (Liesen and Walsh 2012, 6). While Foucault described a biopolitics that is largely pastoral in nature, through which states promote life in order to control, rather than repress and discipline life in order to control, it has been found that in practical terms, and in the case of border control, more repressive policies, which disregard human rights and human life itself, are the dominant power (Topak 2014, 820). While some scholars, such as Özgün E. Topak – who I return to later on in this section – view this divergence in the empirical case as being consistent with Foucault's work alone, others have argued that it is necessary to draw from other theories in order to properly understand repressive death-making policies in the borderzone and in other areas of social life.

Agamben's work provides a key development and challenge to biopolitics, which both acknowledges the repressive power of the state and its biopolitical death-making practices. The Italian philosopher draws on the work of Hannah Arendt and Aristotle in order to challenge Foucault's narrative of biopolitics. In his seminal book *Homo Sacer*, Agamben argues that, counter to Foucault's historical reading of biopolitics, the practice in fact emerged "with the whole of Western metaphysics beginning with Aristotle" (Campbell and Sitze 2013, 25). He also considers the work of both Foucault and Arendt to be incomplete, where Foucault never recognised the totalitarian state and the concentration camp as biopolitical mechanisms, despite his writings in relation to Nazism, and Arendt never applied the concept of biopolitics to the concentration camp and the totalitarian state, which she writes extensively about (Agamben 1995, 71). Agamben sees Arendt and Foucault as having been unable to link their concepts together, and so himself attempts to "make their points of view converge" through the concept he establishes in *Homo Sacer*, of "bare life", the politicised form of natural life or "sacred life" (Agamben 1995, 71). Bare life constitutes the man who "may be killed and yet not sacrificed", included in politics "solely through an exclusion" formed by contemporary

biopower (Agamben 1995, 12, 13). The concept refers to a person who has had his/ her rights as a citizen revoked, becoming a human life valued only for their biological existence, with no attention given to the quality of that life. The rightless zone this person subsequently exists in is the “state of exception” or the “sovereign ban” (Agamben 1995, 50, 72). In a further divergence from Foucault, Agamben sees the concentration camp, and not the city as Foucault states, as “the fundamental biopolitical paradigm of the West” (Agamben 1995, 102). Agamben considers bare life to be exposed through the figure of the refugee, a figure that, “by breaking the continuity between man and citizen, nativity and nationality, [puts] the originary fiction of modern sovereignty in crisis” (Agamben 1995, 77). Agamben’s work has caused some controversy and confusion – additionally, many scholars have sought to use the *homo sacer* thesis and the paradigm of the Nazi lager as a template for other contexts and spaces which do not necessarily reflect the original concept (Vaughan-Williams 2015, 47). I do not draw on Agamben’s work to assess the space of the refugee camp or other institutions, but rather focus on the way in which Agamben’s conception of a state of exception can help illuminate the rightlessness induced in the borderzone, the connection between which I return to in the following section.

Giorgio Agamben also developed the term thanatopolitics, which refers to the sovereign biopolitical exposure to death, and the point at which “a decision on life becomes a decision on death” (Agamben 1995, 72). Thanatopolitics, or ‘death-politics’, is derived from the Greek word for death, ‘thánatos’, and entails a state governed exposure to death or causing of death (Squire 2017, 517). Thanatopolitics runs alongside Agamben’s concepts of bare life and the sovereign ban (Agamben 1995). The concept was later defined by Vicki Squire in relation to the empirical case of migration policies as a “conceptualisation of the way in which exposure to death is integral to sovereign-biopolitics”, and a “process of ‘governing migration through death’” (Squire 2017, 517). This is similar to the related term of necropolitics, which is defined by Achille Mbembe, who is credited with the term, as based on a sovereign right to kill, relating to a “state of exception” – as thanatopolitics does (Mbembe 2003, 16). However, according to Squire (2017, 521), the two terms have distinct definitions, between a “thanatopolitical ‘drift’ that kills and necropolitical conditions that drive flight from a ‘living death’ and the danger of being a ‘disposable life’”. There is a lack of clarity between the two concepts, which warrants further exploration: this exploration is not within the scope of this thesis, and in the meantime, I focus more closely on thanatopolitics, due to the studies linking thanatopolitics with borders and migration, and the connection made by several scholars between thanatopolitics and the control of people on the move (Kantz 2015; Stierl 2019; Vaughan-Williams 2015). I return to the link between thanatopolitics and the Greece-Turkey border in Chapter Three.

Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri reject Agamben’s narrative of biopolitics, in particular because, like Foucault, it fails to identify the subjectivity and shared object of biopolitics, which they state is namely society: “biopower is a form of power that regulates social life from its interior” (Hardt and Negri 2000, 215, 238). Hardt and Negri differentiate between biopolitics and biopower more than Foucault, defining biopower as a power over all life, and biopolitics as “the power of life to resist and determine an alternative production of subjectivity” (Hardt and Negri 2009, 238). They describe this new society of control and biopower as Empire, which consists of industrial and financial powers that produce commodities and subjectivities, through interventions with weapons of lethal force (relating to the military), but also through moral instruments (through news media and religious

organisations, and through NGOs such as Amnesty International and Oxfam) (Hardt and Negri 2000, 223, 227). Biopower regulates “social life from its interior”, making it even more pervasive than the biopolitics of Foucault and Agamben (Hardt and Negri 2000, 216). Their reference to the soft power of international institutions is echoed by Mark Duffield in his study on the global “non-insured” (Duffield 2008, 149). Duffield draws on biopolitical theory to explain how development, security and containment go hand in hand to separate the Global North or “developed” world and the Global South or “underdeveloped” world (Duffield 2008, 145). Duffield (2008, 146) states that “this biopolitical rather than geopolitical divide has been widening since the end of the nineteenth century and has deepened following decolonization”.

In order to proceed with a working definition of biopolitics, I mostly draw from Foucault’s definition of biopower as “state control of the biological”, entailing the control and punishment of populations (Foucault 2003, 240, 242, 246). Reflecting a more recent understanding of biopolitics as being part of a global political sphere rather than just the regulation of individual state populations, I refer to biopolitics in the same way as Foucault often infers, as the overall political rationale for, and system of, biopower. In this, I reject both Hardt and Negri’s inversion of the definition, and Foucault’s often ignored term of anatomo-politics. While the biopolitical subject is key to my understanding of the borderzone, that subject’s power and resistance is not *biopolitics* – rather, I see biopolitics as the system of control enacted over the subject, and the subject’s response to that system as disobedience. Essential to my working biopolitical frame are Foucault’s theories of biopolitical control and state racism, Hardt and Negri’s conception of the biopolitical subject, and Agamben’s notion of the state of exception. These theories all relate to each other in that they either constitute a part of the rightless zone, or a part of disobedient movement. Thus, they build the foundation for my working frame of *disobedient movement in a rightless zone*, which considers both the extreme sovereign biopolitical power which seeks to punish and contain, and the agency and subjectivity of those who oppose, disobey and move against that power.

BIOPOLITICS AND MIGRATION

The link between biopolitics and the EU border regime’s treatment of people on the move has been established for several years. While some scholars have sought to use the empirical case of the border to extend and challenge biopolitical theories, others have used it in the way of a template, on which to apply definitions of sovereign control. In this section, I explore some of the approaches to the “biopolitical border”, what they have contributed to the debate, and what they contribute to my analytical frame.

When biopolitical theory was first conceived of by Michel Foucault, it was generally established to refer to how sovereign states treat their own subjects within their own territories (Foucault 2003, 240). It was also understood to entail a mostly pastoral power, which controls the biological life of its subjects through measures which promote life (Topak 2014, 830). Contrary to these two contingencies, the connection between biopolitics and (violent) border control entails both the treatment of *non*-subjects and *repressive* rather than pastoral policies, which include the threat of death. Despite this contradiction, several scholars have established a link between biopolitical theory and case for at least the last decade (Squire 2017, Zeveleva 2017, Vaughan-Williams 2015,

Lagios and Lekka 2018, Topak 2014). In keeping with a dialogue between theory and evidence (Ragin and Amoroso 2011, 56), many of those same scholars have also used the empirical case of borders and border violence to examine, develop and challenge biopolitical theory. Among them, Özgün E. Topak (2014, 830) challenges Foucault's conception that biopolitics' historical emergence really succeeded the state's sovereign power, given that one can observe lethal sovereign controls at the EU border. Topak's (2014, 816) article is based on fieldwork observations and in-depth interviews, which allow him to claim that "Greece-Turkey borderzones are biopolitical spaces where surveillance intensifies and migrant lives are held hostage". He also draws from Foucault's methodological approach in identifying biopolitics at the EU border as manifesting itself in "the material practices and effects of power", rather than "narratives of power" (Topak 2014, 818). The practices and effects of the Greece-Turkey border identified by Topak for analysis include interception, prevention, pushbacks and "sophisticated surveillance mechanisms", as well as the various military equipment and technology used by the Greek border force, and EU Border and Coastguard Agency Frontex in assistance (Topak 2014, 822, 824, 830). Topak considers Foucault's "underestimation of territory" to be problematic, through which Foucault implies a largely pastoral control by the state over populations, rather than a violent disciplinary control based on sovereign territories (Topak 2014, 819). Despite this, he does not diverge from biopolitics; rather, he chooses to emphasise those existing aspects of biopolitical theory which better suit the case.

While Topak uses rather straightforward interpretations of Foucault's biopolitics, scholars such as Nick Vaughan-Williams adopt developments of biopolitics in order to explain the more repressive EU border policies. In doing so, Vaughan-Williams (2015, 9, 50) argues that biopolitics also entails "negative" dimensions which lead to dehumanisation and death for migrants, drawing on the related theories of thanatopolitics, zoopolitics, and Agamben's state of exception. Vaughan-Williams's study, *Europe's Border Crisis*, is a largely conceptual work which seeks to challenge existing arguments in Critical Border and Migration Studies via "(post) biopolitical theory" in relation to irregular migration into "EUrope" (Vaughan-Williams 2015, 5, 9). In developing Agamben's state of exception, Vaughan-Williams (2015, 9, 50) defines the sovereign ban as "sovereignty that operates by banning subjects from 'normal' juridical-political order and thus exposing them to violence and death". Furthering this, Vaughan-Williams (2015, 47) claims that cases of pushbacks and abandonment of migrant boats at sea are where "the thanatopolitical impulses of the sovereign ban are especially visible". He counters Foucault's conception of the biopolitical state as "making live" and "letting die", and states that this position is too passive, because it does not reflect the active role that sovereign actors like the EU and its member states often play in causing the violent death and injury of people attempting to cross their borders (Vaughan-Williams 2015, 12, 47). For this reason, he considers the frame of thanatopolitics and Agamben's sovereign ban to be a more appropriate approach, due to what he describes as "the politics of the embodied exposure to death", and the activeness required for states to cause death at the border (Vaughan-Williams 2015, 48).

Two further authors, Vicki Squire (2017) and Jussi S. Jauhiainen (2020), also use developments of the broader debate on biopolitics to address dynamics at the EU borders. Squire draws on Agamben and thanatopolitics, as well as the theory of necropolitics to examine "practices of governing migration through death" (Squire 2017, 515). In her study on border deaths in Europe and the US, she uses theories of biopolitics, thanatopolitics and necropolitics to address the "biophysical violence"

enacted over “migrant bodies” at borders (Squire 2017, 520).² Squire focuses on policies that deal with migrant deaths and affect the bodily functions of people on the move. Her comparative analysis considers the difference in geographical terrains, as well as policies and migratory movements across the US and EU borders. Squire’s consideration of politics relating to geography is reflected in Jussi S. Jauhiainen’s 2020 article, which discusses the biogeopolitics of Covid-19 and migration into the EU, based on statistics on irregular migration from Turkey to Greece and field observations in Lesbos, Greece. The study examines mechanisms of control including the “violent immediate” pushbacks which occurred at sea and on land on the Greece-Turkey border at the beginning of the pandemic (Jauhiainen 2020, 267). Jauhiainen concludes that the Covid-19 pandemic was used as an additional tool to foster biogeopolitics at the Greece-Turkey border, with migrants used as a threat by Greek and Turkish states to establish control, and the Greek state either keeping people on the move alive or letting them die, from the Covid-19 virus or other means (Jauhiainen 2020, 271). However, migrants also crucially showed bottom-up agency and political identity by organising themselves in the face of the various threats (Jauhiainen 2020, 271). Squire and Jauhiainen’s articles illuminate both case and theory, and in doing so, reveal a further understanding of the conceptual and empirical narrative.

As demonstrated, the connection made between biopolitics and the border regime has been well established for several years, with the empirical case also often allowing for a deep development and exploration of biopolitical theories. However, a number of key areas remain insufficiently explored in existing literature, which I lay out in the following section.

CRITIQUES

Several authors have drawn the connection between biopolitics and migration on the borders of the EU, but, aside from Topak’s study, which addresses biopolitical control practices at the borderzone (Topak 2014), the focus has primarily been on refugee camps (Zeveleva 2017; Katz 2015), migrants attempting to make regular crossings, such as via airports (Lagios et al. 2018), migrant deaths and “migrating bodies” (Squire 2017, 529), (bio)geopolitics (Jauhiainen 2020), or on a largely conceptual debate, as highlighted above (Vaughan-Williams 2015). Overall, I consider there to be several critiques of the literature, of which I have identified two main elements: control tactics exercised during pushbacks and the biopolitical subject as an agent figure who disobeys the border regime. These critiques also form the basis of my two empirical chapters as related to my core category.

Firstly, in relation to control tactics exercised during pushbacks, I argue that although studies have sought to uncover and discuss control mechanisms at the EU border, most have only considered pushbacks as a minor element of control mechanisms, or otherwise approached the debate from a conceptual rather than empirical perspective. Of the existing studies which reference pushbacks, both Topak and Jauhiainen refer to the practice as an element of violent bordering practices, with Topak concluding that pushbacks demonstrate that “sovereign border practices reign supreme over human rights” (Topak 2014, 821). However, pushbacks are not the focus of a systematic analysis in either study: rather, they serve only as a mentionable element of biopolitical practices at the border.

² See footnote 5 on page 37 for a discussion of the term “bodies” in the context of borders and migration.

Jauhiainen's study also treats pushbacks as a time-limited phenomenon, relating to the onset of Covid-19 and presumably to disappear again after the peak of the pandemic – despite the fact that illegal expulsions have been documented at the Greece-Turkey border as early as, and likely before, the 2000s (Human Rights Watch 2008), and have been continuing and intensifying for reasons additional to the coronavirus pandemic (Refugees International 2020). Vaughan-William's (2015) work goes further in assessing the case of pushbacks, with a focus on both pushbacks and the abandonment of boats in distress in his third chapter, "Thanatopolitical Borders". In it, he argues that Agamben's theories have been too easily overlooked and dismissed by scholars of Critical Border Studies and Critical Migration Studies, and that thanatopolitics and the sovereign ban, when viewed less deterministically, can help us to understand EU border policies' "biopolitical abandonment" far better than Foucault's concept of "letting die" (Vaughan-Williams 2015, 47). Without this understanding, Vaughan-Williams argues that "it is not possible to understand the systemic nature of the conditions that lead to the routine loss of life, which are otherwise reduced to the mere status of regrettable accidents" (Vaughan-Williams 2015, 47). While Vaughan-Williams draws from reports of "embodied encounter[s]" with the border, his study is not based on systematic empirical research – rather, he draws on an undefined number of cases via secondary source research in order to illuminate his conceptual development of biopolitics. This provides an important development to thanatopolitics and biopolitics in the light of pushbacks, but does not provide systematic empirical evidence, leaving a gap in a full understanding of the case itself. Indeed, no academic study has so far attempted to examine pushback practices in depth, or to conduct a systematic analysis of pushback practices at the EU border and their effects. This is important for two reasons: firstly, as pushback practices have been intensifying, they can no longer be dismissed as a mentionable element of overall bordering practices. With at least 6,726 people affected by pushback practices in 2020 (BVMN 2020), I argue that the practice has had too little scrutiny for too long. Secondly, an examination of pushbacks can allow for a greater understanding of the repressive state policies currently exercised in the borderzone, informing an understanding of how biopolitics operates now in the world around us.

The second critique of the literature in relation to the case, is the minimal attention given to the biopolitical *subject* in the borderzone. The question of the biopolitical subject has also been arguably ill-defined by both Foucault himself, as well as Agamben (Hardt and Negri 2000, 215, 238). "Migrant" agency in the context of EU border violence has been examined by others, but often as an afterthought or antidote to a study on bordering practices themselves (Jauhiainen 2020, Topak 2014), or as being emblematic of resistance, with the biopolitical subject appearing in the theoretical backdrop rather than examined in the foreground (Stierl 2019). While Zeveleva (2017, 41) claims that the refugee is the "ultimate biopolitical subject" of the camp, I would ask if we can further define and understand the biopolitical subject, through examining people on the move's disobedience at the borderzone. For migration is essentially about "mobility through space, across borders, and along routes" (Johnson 2013, 84). This interrogation would be redundant if it did not involve examining the subject's agency: how they move, plan, strategise, disobey.³ Drawing on the theories highlighted above, I aim to identify and examine biopolitical subjectivity in the borderzone. This is also with the acknowledgement that each individual person on the move has their own

³ This aim to understand "how" is also with the caveat that I do not reveal any sensitive or crucial information about people's movements, as discussed in greater depth on page 13-14 of Chapter One.

unique perspective and reasons for moving – I do not attempt to reduce any individual to a category or type, and recognise that there are multitudinous ways that a person on the move may subvert my analysis.

DISOBEDIENT MOVEMENT IN A RIGHTLESS ZONE

The discussion so far leads me to the working frame I have developed for this thesis, as elaborated on in the chapter on methodology. The frame is *disobedient movement in a rightless zone*, which encapsulates all of the elements which have so far been missing in the debate on movement across the Greece-Turkey border – most pertinently, the consideration of both the practices of the EU/ sovereign power, and the agency of people on the move. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the frame consists of five indicators, which are explored in turn in chapters three and four. The first three indicators pertain to the *rightless zone* and are: *the zone* and *rightlessness*. This examines how the rightless borderzone is established, and how the sovereign power exercises violent control mechanisms in the form of (sometimes deadly) pushbacks, which aim to eliminate and exclude unworthy life. The remaining indicators pertain to *disobedient movement* and are: *persistence*, *ingenuity* and *solidarity*. These indicators address the humanity and complexity of those who survive or die at the border, and ultimately, their disobedience and agency in making choices and strategising in the face of a sovereign power. I pose that, for racialised people on the move, the borderzone is not limited to a geographical space: many of the accounts attest that people on the move, or people perceived as being on the move, are subjected to violent pushback practices in locations hundreds of kilometres away from the geographical border. In the everywhere space of borderzone then, a “state of exception” – or rightless zone – emerges, where racialised people are deemed non-citizens and denied rights and access to judicial processes (Agamben 1995, 13). These indicators highlight how pushback practices at the Greece-Turkey borderzone are both a component and a microcosm of the global system of control, by which sovereign entities separate, control and punish human life through a system of expulsion and violence. This practice upholds a regime of global containment by which former colonies/ the Global North prevent “incomplete life” (Duffield 2008, 145) or “bare life” from threatening their own way of life, and are in turn reliant on this subjugation in order to survive themselves (Agamben 1995, 71). Although the agent subject has limited power in this space, I demonstrate in Chapter Four that they act nevertheless, in responding to and at times resisting/ disobeying to the EU border regime.

CHAPTER THREE: BIOPOLITICAL CONTROL IN THE BORDER-ZONE

An old man had breathing problems and he collapsed when they arrived at the Meriç river. He didn't receive any assistance; the migrants were ordered to pick him up. The beatings continued at the riverside. The migrants were forbidden to lift their gaze from the ground and were threatened with guns. Those who looked at the officers were brutally beaten by the masked men in black and green army uniforms [...] “If you look at them, they can hit you until you die. They don't care about this. We were so scared,” our interviewee told us (BVMN, 02/07/2020).

[Greek police officers] asked me to just lay down on my stomach and they put my hands over my head and they just walking on it, they keep walking on it, just like I'm asshole or anything, they don't care if it hurts or not (Interview #2, Turkey).

The data generated for this study reveals that pushbacks in the Greece-Turkey borderzone are systematic, coordinated, multi-agency operations. They also reveal a large array of control tactics, which, while not entailing discipline itself per se, fall under the disciplinary category of Foucault's biopolitical theory, as a "technology centred upon the body, with a focus on "individual bodies that can be kept under surveillance, trained, used, and, if need be, punished", (Foucault, 249). Having discussed the relevant theoretical debate and critiques in the preceding chapter, I elucidate the first part of the empirical case here: control in the borderzone/ *the rightless zone*, through which I examine current biopolitical and sovereign practices in the Greece-Turkey borderzone – an everywhere space which expands far beyond the geographical location of the border. Before embarking on this examination, some context for the case is provided below. While I address both land and sea pushback cases together in this chapter, there are some key differences between the two, an explanation of which informs the ensuing discussion.

PUSHBACKS ACROSS THE LAND BORDER

The land border between Greece and Turkey is a restricted, militarised area in which Greek police and military, assisted by EU agents such as Frontex officers, conduct systematic and clandestine operations to expel people in high numbers. Other agencies such as UNHCR have also been reported to be present during detainment or at other points in the route. While the geographical border is the site of these pushbacks, many people are captured by police hundreds of kilometres into Greek territory. People on the move cross the land border between Turkey and Greece by walking through forest for days in small groups; they also usually have to cross parts of the Evros/ Meriç river (the same river many are later forced back across), which marks much of the Greece-Turkey land border, by wading or swimming. Most have minimal provisions and endure days without food or water: one interviewee spoke of walking for 12 days before he was stopped by police in Greece (Interview #4, Turkey). Characteristic of the treatment people receive when apprehended by officials in Greece is severe beatings, detention without food or water, and being stripped naked for the ordeal. This treatment also sometimes applies to women and children. Often officers are masked and take deliberate measures to conceal their identities. Turkish military officers also sometimes engage in violent practices when receiving people on the Turkish side of the border, or force them back into Greece again: many are left stranded on islands in the middle of the Evros river due to being threatened with violence on both sides of the border. The human rights violations reported in the testimonies and interviews are severe, and indicate a biopolitical sovereign power that controls and punishes people via brutal and extra-legal means.

PUSHBACKS AT SEA

Pushbacks from Greece at the sea border are also highly systematic, coordinated operations. They usually involve a group, travelling by dinghy, being apprehended in Greek territorial water by masked men on a coastguard or unmarked ship, with those officers then destroying or removing the engine of the dinghy and physically pushing or towing the small boat, or making waves to force the dinghy to drift into Turkish waters. Frontex, NATO and other EU marked ships have also been reported to be present for/ have facilitated the operations. Arrivals on land have also reported interactions with UNHCR officers before being pushed back. More recently, the practice has also seen people taken aboard a Hellenic Coast Guard or unmarked ship and then forced into small inflatable unnavigable life rafts and left to drift in open water. In the last year, the practice of forcing people into life rafts has also been occurring after people have already arrived on the islands. One of the key differences between pushbacks at the land and sea borders is the legal context: the obligation to rescue at sea as laid out in the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (United Nations 1982) and the International Convention on Maritime Search and Rescue (United Nations 1979). Another difference is detention: many people pushed back at sea do not physically touch Greek soil, so are not subjected to detention in the same way as on land. However, as more people are being pushed back after arriving on the islands, detention is becoming more of a systematic element in relation to pushbacks at sea.

Taking both land and sea pushback cases together in this chapter, I examine the empirical case through the two halves of the rightless zone: *the zone*, and *rightlessness*. The first section, *The zone*, examines the everywhere borderzone, which exists as a space grounded in the geography of the physical border, particularly that of the Evros river and the Aegean Sea, but also as an everywhere space which applies to people on the move in locations far beyond the geographical border. I also assess how technologies of control operate to facilitate that physical and everywhere zone. I then examine the mechanisms used to strip people on the move of their rights in the section, *Rightlessness*. This section addresses the means of detention, punishment and expulsion of people on the move. I also consider the death-making practices exercised in the borderzone, and how racialised people on the move are subjected to lethal practices by the biopolitical border regime. I aim to answer sub-question one of my research puzzle in this chapter:

What mechanisms of biopolitical control were exercised (officially or unofficially) by the Greek government and EU agencies in the Greek-Turkish borderzone in 2020?

Pertaining to this, I also consider the following questions: where is the borderzone? How do people's first-hand testimonies and accounts elucidate the sovereign practices of the Greek state and the EU? This exploration aims to build an understanding of events in the borderzone based on majority first-hand testimony, as well as to elucidate the biopolitical and thanatopolitical control tactics exercised by the sovereign state over the biopolitical subject in the borderzone.

THE ZONE

Where is the borderzone? What does it look like? How does one know when they are in the borderzone? While many scholars claim that the border is a physical space (Topak 2014; Rozakau 2017; Kovras and Robins 2016), and many others claim that it is rather a digital or more dispersed/

liminal space (Lagios and Lekka 2014; Pollozek and Passoth 2019), the data reveals that the borderzone can be both. The borderzone is a term used by Topak in his 2014 study to describe the border practices which are concentrated in the territories at the edge of states (Topak 2014, 815). Topak acknowledges that those practices are “diffused” within and beyond states, but maintains the geographical nature of the borderzone as being fixed in the border area between states. The results from the data generated in this study demonstrate that, while biopolitical border practices are indeed concentrated at the geographical edges of the Greek state, the term “diffusion” does not provide sufficient explanation for the way in which bordering practices systematically follow people on the move hundreds of kilometres into Greek territory, and occur in populated and regulated areas such as refugee camps and city centres. I therefore suggest the term borderzone to indicate an *everywhere* place as well as a physical place, which applies to racialised people on the move and those people perceived to be on the move. In essence, bordering practices can rely far more on the subject’s perceived identity than the location of that subject. In this section, I examine this zone in two parts: *The far-reach of the borderzone* addresses how border mechanisms exercise control over people in locations far from the geographical border; *Technologies of control* examines how emerging and unpiloted technologies facilitate the sovereign state’s implementation of this zone.

THE FAR-REACH OF THE BORDERZONE

Pushbacks on land target people deep into the mainland, demonstrating that the control of the borderzone extends far beyond the parameters of the geographical border. According to Pollozek and Passoth (2019, 608), a system of immigration and border officials working across networks and databases in Greece and the EU is “moving border practices away from the geographical border of the Schengen area to multiple border sites of remote control”. While some testimony respondents had never crossed the Greece-Turkey border by irregular means, others who were apprehended had crossed a long time before, and were in possession of white cards or permits. Eight of the 43 respondents for land pushback testimonies were apprehended in Thessaloniki, a city 402 kilometres from Edirne, the closest Turkish city to the border. One respondent was apprehended inside Diavata refugee camp, over 400km away from Edirne: along with roughly 40 other people, the respondent was removed from the camp by police under the guise of processing their documents, loaded into a vehicle, detained and then expelled by boat across the Evros river (BVMN 31/03/2020). A further five respondents were apprehended in Alexandroupolis, a city 136km from Edirne and roughly 28 hours of walking at an average speed. 13 of the 64 testimonies for pushbacks at sea stated that the respondents were pushed back after having arrived on an island, despite the fact that legally, their presence on a Greek shore grants them the right to apply for asylum. As highlighted in the introduction, one of the cases of pushback after arrival on a Greek island involved two minors being apprehended in Vathy RIC on Samos, before being forced aboard the Hellenic Coast Guard vessel and pushed out to sea on an unnavigable life raft (GLAN Law 2021). Another group of people were apprehended on Cape Kafireas, mainland Greece after arriving by boat: they were forced onto a vessel by police and then onto small life rafts south east of Chios, and left to drift in the dark (Aegean Boat Report 27/10/2020). One interviewee, a fieldworker with lived experience, commented:

It doesn't matter for [the authorities] how much you did walk in Greece, how many kilo, how many nights, how many days you did walk. It takes you 15 days to walk, or 24 days to get

over Greece, if they catch you, take only two hour to get to the river [at the border]. That's what you hear from everyone who is trying to cross the river (Interview #2, Turkey).

Despite existing laws and conventions, and often despite their locations or lawful requests for asylum, people on the move are subjected to illegal expulsions. The borderzone is a rightless zone for them, where they are afforded no protection under the law. The person in question is reduced to something akin to bare life by the biopolitical borderzone, in which they exist “solely through an exclusion” (Agamben 1995, 13). A crucial function of the borderzone is that, as demonstrated by the data, its reach is far more subject to the people it targets, rather than the location they are in. For the people who have been selected as worthy of exclusion, an everywhere borderzone is in operation; for those who have been selected as worthy of inclusion, the borderzone is just a geographical place.

I suggest that the key distinguishing factor for the application of the everywhere borderzone is racism. According to Foucault (2003, 254), racism is “primarily a way of introducing a break into the domain of life that is under power's control: the break between what must live and what must die”. This is in line with comments from field experts, who note that pushback practices reflect a regime based on race rather than documents (Barker and Zajović 2020). Racist practices in pushback scenarios entail both individual incidents on the ground and the wider context at state and global level. Incidents reported from on the ground primarily entailed race-related insults and a difference in treatment between ethnic groups:

“When they figure out you're Moroccan or Algerian they will hit you more” stated the respondent. They hit the respondent, who is Moroccan, twice on the arms, once on the elbow. [...] Those that told the police that they were Moroccan or Algerian were beaten more than the others (BVMN, 10/10/2020).

Some testimonies I've been taking, one of the guys he is a Palestinian guy, told the officer that he was from Palestine, and they did say, “there is no such country as Palestine,” and hitting them for that (Interview #2, Turkey).

As well as revealing a differentiation in treatment according to perceived national or racial identity, statements also concerned the overall nature of pushback practices as part of a wider global system of inequality:

I think it's all about race. It's all about racism because if you just look at any incident where a white person is in distress at sea, how much is mobilised to save them and how everybody involved in the rescue is celebrated as heroes and so on, and how widely it's reported [...] Also the access to movement that people have is basically based on colonial structures, so the former colonial powers are the ones who now enjoy the most freedom of movement, where everybody else is really restricted [...] You cannot tie someone's hands together and then throw them in the Evros River or in the sea, knowing full well you might kill them by doing that, if you actually see them as human (Interview #1, Turkey).

According to Foucault (2003, 254), racism is embedded in the biopolitical function of the sovereign state:

It is indeed the emergence of this biopower that inscribes [racism] in the mechanisms of the State. It is at this moment that racism is inscribed as the basic mechanism of power, as it is exercised in modern States. As a result, the modern State can scarcely function without becoming involved with racism at some point, within certain limits and subject to certain conditions.

Beyond the level of the state, Mark Duffield argues that there is a “biopolitical division of humanity” operating on a global scale, set in motion by colonisation and fixed by decolonisation. (Duffield 2008, 149). Pushback practices can be seen as a microcosm of global division, which seeks to separate “worthy” and “unworthy” life in order to reproduce and maintain the status quo by means of a rightless, far-reaching borderzone. The very essential aim of borders is racist, built on structures of inequality that keep some sections of global society in power and some sections in a “state of exception” (Agamben 1995, 13).

TECHNOLOGIES OF CONTROL

Technology plays an integral role in maintaining the borderzone’s far-reach. This is executed particularly through remote operation, digitalisation of databases and biometric information, and the testing of unpiloted technologies on people on the move without their consent. These technologies facilitate the rightless zone via pushbacks and border violence. Border technology and military equipment has been heavily invested in by Greece and the EU in recent years. The EU has assigned €34.9bn in its current budget cycle (2021-2027) for border security, with millions of that budget earmarked for contracts with drone companies and the digital European Border Surveillance system (EUROSUR) (Gifford, 2020). According to Topak, there is extensive military and surveillance equipment at the disposal of border enforcers:

the Greek coast guards use patrol vessels and boats, helicopters, planes, thermal cameras, binoculars, night vision goggles, movable vehicles for coastal surveillance, land vehicles, and land-based radar surveillance systems to detect their entry (Topak 2014, 822).

Additionally, EU agencies have begun implementing sound cannons in the land border area, the use of which could cause permanent hearing loss (Cockerell 2021). These technologies form part of an “electronic system of surveillance”, enforced by military operations on both sides of the border, under EU, national and bilateral agreements or regulations (Bigo 2014, 212). Frontex is also a key actor, as a mandated agent in the borderzone which makes use of unpiloted military-grade drones and other surveillance systems (Molnar 2020, 19). Frontex’s involvement is doubly problematic due to its status as a “fundamentally ambiguous” organisation which operates according to a “logic of exceptionalism”, and is neither entirely separate from the state, nor a state itself, assuming “the position of a temporary sovereign” without any of the accountability mechanisms (Vaughan-Williams 2015, 62-63).

In a 2020 report by Petra Molnar for European Digital Rights, the current and proposed technologies of control used in the borderzone demonstrates the essential use of technology in enforcing

biopolitical control and the rightless zone. This has also been exacerbated by the use of technologies in response to the Covid-19 pandemic:

Now, as governments move toward biosurveillance to contain the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, we are seeing an increase in tracking projects and automated drones. If previous use of technology is any indication, refugees and people crossing borders will be disproportionately targeted and negatively affected. Proposed tools such as virus-targeting robots, cellphone tracking, and AI-based thermal cameras can all be used against people crossing borders, with far-reaching human rights impacts (Molnar 2020, 1).

Regarding the impacts of this use of border technologies, Topak states:

Rather than preventing migration, surveillance technologies shift its route to risky areas that are harder to control; and migrants, despite the great risk, continue to cross from these areas and challenge biopolitical controls (Topak 2014, 822).

He concludes, “the primary effects of the technological systems are biopolitical rather than preventative” (Topak 2014, 822). The above discussion demonstrates how the advanced technological equipment of authorities only enhance and facilitate the sovereign control exercised in the everywhere space of the borderzone.

RIGHTLESSNESS

The second part of this chapter addresses the rightlessness enforced over the biopolitical subject in the everywhere borderzone. This indicator is strengthened by Agamben’s theory of the state of exception, in which the subject “may be killed and yet not sacrificed” and is included in politics “solely through an exclusion” (Agamben 1995, 12, 13). This inclusion through exclusion sees the subject’s rights deliberately revoked by the sovereign state through practices of destroying documents, unlawful detention, illegal expulsion and sometimes lethal death-making practices. I examine these four practices in the following sections: *Revoking papers*, *Borderzone detention*, *Expulsion* and *Making die*. Each section details a different indicator for the enforcement of rightlessness via violent pushbacks at the land and sea borders between Greece and Turkey.

REVOKING PAPERS

The rightlessness of the borderzone is often established through the revocation of valid documents for residence in Greece or another EU country, as attested to by multiple testimony and interview respondents. Over a quarter of the 43 testimony respondents for pushbacks on the land, and six of the 64 testimonies for pushbacks at sea, reported having official documentation confiscated and/ or destroyed in front of them, including EU residency documents, official asylum-related paperwork and ID documents from their countries of origin. Several accounts document the destruction or confiscation of Greek residence cards, asylum applicant cards (“white cards”), or temporary residence permits (“kheartias”):

The police arrived to the location with an unmarked white van with no windows and a Škoda car. One of the people apprehended had a registration paper issued by the police (“khartia”), but a policeman took it and ripped it apart (BVMN, 14/04/2020)

“Papers were torn apart and thrown in the paper bin. [...] When they arrest you they don’t listen to you. They know you have the papers, they checked the papers” (BVMN, 16/05/2020).

These accounts reflect a wide reaching, systematic practice conducted by police and officers across the borderzone, with the potential aim of hindering the asylum process and/ or of removing evidence of a person having been lawfully present in Greece. This is supported by an expert report by Human Rights Watch (2020), based on 13 interviews with survivors. The report states that all interviewees had their “personal identification documents” removed when they were expelled from Greece. Additionally, 18 of the 107 testimony respondents and one of the three interviewees with lived experience stated their intention to claim asylum to authorities. While these numbers are significant alone, it is reasonable to assume that many more people may have felt too afraid to voice their request for asylum, due to the extreme violence exercised against them during the ordeal. As stated by one testimony respondent: “when they arrest you they don’t listen to you. [...]. They don’t allow you to ask for water. What would happen if you asked for asylum” (BVMN, 16/05/2020). A person’s right to claim asylum is enshrined in Article 14 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, of which Greece became a signatory in 1948 (UN Digital Library). Greece’s own asylum law reflects this right, stating that “all third-country nationals and stateless persons who enter [Greece] without complying with the legal formalities in the country shall be submitted to reception and identification procedures” (Article 9, Law 4375). In no account – testimony or interview; land or sea pushback – was the respondent received and identified in Greece as stipulated by the law. Rather, the revoking of papers during pushback practices appears to be a standard, if unofficial, procedure, often a key first step in establishing the rightless zone.

BORDERZONE DETENTION

According to Foucault (2003, 242), discipline is part of the sovereign power “addressed to bodies”, which tries to “rule a multiplicity of men to the extent that their multiplicity can and must be dissolved into individual bodies that can be kept under surveillance, trained, used, and, if need be, punished”. While Foucault maintains that this sovereign power is now reduced, the empirical case would suggest that this repressive control is still of primary importance to the biopolitical border regime. While discipline itself is not a relevant indicator here, Foucault’s categorisation of the sovereign state’s control, via surveillance and punishment, remains pertinent to much of the case. Among other control mechanisms, detention plays a crucial role in the punishment and control enacted over people on the move. Detainment is a common feature in land pushback cases particularly, and is reliant on the extra-legal power of the state and its use of hard-to-reach geographical and military areas. Many survivors describe spending one or more days in detention facilities at police stations or in unmarked facilities, situated in the “restricted ‘buffer zone’” of the Greece-Turkey land border, inaccessible to civilians, journalists and human rights observers (Forensic Architecture 2020). Some of these facilities are reported to be little more than informal structures: according to one testimony respondent, “the room did not look like a normal prison or police station

but more like a stable”; another respondent stated they were detained in what appeared to be an “old house” (BVMN, 06/09/2020; 31/03/2020). Four of the 64 accounts from pushbacks at sea also report people being detained in places such as a small informal camp by the sea, a “prison-like detention centre”, and a bus (BVMN 27/07/2020; Aegean Boat Report 05/12/2020, 28/11/2020). A chief characteristic of detention in the borderzone was the denial of basic necessities: 35 of the 43 land pushback testimonies referenced the denial of food, water and/or sufficient clothing (many accounts tell of survivors being forced to strip or of having their clothes removed before being expelled). Some of these ordeals constitute treatment amounting to torture according to the United Nations definition in Article One of the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (United Nations 1987):

The whole group followed the officers to a prison-like detention centre, with three tents and one toilet. [...] The officers denied all their demands for water, food, medication and baby milk. They constantly asked for food but were told there was none for them. They were allowed to use the toilet, but some men from the group were forced to clean it (BVMN 27/07/2020).

Moreover, the detainees were not given any clothes, and were constantly subjected to insults and physical violence. When a person asked questions such as why was he kept there, complained, or asked for basic necessities such as underwear, often an argument broke out. In these cases, the guards called the officers covered with balaclavas, who beat everyone from that cell. The beatings were brutal. The respondent was beaten many times in all kinds of ways – punched, hit with batons, kicked, stamped, etc. Some people’s heads and cheeks were injured in the beatings, but the police did not care, stated the respondent. “They hit you in your face, in your head, your back, it’s up to them.” [...] They were called words that our translator was unable to state out loud because of their level of abuse (BVMN 05/07/2020).

These practices are exacerbated by the added risks posed by the Covid-19 pandemic and the additional need for access to sanitation facilities, considered “essential” by the World Health Organization in managing transmission of the infectious Sars-Cov-2 virus (World Health Organization 2020). Some transit groups also attested to being refused asylum protection with Covid-19 cited as a reason by border officers or police (BVMN 16/05/2020; 23/04/2020). Indeed, Greece’s unlawful suspension of all asylum applications in March 2020, after Turkey’s “ploy” of sending large numbers of people across the border, intersected with the outbreak of the pandemic, two factors which were likely both significant (Refugees International 2020). In a health emergency that has heightened fears and risks, people on the move have been subjected to additional insidious and illicit forms of control. This includes unexplained events such as that of one testimony, which reports that a group of 17 people were injected with a “transparent liquid” in their arms and told “it is for Corona” (BVMN 20/07/2020). I attempted to verify this claim with the source but was not able to obtain further details or corroborating evidence/ stories of a similar nature – therefore the account remains somewhat of an anomaly.

Additional to the abovementioned methods of control or violence utilised during detention, is the employment of sexual and gender-based violence. Incidences of sexual harassment were reported in

six testimonies and two interviews, and related to accounts of unwanted touching and body searches, particularly during detention:

The respondent was searched again and explained (in distress) how one of the officers in Greek police uniform tried to take her away from the group while groping her. He tried to convince her but she refused and eventually he let her go back to the others (BVMN, 03/12/2020).

They were ordered to undress to their underwear and had their bodies searched; the respondent alleged the male officers searched the two women's underwear and repeatedly touched them inappropriately. When the officers did find anything on a person, they ordered them to fully undress in front of the whole group (BVMN 20/06/2020).

It is not clear to what extent sexual violence occurs at the border, as the data generation methods for this thesis were restricted by the lack of access to women with lived experience. However, accounts attesting to incidences of sexual violence suggest that at the very least that there is an abuse of power occurring on the level of the actions of individual officers. As a practice exercised by representatives of the border regime, this constitutes an informal but nevertheless official – because it is practiced by the *officials* – practice of sexual violence as a part of border control. Rape and sexual violence have long been established as a “weapon of war”, enacting violence in various ways (Kirby 2013, 798). Sexual violence in the context of bordering practices is not coincidental, but operates as part of the border regime, just as it has been established by scholars as being a part of the “larger political scheme” in a wartime context (Skjelsbaek 2001, 115). While pushbacks at the Greece-Turkey border do not occur in a wartime context, they occur in a scenario with an extreme power imbalance, where one participant is the representative of the sovereign state, and the other has been stripped of their rights and legal protections. Therefore, sexual violence as a method of control and as a “weapon” is a highly relevant concept, and operates as a (often gendered) tactic of biopolitical control. I see Foucault as having been short-sighted in his approach to the disciplinary element of biopolitics, in that he made no consideration for the use of sexual and gender-based violence as a tool for control over disobedient or unwanted populations and communities. With regards to the data generated, sexual violence is revealed to be a less than common but severe and insidious part of biopolitical control in the borderzone.

The accounts analysed in this section present a particular combination of violence and punishment exercised during detention. Definitions of violence incorporate “assaults on the personhood [and] dignity” of the survivor (Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois 2004, 1), as well as a “staging of power and legitimacy” (Schröder and Schmidt 2001, 6). This staging of power is in line with the control tactics which are key to the disciplinary nature of biopolitics. This sovereign power, according to Foucault (2003), has been reduced, with pastoral biopolitics remaining the dominant form of biopolitics. However, the above discussion of detention practices reveals that, in the borderzone, repressive biopolitics dominates, and is crucial to the enforcement of rightlessness over people on the move.

EXPULSION

After capture, beatings, harassment, deprivations and detention, respondents describe their forced expulsions. The extreme terrain of both the land and the sea border heightens the risk of death from drowning, dehydration or starvation in both the river and the sea, as well as the uninhabited islands situated there. These potentially fatal effects emerge from both action and inaction on the part of authorities during pushbacks. The specific biopolitical and thanatopolitical practices which lead to death or exposure to death will be explored in further detail in the following section, *Making die*. In this section, I examine the extreme biopolitical treatment enacted over survivors during their expulsions, and the methods employed to enact those expulsions according to data generated.

On the land border, expulsion entails survivors being forced into vehicles which are often extremely overcrowded and hot – or extremely cold due to the overuse of air-conditioning – causing some to faint, vomit, or experience difficulty breathing; the vehicles are driven in a way described as “reckless” to a site for drop off near to the river or border fence (BVMN 06/09/2020; 09/09/2020; 03/11/2020). While most groups reported being forced back into Turkey via the river crossing, some state being forced back through a fence instead: “there’s just a fence, they open a door in the fence and then [they] let us go” (Interview #2, Turkey). Several respondents described being stripped of some or all of their clothes before the journey, and being forced across the border naked or in their underwear (BVMN 05/07/2020; 06/09/2020). For pushbacks at the sea border, survivors were either abandoned in the dinghies they had been travelling in, after their engines were destroyed or removed by masked officers, or they were forced – sometimes thrown – onto life rafts and left to drift until the Turkish Coastguard found and rescued them – sometimes aided by distress calls to NGOs and/ or the coastguard made by people on board. Several testimonies for land and sea pushbacks include descriptions of people being forced to keep their heads down, or to crawl on their hands and knees, and being beaten for not doing so (BVMN 02/07/2020, 05/07/2020, 10/11/2020, 28/11/2020). This appears to be a tactic used in order to maintain the clandestine nature of pushbacks and to impede witness accounts, to avoid detection by Turkish authorities, or even at times for the Greek Coastguard to avoid detection by Greek police, as illuminated by the data:

When they put us inside the vessel they put us at gunpoint again. They were hiding us. They said for the Greek police not to see us. They were beating us and told us to sit down (BVMN 10/11/2020).

Anyone who arrives [on the islands] at night will vanish. It’s difficult to [push people back] in broad daylight (Tommy Olsen, Interview #5).

The clandestine nature of pushback practices evidenced here is emphasised by the frequent presence of masked officers: 46 of the 107 testimonies referenced officers whose faces were covered by balaclavas or masks to disguise their identity from survivors.

While some groups reported humane treatment from Turkish police or military who met them on the other side, there are also reports of active violence from authorities on the Turkish side, or of a refusal to rescue despite the Turkish Coastguard/ border officials being present in the area. At the land border, there are dystopian accounts of survivors being pushed back and forth between the two sides of the land border by authorities, resulting in their being stranded in the no-man’s-land of the river and its uninhabited islands:

[...] the Turkish army figure out that they will push people back from that point and it's gonna be a problem. It's been hard because I did find myself just in the middle of nowhere, in an island, between two river, and I spent like one day in there trying to cross (Interview #2, Turkey).

People end up getting pushed back and forth between Turkey and Greece, or they end up getting stranded on islands in the Evros river for days (Hostile Terrains 2021).

Reports from pushbacks at sea also indicate hostility and refusal to rescue from both sides of the border, regardless of the legal and moral obligations:

[The Greek Coastguard] created big waves which were pushing us in the direction of Turkish waters. Our boat was taking in water and the kids were screaming. Our boat started breaking from the bottom. We were taking out the water with our boots. We threw all our belongings in the sea to make our boat lighter. Many of us had no life vests. A pregnant lady fainted. The Greeks continued making waves for a long period. A Turkish coastguard boat arrived and stood aside watching and taking photos and videos for more than six hours. Only after 13:30 o'clock the Turkish coastguard boat finally saved us (Bellingcat 24/03/2020).

This account is one of many which demonstrates the dangerous combination of action and inaction on the part of the sovereign entity during pushback practices, which often entail severe physical violence. The sheer volume of reports which relate to beatings during pushbacks reflects a systematic practice in which severe physical violence is a common and, it would seem, essential component of the state control exercised during expulsion. 51 of the 107 testimonies reported beatings and physical violence; all three interviewees with lived experience reported a personal experience of beatings, and all three interviewees from the fieldworker group reported being witness to survivors' testimonies of beatings and/ or their physical injuries as a result of the violence. The beatings described by interview and testimony respondents were often severe, leaving some survivors with long term physical injuries including skull fractures and head injuries, as well as psychological trauma (BVMN 21/06/2020, 05/07/2020, 16/12/2020; Aegean Boat Report 05/12/2020).

Action and deliberate inaction on the part of Greek, EU and Turkish authorities leaves people on the move stripped of their rights and dignity by the everywhere rightlessness of the borderzone, with escape further dependent on those authorities as well as the geographical terrain. In these examples, the sovereign power of Greece, the EU and Turkey, to control, punish and hold biopolitical subjects in a rightless zone is absolute. The violent and extreme nature of the expulsion, entailing both action and deliberate inaction, emphasises the sheer exclusion of the biopolitical subject from any human rights they may be legally or ethically entitled to, and their ultimate exclusion from EU and Greek territory.

MAKING DIE

Fatalities in the Greece-Turkey borderzone are a relatively unknown quantity, with large disparities in recorded numbers depending on the source. Data from the International Organisation for Migration for their Missing Migrants Project recorded 866 deaths across the Mediterranean route in 2021 (International Organisation for Migration 2021). Yet an investigation by the newspaper *The Guardian* found that at least 2,000 deaths have been linked to illegal pushbacks at EU borders during the pandemic, with “brutal tactics” employed by EU member states to pushback over 40,000 people on the move (Tondo 2021). Although these statistics reference a slightly different area coverage, there is too large a disparity for both statistics to be correct, demonstrating a lack of accurate recording and reporting. Due to the clandestine nature of pushback operations, the environments in which they occur, and the large amount of underreporting, many dead remain unidentified and buried in unmarked (mass) graves in areas close to the border, or lost at sea/ in the river/ in uninhabited areas (Squire 2017, 525; Kovras and Robins 2016). Almost 100 sites for unmarked migrant graves existed in Southern Europe and Turkey by 2016, with numbers likely now having increased since then (Hernandez and Stylianou 2016).⁴ This lack of clarity emerges as a deliberate tactic on the part of authorities to maintain secrecy around pushback practices and extra-legal border control. At the Greece-Turkey borderzone, both deliberate neglect by authorities and deliberately lethal practices bring about the deaths of people on the move. Some scholars differentiate between more active and more passive practices, with Vaughan-Williams describing passive lethal practices as a “thanatopolitical drift” consisting of “acts of omission”: he emphasises that these omissions are deliberately made by responsible authorities, opposing the idea that they rather occur as “tragic accidents” (Vaughan-Williams 2015, 47). In this, Vaughan-Williams challenges the Foucauldian approach to biopolitics, which sees states as simply “letting” people die. However, the data yielded for this study did not reveal a large disparity between different lethal practices, with all fatalities or near-fatalities occurring as a result of some action, or a combination of action and inaction, on the part of the sovereign entity. One example of this difference may be forcing a group into a dinghy in the Evros river (action) and then not assisting them beyond an uninhabited island, where they have no access to food and water, or means of escape (inaction). Both action and inaction are violent practices in this context, and often operate together in pushback scenarios, with sometimes fatal effects.

Five of the 107 testimonies contain incidences of deaths, involving a total of 15 people, as reported by the witness survivors (BVMN 30/10/2020; 06/09/2020; 09/09/2020; 13/12/2020; Aegean Boat Report 19/12/2020). 11 of the deaths were as a result of drowning – eight in the Evros river, three in the Aegean Sea. The remaining four deaths were reportedly as a result of abandonment on an uninhabited island in the middle of the Evros river (BVMN 13/12/2020). Those who deceased in the Aegean Sea are reported to have died after an explosion on the life raft they were forced into by the Hellenic Coast Guard, used to push them back to Turkish waters in December 2020:

34 people was forced into three life raft, but shortly after one of the rafts “exploded” one of the survivors stated, five people disappeared in the dark, only two of them was found alive.

⁴ Further details and insights into the unmarked and/ or mass graves for people on the move at Europe’s borders can be found in reports by the UNHCR (UNHCR 2018), the BBC (Hernandez and Stylianou 2016) and articles by Kovras and Robins (2016) and Squire (2017).

Three dead bodies was taken onboard the Hellenic coast guard vessel ΛΣ 050, before they left them drifting, according to the survivors (Aegean Boat Report 19/12/2020).

The surviving 31 people were rescued by the Turkish Coast Guard on the 19th December 2020. In another incident at sea, one interview respondent described how a transit group was simply thrown into the sea without life rafts:

There were several instances where people were not simply pushed back in life rafts or dinghies, but actually just given life jackets and thrown into the sea close from an uninhabited island. There were at least four instances like that (Interview #1, Turkey).

With the more recent tactic of forcing people onto life rafts at sea (or simply throwing them into the sea without a vessel), rather than pushing them back in the boat they arrived on, the Hellenic Coast Guard, and Frontex in assistance, generally appear to be engaging in a much more active operation than the “acts of omission” described by Vaughan-Williams (Vaughan-Williams 2015, 47).

On the land border, incidences of death most often occur at the river: many transit groups are forced across the river into Turkey in small dinghies (often driven by other asylum seekers who reported being offered the “job” in exchange for residence permits: 19 out of the 43 testimonies attested to this) – others are made to swim across. Many survivors report not being able to swim, or being with others who could not swim: some manage to cross shallower sections of the river by wading, or by holding onto people who can swim. Eight fatalities at the river occurred when people on the move were swept away by the current when forced to swim back, or when the dinghy they were forced into capsized. A further four fatalities occurred after the deliberate abandonment of people on an uninhabited island, with no food and water or way to escape. A testimony from 13th December 2020 reports one such case:

“There is an island inside the [Maritsa] River, a small Island ... [the Greeks] put four people on this island, they drove by dingy, in the river, and they put them [on] this island. They didn’t have anything to go back to Greece, or to go to Turkey”. The respondent alleged that these POM died on the island (BVMN 13/12/2020).

While potentially falling under Vaughan-Williams’ category of an “omission”, this incident demonstrates the calculated thanatopolitical actions taken by the sovereign entity, which knowingly left people to the fate of death on the uninhabited island. At the very least, inaction on the part of the sovereign state is coupled with the earlier actions which forced the transit group to the border area. Other inactions by the sovereign entity are demonstrated by the effects of wider policies of abandonment, such as through the lack of safe routes to asylum, and investment in securitising borders rather than supporting people. The lethal effects of this were highlighted in one interview:

The people got on the truck somewhere in Greece, Thessaloniki [...] and then disappeared for several months, and after I think seven or eight months, their bodies were found in Paraguay (Interview #1, Turkey).

As the interviewee stated, “pushbacks as part of deterrence just leads to more dangerous [routes]” – they do not stop people from making their journeys (Interview #1, Turkey). Other testimonies reveal more discernible active techniques of thanatopolitical control. One particularly shocking incident involves a near-fatality, in which the respondent, who had been residing in Greece for many months and held a “white card” permitting his residence, was forced out of Greek territory by being thrown, handcuffed and naked, into the Evros river:

[Police and soldiers] proceeded beating them for one hour and used zip ties to handcuff them. With their hands handcuffed, they threw them into the water of Evros river. The respondent and some others couldn't swim, other refugees helped them stay afloat (BVMN 21/06/2020).

While the respondent survived to give their testimony, the treatment described demonstrates not only a complete prohibiting of their right to life, but a calculated action to endanger and end it. In this way, the rightless zone is an enactment of the sovereign ban, through which subjects are banned from the normal judicial-political order and exposed to death – both in the literal sense of exposure, and through premeditated actions to end life (Agamben 1998, 53). According to Topak (2018, 820), this also interacts with the position of people on the move in the global order:

It is the practices of death and exclusion, which are all related to migrants' disadvantaged structural positioning in the global capitalist order, rather than productive and pastoral biopolitics that are the dominant aspects of power at the borderzones.

While the position of people on the move within a social hierarchy is certainly pertinent to the case, Topak misses the defining factor of structural racism which governs global borders and produces lines of division and exclusion. As Foucault (2003, 254) emphasised, racism provides the biopolitical break between who should live and who should die. While Topak also claims that death practices as part of the border regime remain true to a Foucauldian biopolitics, Foucault's emphasis on the passivity of death-making practices in relation to biopolitical control leaves his theory lacking in this area. Instead, the active practices exercised to kill human life at the Greece-Turkey border can only be understood by seeing them as part of a thanatopolitical, death-creating system which seeks to both exclude *and* eliminate unworthy racialised life from the sovereign territory. These practices are sometimes coupled with practices of inaction – most often through abandonment – in order to effect lethal consequences. The clear use of – even reliance on – lethal practices at the border in forming a rightless zone and enacting complete control over people on the move is demonstration of the thanatopolitical nature of the Greece-Turkey borderzone.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

In this chapter, I have elucidated the various methods of sovereign control used against biopolitical subjects, and the violent processes utilised to push people back from EU/ Greek territory to Turkey. In it, I have demonstrated how the borderzone exists as an everywhere zone as well as a physical place, and that while biopolitical practices do not necessarily occur in the geographical border area, the practices are also regularly exercised far beyond the border area and depend far more on the

identity of the subject than the location they are in. I have also shown how biopolitical and thanatopolitical practices are enforced through advanced and often unpiloted technology, the use of which has been exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic. Additionally, detention, physical violence and brutality are crucial elements of the extreme control enacted over people on the move, with sexual violence further acting as an insidious tool for control. These practices take their extreme form in the thanatopolitical death-making practices within the rightless borderzone. Violence and lethality is performed through both action and deliberate inaction on the part of the sovereign entity, such as through neglect, abandonment and the refusal to rescue, which demonstrates the essentiality of disciplinary biopolitics and an Agamben-style state of exclusion in the borderzone, rather than the pastoral biopolitics which Foucault established as being dominant. These points illuminate bordering practices as creating a *rightless zone* in which biopolitical subjects/ people on the move are controlled, punished and expelled with no recourse to their rights, a judicial process or accountability mechanisms. However, it is essential that we do not stop at this point. For while the rightless zone of the border regime seeks to exclude people on the move and prohibit their right to life, they are not therefore inevitably reduced to victims. Rather, there emerges a complex interaction and reproduction between the structure and the subject, of which the agency and disobedience of people on the move is an essential component. The disobedient agent, and their interactions with the structure, is the focus of the following chapter, an examination of which takes us further into the heart of the empirical case.

CHAPTER FOUR: DISOBEDIENT MOVEMENT

People on the move are not victims. They have been pushed into a situation and are trying to do the best for themselves and the people with them. In my field in search and rescue there are so many life and death situations where people help each other and do so much to help each other.

(Interview #6, Greece)

I did have a lot of experience crossing [the border]. I knew how to deal with people who are pushed back, because I know how they feel in the first place [...] If you were Muslim or not, it doesn't matter, he is a human, you have to accept him as a human. It doesn't matter his religion, it doesn't matter what is his face, what is his colour, what is his background. He is a human being. You have to greet him as a human being. That is the difference between us, and you know the other governments that we are challenging what they are doing, all the illegal pushbacks that they are doing every day.

(Interview #2, Turkey)

People on the move are not victims. Nor is the sovereign state an ineffective entity. Indeed, both the individual at the border *and* the border regime take actions, make decisions, affect, produce and reproduce each other. Too many studies – particularly those based on empirical research – maintain a focus on the actions and practices of borders alone. And while some of those studies discuss the agency of the people targeted by biopolitical borders, most of them leave the discussion to the concluding remarks or as a mentionable alternative to the main argument of sovereign border control (Rozakou 2017; Kantz 2015; Pollozek and Passoth 2019). In doing so, existing studies often

produce and perpetuate the apparent victimhood and powerlessness of those whom biopolitical border regimes target. Some studies also perpetuate this victimhood through dehumanising language, such as by referring to “bodies” rather than the living, feeling people who experience and interact with the world around them – terminology which essentially centres the objectivity rather than subjectivity of people on the move.⁵ And while other studies do place the agent subject and people on the move’s disobediences at the centre of their work on borders, biopolitical theories remain generally discounted (Stierl 2019; Tsianos 2015). As mentioned in Chapter Two, Vaughan-Williams’ study, although overlooking structurationism as a theory, is one of the few to consider both structure and agency/ “‘border control’ versus ‘migrant agency’” in equal weight and as “mutually constitutive”, in relation to the biopolitical border (Vaughan-Williams 2015, 123). However, his study, as a largely conceptual work, lacks empirical contribution. In the second half of the complication addressed in this thesis, I seek to contribute that empirical weight, which allows for a fuller exploration, understanding and recognition of the agent subject – the person moving disobediently through the rightless zone. In doing so, I link biopolitical theory with the observable agency of the subject, expanding on my working frame through its second part: *disobedient movement*.

THE BIOPOLITICAL SUBJECT

Many approaches to biopolitical border control do not sufficiently examine the position of the subject. As Vaughan-Williams (2015, 57) discusses, those who take an Agamben or Autonomy of Migration approach often tend to privilege either human mobility or sovereign power over the other, creating a binary hierarchy where in fact, neither element is necessarily primary to the case of border control. However, less deterministic interpretations of Agamben’s work can offer “an instructive mode of interpreting the phenomena of contemporary push-backs and abandonment at sea in the context of Europe’s contemporary border crisis”, as well as informing on the agency and lived experience of people on the move (Vaughan-Williams 2015, 59). At the same time, Vaughan-Williams emphasises that

⁵ I consider the misterming of people as “bodies” as inherently dehumanising, and as perpetuating the very biopolitical systems which are analysed in the research. Scholars such as Squire, Lagios and Lekka (2018) and Pollozek and Passoth (2019) all use the term body/ies in reference to people who are crossing borders and experiencing physical restrictions, control and violence. While Vicki Squire largely talks about “migrant bodies” in relation to the dead, the distinction between the living and the dead is not often made clear in her study. Her argument is hinged on what she describes as the “biophysical violence that acts on the biological functioning of migrating bodies” (Squire 2017, 520, 529). By definition, the functioning body is required to be alive in order to be made to die, and is therefore not simply a ‘body’, but a person. I acknowledge that many may use the term with the intention of exposing the dehumanisation of bordering practices, which reduce people to their physical bodies alone. However, I disagree with the centring of the concept in the production of academic research, which only succeeds in normalising the focus on the objectified body rather than the whole thinking, feeling, decision making human being. In line with an exploration into thanatopolitics and death-making practices at the border, I pose that a more humane approach is urgently needed in the field of border and migration studies, and that academics have a responsibility to respect the humanity and personhood of the people who are the subjects of our research, which can begin with the language we use.

it is politically important not to allow an equally abstract emphasis on the agency of 'irregular' migrants to gloss over or detract from the identification and diagnosis of the often-violent methods via which attempts are made to constrain their mobility (Vaughan-Williams 2015, 59).

Indeed, a discussion about the agency and decision making of people on the move should not serve to diminish the attention on the extreme sovereign biopolitical and thanatopolitical policies that operate in the borderzone. While Vaughan-Williams' contribution to this debate is extremely valuable, his study falls short in his failure to identify the structurationism at the heart of this discussion, as well as his lack of empirical contribution. According to Giddens (1986, xxii), "human agents or actors [...] have, as an inherent aspect of what they do, the capacity to understand what they do while they do it". This capacity exists *alongside* the capacity of structures and systems to control and produce the human subject. Human actors are largely in control of their actions – but this is not equal to their existing outside of the structures which govern social life. Essentially, a biopolitical and thanatopolitical border that controls people through violence and death-making practices, to an extent effects and produces the subject who disobeys and acts in contravention of those control mechanisms; the subject's actions also operate to reinforce certain bordering practices and strengthen the aims of the border machine. Therefore, the two elements, structure and agency, exist together, continuously producing each other.

The terminology used to describe the subject's responses has, to date, been varied and sometimes misleading. In discussing structure and subject, Hardt and Negri state that "at the very heart of the power relationship, and constantly provoking it, are the recalcitrance of the will and the intransigence of freedom" (Hardt and Negri 2000, 239). The scholars term this will or refusal to comply as "biopolitics", with "biopower" being used to identify the might of the system (Hardt and Negri 2000, 238); Vaughan-Williams terms it as "positive biopolitics", as opposed to the "negative biopolitics" of the border regime (Vaughan-Williams 2015, 8); Foucault, Stierl and others term it as "resistance" (Foucault 2003, 277; Stierl 2019, 2).⁶ I consider these various classifications to be unsuitable. Firstly, the classification of agency as a version of biopolitics inevitably entails an inversion and confusion of the theory which, as its aim, is essentially examining the extreme sovereign control of the state, and not the agency of the individual. The term resistance is also not satisfactory. While resistance is a complex and diversely applied term, I refer to one of the more common definitions, of resistance as a collective struggle against a greater power, in pursuit of a higher cause or purpose (Hollander and Einwohner 2004, 545). However, the data generated for this study did not reveal a collective opposition to something in order to elevate a higher cause. Indeed, the term "resistance" negates the fact that many people on the move cross borders out of desperation and a lack of alternative pathways, and that they move in order to survive – perhaps collectively, but not as a conscious collective – with individual hopes and dreams, but not necessarily with goals that transcend the individual.

⁶ Stierl (2019) also divides "resistance" into three categories: *dissent*, *excess* and *solidarity*. While some of these categories, particularly solidarity, may appear to overlap, Stierl's focus is on outright protest and resistance, including international networks of solidarity through organisations and activist networks. These focuses are too broad for this study, and at times detract from the people on the move themselves in the borderzone. For that reason, I do not employ them here.

In order to understand people's movement for survival – which does nevertheless often defy the dominant power – I therefore adopt the term *disobedience*. Disobedience is an appropriate term because it recognises the nature of irregular movement as being in contravention of the sovereign biopolitical system, while leaving an interpretation of the motivations and reasons for that movement somewhat open. It also acknowledges that many people on the move do *not* act in a way that is consciously political, and often take actions simply in order to survive, or to find safety. All the same, their actions *disobey* the dominant power. In this chapter, I aim to answer my research sub-questions two and three:

What were the effects of Greece and the EU's regulatory and disciplinary mechanisms on people on the move during 2020?

How did people on the move (the biopolitical subject) resist or defy pushback practices and border policies in 2020?

In answering these questions, I lay out the three indicators for the ways in which people move disobediently in the borderzone, as identified in the data. The three indicators are *persistence*, *ingenuity* and *solidarity*. *Persistence*: how many people on the move exercise patience and perseverance in attempting to continue their journeys across the border despite the obstacles, with many making multiple attempts to cross the border. *Ingenuity*: how many people strategise or utilise minimal resources in order to survive, to move from one place to another, or to avoid detection. *Solidarity*: how people assist each other within and beyond their communities. All three indicators arose from the data as the main ways in which people on the move organise and act as agent individuals on their journeys: how they *move disobediently*. The indicators also relate to each other with regards to the journeys people make, as, while I have separated them into distinct categories, they sometimes overlap with each other, becoming somewhat indistinguishable from each other in accounts of pushbacks. Along the way, the borderzone's *effects* over the people it controls are also considered. Importantly, these indicators are not prescriptive or catch-all: there will be many divergences and differences according to people's lived experiences and individual cases. Rather, they capture some of the main ways in which people move disobediently across the rightless zone as identified in the data, and how, in doing so, they maintain their agency and humanity in the face of a regime of biopolitical and thanatopolitical control.

PERSISTENCE

The first identified indicator for disobedient movement is persistence. This section considers how people on the move move disobediently by persevering, continuing on their journeys and trying again. The primary feature of persistence is the multiple attempts that people make to cross the Greece-Turkey border. People making multiple attempts to cross the border was referenced relatively frequently in the data: five of the six interviews contain a reference for multiple attempts at crossing the border, and sixteen of the 107 testimonies (all from land pushback accounts) reference multiple attempts. While "multiple" refers to anything more than once, several accounts reported people having attempted to cross the border at least ten times, being pushed back each time:

I've spoken with the same people who've been pushed back over 12 times (Tommy Olsen, Interview #6).

This one young Afghan guy had 32 pushbacks within six months. He made it to Slovenia five times and then he ended up all the way back in Turkey. And that's not the norm, but there are several cases like that (Interview #1, Turkey).

While I focus here on the *persistence* of the biopolitical subject, it is worth noting that this persistence is necessitated by the extreme and violent measures taken by the sovereign state, as highlighted in the previous chapter. Indeed, with multiple attempts, comes multiple pushbacks. However, this indicator is also undeniably a marker of the disobedient agency of the people moving through that space. Key to the provocation of power by the subject, according to Foucault (2003, 239), is the “recalcitrance of the will”. In other words, the subject’s obstinacy or refusal to give in is an essential element of their disobedience. This persistence is demonstrative of the agency practiced by the individual who is the subject of the biopolitical and thanatopolitical border control. Even when that individual does not succeed in their crossing, the fact that they return to try again – with some people attempting a crossing up to 30 times – is in itself a challenge and a disobedience in the face of the sovereign power.

The persistence of the agent subject also has consequences for the structure: the Greek authorities have invested a great deal of resources to increase fortifications at the Greece-Turkey border in response to the continuation/ increase in irregular arrival numbers. In January 2020, a 2.7km long floating sea barrier was reported to be constructed between the island of Lesbos and the Turkish coast, with the aim of “containing [migration] flows” (Smith 2020). While the proposed sea barrier was met with political and logistical challenges in later stages, plans to extend the land border fence by 26km came to fruition in October 2020, at the cost of €63m (McKernan 2020). These costly responses to irregular movement demonstrate how much of an impact the movement of people can have on sovereign structures. With a continuously reproducing interaction between agent and structure, the person on the move is also in turn affected by the sovereign response, with arrival numbers dropping significantly from 59,726 in 2019 to 9,714 in 2020 as a result of illegal pushbacks and increasing border fortifications (UNHCR 2021). However, while these measures no doubt have an effect on arrival numbers, they do not stop people from attempting their journeys. As one fieldworker relayed, “deterrence, and pushbacks as part of deterrence just leads to more dangerous [routes]” (Interview #1, Turkey). Often, those dangerous routes come at an extremely high cost, with many losing their lives in the attempt. Ultimately, risky and disobedient persistence is demonstrative of the practical, real world choices people on the move make as agent individuals in crossing the border, which in turn interacts with the way in which the structure operates and responds to them.

INGENUITY

Closely intertwined with the persistence of the agent subject is the ingenuity demonstrated by those making irregular border crossings. As confirmed by all six interviewees, many people on the move are aware of the risk of pushbacks, and so take decisions in order to attempt to prevent themselves

from being subjected to the practice. These decisions generally involve one or a combination of: hiding; a change of route; raising awareness of their situation or position. Some are successful in these disobediences; many are not. However, as highlighted in the preceding section, the success rates are not of particular significance: regardless of the outcome, the strategic decisions taken by people on the move in order to keep themselves safe is evidence enough of the agency and determination of the biopolitical subject in facing the rightless zone at border. One such case, in which a family subsequently avoided being pushed back, was highlighted in an article in the newspaper *The Guardian* in June 2021:

After reaching Samos, [Aisha] hid in the mountains with her children. “We found out the others had been caught and deported back to Turkey, but I made up my mind to stay on the island at any cost and even live on water for many days. I didn’t want to go back to Turkey.” The family drank water from streams and slept in woods on a journey of more than 40km across Samos to the refugee camp in the main city of Vathy. “We were [suffering] hunger, thirst and the terror of being caught” (Fallon 2021).

The family, a woman and her three children, then went to a lawyer on Samos island after being advised by others on the move (this is one example of an overlap between the indicators: in this case, ingenuity and solidarity). With the lawyer’s assistance, they obtained the right to remain in Greece. Aisha also gave at least one interview to a reporter, with articles appearing in local and national media, demonstrating her ingenuity in garnering support and raising wider awareness of pushbacks and her situation. The determination and resourcefulness of the woman and her family meant that they not only disobeyed the rightless zone of the border but also succeeded in *obtaining* their rights in the face of the extreme sovereign power.

Other exceptional cases also highlight the sheer will of the individual against the power of the structure, which sometimes also resulted in their obtaining their rights. In the below case, a group of four people arrived at the reception centre on Chios island, from which they were taken and forced back out to sea by the Greek authorities. During the expulsion, they made attempts to escape, for which they were severely beaten, and their hands zip-tied by coast guard officers:

[Coast guard officers] took them back to sea, and then there they gave them life vests, ordered them to put them on, and then just dumped them in the sea, 100 metres from an uninhabited island. They made it to the island, and then they were stuck there for three days without water, without food. And they started, because they were super desperate, they started using all kinds of trash and debris they found there to try and build a raft. They did, and then one of them – it was kind of buoyant, but it could only carry one person – so they made one of them go on this raft, he just tried to go wherever, didn’t even care if it was Turkey or Greece or anything, just tried to go wherever to try to get help. And that person was then picked up by a Greek ferry, Blue Star Ferries, the normal ferry lines between the islands. And he was actually taken back to Chios successfully. The other three were later on that same day, at the end of the third day, were picked up by the Turkish coastguard with the helicopter (Interview #1, Turkey).

As well as sheer resourcefulness in the face of an extreme situation, many people on the move try to raise awareness of their position – usually via phone calls or online, via social media or messaging platforms. This is often done in order to facilitate a rescue and make themselves more visible, both reducing the likelihood of a pushback and holding the sovereign state more accountable. However, some of these actions have also resulted in more repressive responses from the state, with one unaccompanied minor who livestreamed his boat crossing on social media being put in prison with no charge for up to eight months. As explained by a fieldworker in Turkey,

Because they were aware of pushbacks, [people crossing the Aegean Sea] just tried to raise as much awareness about what was happening as possible. So [...] they were recording videos or actually livestreaming videos, and sharing them in all the big groups [on social media], and calling the emergency number 112, calling UNHCR, and in these videos, call for people to call these authorities [...] the person who did those livestreams ended up being in prison for seven or eight months. There was no charge in the beginning, he just disappeared and it took me a while to find out what happened then took me a while to organise a lawyer, and then that lawyer for the first two months was not told any charges, they were just like “ah no he’s just in custody because he’s a threat to public security” (Interview #1, Turkey).

While the ingenuity of people in the move in their disobedient crossings is undeniable, this does not negate the extreme power of the sovereign structure, which sometimes also doubles down on its efforts to repress the agent subjects who refuse to comply. While this response from the sovereign state demonstrates the mutual constitution of the agent-structure relationship, it also suggests that the actions of the individual, while small, are sometimes successful in posing a legitimate threat to the structure, which therefore sees a justifiable need to take action in order to eliminate or reduce the threat.

SOLIDARITY

The last indicator for disobedient movement considers the ways in which people assist each other during their journeys: how people on the move, along with locals and organisations, offer help and assistance to those in need, and in doing so, disobey the sovereign power whose aim it is to punish, control and divide. (Migratory) solidarity has been termed by Natasha King as “mutual support” and by Stierl as “togetherness”, even if seen only through fleeting moments or digital interactions (Stierl 2019, 95). As observed in the data, solidarity in the Greece-Turkey borderzone comes in two main forms: in the informal assistance given at spontaneous moments during the journey across and beyond the border, and in the more formal, dedicated time and energy given by people via organisations and community groups. Both are worthy of examination, as both demonstrate the will, hope and agency of people on the move, that forms their biopolitical disobedience.

The small ways in which people informally assist each other while on the move is through offers of food, shelter, transport and medical assistance. Some of these offers also come from local people:

There, the villagers helped the people, who were exhausted and had not eaten for almost 3 days. They also called an ambulance for the old man who had a breathing problem. The rest of the people continued to the Meriç village and towards Istanbul (BVMN 2020, 02/07/2020).

In the camp they were assisted by camp residents with food and a place to stay, while organizations provided them with other non food items as well as food (BVMN 2020, 16/09/2020)

Stories of solidarity are not consistent and indeed, there are perhaps as many accounts in which people – particularly locals, for whom there is also a fear of reprisals from the authorities – deliberately thwarted or attacked people on the move and/ or reported them to authorities. However, the stories of solidarity that *do* exist demonstrate that, despite the extreme repression, togetherness and solidarity provide a constant provocation of dominant power by the agent subject, forming “the recalcitrance of the will and the intransigence of freedom” (Hardt and Negri 2000, 239). They also demonstrate that disobedience through solidarity can be exercised by allies to people on the move, as well as people on the move themselves.

The second version of solidarity takes a more formal guise, and also demonstrates more clearly the ways in which the sovereign power responds with further repression and control – mostly through criminalisation. This solidarity is seen through the groups and organisations which offer humanitarian assistance to people on the move and document state abuses, despite the great challenges and risks to themselves in doing so. Two of my interviewees were fieldworkers who had themselves experienced violent pushbacks, and had since decided to remain in Turkey in order to assist other survivors. Both cited a desire to help other people, motivated by their own difficult experiences:

I decided to stop [trying to cross] because now I’m here working. I’m happy with what I’m doing now, and I’m happy to help people who have had this experience. I know what they’re suffering from and feel that I can give at least 1% of my energy to help them [Interview #4, Turkey].

At least you can really feel that you really did something in this world before you left. You don’t need to have a big amount of money. You don’t need to have a castle. You’re just looking for someone that remember you after you’re dead. After you’ve passed away they will go, “oh that man he did help”. So that’s what I want to feel after all (Interview #2, Turkey).

Organised solidarity feeds a longer-term disobedient effort and is practiced by people on the move themselves as well as by people without lived experience, who often work long hours without pay in order to support people on the move.⁷ While a wider sense of justice and altruism is clear from the

⁷ It is outside the scope of this thesis to enter into a discussion about the ethics and politics of volunteering and voluntourism. See ‘The white woman’s burden’ by Ranjan Bandyopadhyay & Vrushali Patil (2017) and ‘Volunteer tourism and lived space’ by Federica Letizia Cavalloa and Giovanna Di Matteo (2020) for an exploration of the topic.

statements above, at the same time, the interviewees' own precarious positions continue to pose challenges to them:

I'm looking for a solution. I'm feeling a little bit better now, but I didn't come here to stay in Turkey, I'm still looking for a solution (Interview #4, Turkey).

There are complex individual motivations, goals and desires at play in these accounts, which should not be flattened in order to produce a neat summary or description of disobedient solidarity. Indeed, this fact reminds the researcher and reader more clearly that people on the move – the subjects – are individual, feeling, thinking human beings who move about the world in a way that is particular to them, and only them. And while many of them move about in a way that is disobedient, no disobedient movement or effort is the same.

Finally, as stated above, the response and reaction from the sovereign power remains a key feature of disobedient movement. The additional repressive measures enacted in response to actions of solidarity demonstrates that the sovereign power aims to divide people, and to prevent them from acting in collaboration and assisting one another – and that the sovereign power is threatened by solidarity and disobedience. This can be seen most sharply through the criminalisation of people on the move and organisations who assist people on the move. Currently, at least 33 human rights defenders working for four organisations across Greece and Turkey face largely baseless charges including “‘espionage’, ‘violation of state secrets’, ‘creation of and participation in a criminal organisation’ and ‘violations of the migration law’” (The World Organisation Against Torture 2021). While these charges gravely impact on the work of these individuals and organisations, it also demonstrates their strength and effectiveness, in acting as confirmation that they have threatened the dominant structure. According to Charles Heller, spokesperson for Forensic Oceanography: “if NGOs are being criminalised, it is because they are being effective” (Hostile Terrains 2021). When the sovereign power takes extreme action to thwart the legal and humanitarian efforts of solidararians, it sends a clear message that the efforts of those human rights defenders is posing an effective threat and challenge to them. This interaction demonstrates the “doubleness of power” through the power of both agent and structure (Hardt and Negri 2000, 237). The power of the subject may be small at times, but it can be very effective.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

In this chapter, I have laid out the main indicators for disobedient movement in the borderzone, which are *persistence*, *ingenuity* and *solidarity*. The examination of these indicators assists in understanding aspects of people on the move's agency in the borderzone. This examination has acknowledged the personhood and agency of people on the move and how, at times, they can be effective in making an impact on both a small and a wider scale. The chapter has also further elucidated how the structure and agent produce, affect and respond to each other with regards to irregular movement and illegal pushbacks, in a way that reflects Giddens' theory of structuration. I have demonstrated how, through *persistence*, some people on the move display an immovable disobedience in the face of the sovereign structure – regardless of whether they succeed in their endeavours. I have also shown how the *ingenuity* of people on the move can allow them to subvert

border control mechanisms and even sometimes obtain their rights from the originally *rightless* zone. Finally, I have demonstrated how, on many occasions, people on the move work together in *solidarity* to assist each other, or receive assistance from those without lived experience, forming a togetherness which strengthens their agent disobedience and increasing their effectiveness against the sovereign biopolitical power. The examination of these indicators offers a small insight into the agency of the individual people who risk their lives attempting to cross borders. As stated above, the indicators are not prescriptive or comprehensive, but rather reflect common themes which emerged from the data generated during the research for this study. This discussion builds on ideas from Vaughan-Williams (2015, 213) about how the border regime and agency of people on the move are mutually constitutive, with a clearer identification of that relationship as structurationist. It also builds on theories about the biopolitical subject as established by Hardt and Negri, regarding the “doubleness of power” and the “power of life to resist and determine an alternative production of subjectivity” (Hardt and Negri 2000, 237, 238). This chapter has elucidated the second half of the complication at the heart of this thesis, and provided an examination of the essential and very present and at times effective actions and responses of the disobedient subject in the biopolitical borderzone.

CONCLUSION

I did try to cross four times. The last time was too bad, so I gave up [...] Actually, I never thought it was gonna be like this way, or the way they behave to refugees or people trying to cross. Because all we can hear about EU that they give the rights to people. Their rights. But unfortunately there is no rights. They do like a thousand crimes in a day. All they do about humiliating people, about taking their belongings, about beating and hitting them and their faces, about harassing women when they are checking them. So, I was shocked, you know, that I saw all that (Interview #2, Turkey).

I thought that Europe was a state that cared for people, that has laws for human rights, a democratic state. From what I had understood of Europe, I had seen safety, freedom and stability. I didn't expect to experience beatings, harassment or racism in Greece or Bulgaria. In the end, we are people. I didn't expect any of that (Interview #3, Turkey).

Disappointment, rejection, shock, pain and trauma. A firm belief in the rights of all people regardless of nationality or race; bitterness and humiliation at being stripped of those rights. Hope that a sense of freedom and safety could still be found somewhere, at some point. All these themes emerged from the interviews conducted with people with lived experience of pushbacks and border violence. While the themes did not fit into an analysable category for this particular research study, it is important to acknowledge them and recognise that these feelings, emotions, beliefs and hopes lay the foundations for the actions and decisions taken by people on the move in the borderzone, running as strong undercurrents of their disobedient movement in the rightless borderzone. And that each individual has intentions and experiences unique to them. While analysis, by its nature, seeks to categorise, interpret and understand, it is my sincere hope that the analysis conducted for this research study has not therefore reduced the people at the heart of this thesis to those

categories or interpretations. Rather, it has been my aim, from start to completion, to illuminate the multitudinous ways in which people subvert the categories and limitations placed over them, including any potential limitations posed by this research study. In order to conclude this thesis, I summarise the main findings of the research and the analytical developments made by the research, before discussing the contributions this thesis has made to the academic and wider social world. I then conclude by examining the limitations of the study and avenues for further research.

In this thesis, I established *disobedient movement in a rightless zone* as an operationalisable analytical frame applied to the empirical case of pushbacks at the Greece-Turkey border. In doing so, I unpicked the core indicators for the frame and examined each indicator's relevance to the case. I addressed the first part of this frame in Chapter Three. In the chapter, I examined how *the zone* itself operates: as an everywhere border which applies to people on the move far beyond the geographical border, and is more dependent on their perceived racial status than on the location in which they are apprehended. The implementation of this zone is facilitated by technologies which digitalise and operationalise remote control, which also use people on the move as subjects for testing unpiloted technologies. This examination demonstrates how the rightless borderzone is a combination of an everywhere border and a physical location, rather than being one or the other as previously established by scholars (Topak 2014; Rozakau 2017; Kovras and Robins 2016; Lagios and Lekka 2014; Pollozek and Passoth 2019). I then discussed the aspects of *rightlessness*, as the main aim of the biopolitical borderzone. This category has four indicators, each of which take a part in establishing a state of exception in which the person on the move is made into a biopolitical subject and stripped of their rights. This is executed through the revoking of papers, whereby state officials confiscate, tear up or otherwise destroy the paper permissions of people on the move to reside in Greece or another EU state. Detention and unofficial detainment practices then effectively control and punish people on the move through brutal means. The violence inflicted on people on the move in detention and during pushbacks is sometimes used against women and children as well as men, and includes sexual violence and racially motivated abuse. The risks people on the move are placed in by these practices is seen to have been exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic and lack of protection against infection and illness. Then there is expulsion, during which people on the move are forced out of Greek territory, and the sovereign power employs clandestine and violent means in order to expel the biopolitical subject. Finally, practices used by the biopolitical power to make die display a combination of action and inaction that sometimes results in fatal thanatopolitical effects for the person on the move. The exploration and examination of these practices forms an in-depth look at the first part of the research complication, in which the sovereign state in establishes a rightless zone for people on the move.

The second part of the frame is examined in Chapter Four, during which I dissect *disobedient movement* and its key indicators as practiced by the biopolitical subject at the Greece-Turkey borderzone. Disobedient movement consists of three indicators, which, while not claiming to be a comprehensive examination of people's disobedience, most consistently emerged from the data generated. In this examination, I discussed how people on the move move disobediently through the borderzone with *persistence*, *ingenuity* and *solidarity*. They persist by making multiple attempts at crossing the border, often risking their lives in the attempt, and/or by waiting and exercising patience and perseverance in their endeavours. They demonstrate ingenuity in their resourcefulness and strategic decisions taken to keep themselves safe and to avoid being apprehended by

authorities and subjected to unlawful practices. Sometimes, the ingenious actions taken by people on the move see them succeed in obtaining their rights. Finally, they display solidarity and togetherness through assisting one another in the borderzone, creating strength enough to threaten the sovereign power. This solidarity comes in two forms – in the informal assistance given to each other at spontaneous moments on the journey, and in the formal assistance given as part of established organisations and groups. The effectiveness of these disobediences is at times demonstrated by the Greek state's repressive actions in response. The actions of individuals in the borderzone can be effective enough to warrant a response from the dominant power, in which lies proof of their strength. This examination of the second part of the research complication provides an understanding of the power that emerges from the agent in the borderzone, a power that interacts with, challenges and disobeys the sovereign biopolitical power. While both agent and structure are mutually constitutive, reproducing and interacting with each other, the biopolitical subject – the person on the move – is still ultimately subjected to lethal and degrading practices by the sovereign power. As established in the chapter, the subject's agency does not negate the dominance of the biopolitical power in the borderzone, which still often succeeds in stripping people on the move of their rights in the borderzone.

In order to understand both aspects of this complication and to develop my own working frame, I have drawn on theories by Foucault, Agamben, Hardt and Negri, Topak and Vaughan-Williams, which I identified and discussed in Chapter Two. Rather than applying any of these academic works in a rigid manner, I have adapted and developed their established concepts in order to better fit the findings which emerged from the research conducted for this thesis. The following are essential aspects of their theories which I have utilised and adapted: Foucault's (2003) discussion of biopolitics, the sovereign power's repressive and disciplinary control, and state racism; Agamben's (1995) state of exception and theory of thanatopolitics; Hardt and Negri's (2000) theory on the biopolitical subject and resistances to biopower; Topak's (2018) establishment of the concept of the borderzone, and his focus on the practices and effects of the border regime; Vaughan-Williams' (2015) examination of the negative dimensions of biopolitics at the border, as well as the agency of people on the move and the mutually constitutive relationship between structure and subject. These theories, along with work from Duffield (2008), have helped to elucidate how pushback practices at the Greece-Turkey borderzone are both a component and a microcosm of the global system of control. Throughout, I have also engaged with structuration theory by Giddens (1986), in order to examine the interrelationship between structure and agent. The abovementioned theories and scholarly works have been formative to this study and have provided the building blocks for many of the indicators within the analytical frame which I eventually developed. In advancing and combining aspects of these theories, I have coined and operationalised the frame of *disobedient movement in a rightless zone*. This offers a significant contribution to the academic community as a new working frame which applies to the case of pushbacks in the Greece-Turkey borderzone, as evidenced by the in-depth field research. This frame offers a thorough analytical understanding of violent pushback practices and the actions taken in response to them by the individual agent. This is particularly pertinent as one of the first studies to conduct an in-depth academic analysis of pushback practices at the Greece-Turkey border. This advancement also offers a significant societal contribution, as it researches and examines a practice that is still shrouded in intransparency and lack of accountability, and affects the lives and wellbeing of thousands of people. This is particularly pertinent in light of the increase in number and intensity of pushback practices in the last 18 months

(Legal Centre Lesvos 2020, BVMN 2020). This thesis also comes at a time when pushbacks are coming under greater scrutiny by political and international bodies, such as by the European Parliament and in the European Court of Justice (Statewatch July 2021; Front-Lex, Legal Centre Lesvos 2021; Statewatch May 2021). These developments remind the reader that this practice almost certainly indeed violates human rights and international and national legislation, and that pushbacks and border violence are not an inevitable result of current migration flows.

This thesis has offered significant contributions, but there no doubt remains limitations, and the avenues for potential future study. Firstly, as mentioned in Chapter Three, there are several reports of sexual harassment and violence in the borderzone. However, the phenomenon remains generally underreported and unclear, the elucidation of which was exacerbated by limitations in the (remotely conducted) data generation process for this study, which greatly lacked female and LGBTQI+ input. The intersection between sexual violence and border violence, and the intersection between women's/ non-binary people's experiences and pushback practices, are two particularly relevant and urgent topics, for which further research is needed. Secondly, while I discussed racist practices in this thesis, this was not the core focus of the study: there is a great need for more in-depth examination of racism in conjunction with pushback practices and border violence, with regards to both theories of racism and people on the move's experiences with racist treatment. Finally, I am aware of a limitation in the thesis regarding the motivations of people on the move. Partly due to my methodological approach – which focused on practices, asking “what” and “how” questions – and partly due to limitations regarding the length of the project, I rarely asked “why”. This means that the thesis gives little insight into the reasons why people move, why they take disobedient action, why they continue to persist in crossing the border despite being pushed back. This was also not my interest as a researcher, particularly because I am aware that a discussion about people's motivations can lead to theories about “deserving” and “undeserving” migrants/ asylum seekers, when, in legal terms, every human being has the right to make a claim for asylum in another territory (UNHCR 2016). In that sense, the “why” is irrelevant. However, it remains an unexplored avenue for research, and if considered carefully and with respect to the rights and dignity of the subject, may be a fruitful and important topic of study.

In closing, it is essential to emphasise that *pushbacks are not an inevitable feature of our social world*. Rather, they are a deliberate choice by the sovereign state to implement a violent biopolitical policy against people simply for moving from one place to another. This has been demonstrated throughout the analysis of sovereign control in this thesis. It has also been shown by the fact that pushbacks have increased and intensified in the last 18 months, and by the fact that the practice is already under various different legal and political investigations (Legal Centre Lesvos 2020, Mare Liberum 2020, Refugees International 2020, BVMN 2020, GLAN Law 2020, Alarmphone 2020). Taking this point forward, it is possible that the borderzone – if one has to exist at all – could operate in a vastly different way. The same technologies, infrastructure and resources which are pooled into controlling and expelling people on the move, could certainly be diverted into assisting and facilitating requests for asylum or migration for work from people on the move, and into their integration and progression in their new communities. Rather than being a rightless zone, the borderzone could be a zone that *promotes* rights. Rather than necessitating the disobedient movement of people on the move, it could facilitate their movement full stop. As stated by one interviewee, cited in Chapter Three, “pushbacks as part of deterrence just leads to more dangerous

[routes]" (Interview #1, Turkey). Humans have always migrated, and will continue to migrate and move when they decide, and when conditions necessitate it. On a warming planet, with an increasing global population, an overwhelming poverty gap and increased public health risks due to the rise in epidemics and pandemics, it is reasonable to suggest that migration is not going away. It is also reasonable to suggest that the person on the move, the individual agent who makes decisions about their own life, could and *should* be respected in making those choices, and be allowed to move. However, while they are *not* allowed this freedom, I am certain in stating that they will continue to do so, disobediently.

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APPENDIX I: INDICATOR LISTS

The initial indicator list (each indicator relating to one of the four umbrella categories) developed at the start of data analysis is as follows:

Multiple pushbacks/ attempts	–	POM strategising
Covid-19 reference	–	endangering life
Denial of basic necessities	–	endangering life
Death	–	endangering life
Unofficial policies or secrecy	–	unofficial policies
Degrading treatment	–	control tactics
Racism	–	control tactics
Signs of surveillance	–	control tactics

I then supplemented this list with indicators relating to common themes and issues which appeared in the accounts: this list was created and added to as I progressed through the stages of data analysis.

Chain pushback	–	POM strategising
Intention to claim asylum	–	POM strategising
Solidarity	–	POM strategising
Foreign nationals involved	–	unofficial policies
Frontex (presence during pushback)	–	unofficial policies
Masked officers	–	unofficial policies
Beatings	–	control tactics
Belongings stolen	–	control tactics
Dog attack	–	control tactics
Men and women/ families separated	–	control tactics
Mental health impact	–	control tactics
Permit holder	–	control tactics
Reckless driving	–	control tactics
Sexual harassment	–	control tactics
Vulnerable groups	–	control tactics
Overcrowding	–	control tactics/ endangering life
Weapons	–	control tactics/ endangering life

APPENDIX II: TOPIC LISTS

In order of:

Interview type I: Fieldworkers in a supportive capacity

Interview type II: People with direct experience of pushbacks

INTERVIEW TYPE I: FIELDWORKERS IN SUPPORTIVE CAPACITY

Thank you for agreeing to take part.

Introduction:

I am master's student at Utrecht University and am conducting this research for my thesis. The purpose of the project is to find out more about control mechanisms at the Greece-Turkey sea border, and resistances to the control – particularly last year during the Covid-19 pandemic. **I am looking into both unofficial and official practices, as well as the unlawful practices of pushbacks, specifically in the Aegean Sea. The purpose of this interview with you is to get some insight into these border processes, and the effects of that on the people who were attempting to make crossings last year.**

Consent:

Before we begin the interview, I need to inform you about what I will do with your data: I will be keeping you anonymous when reproducing any of this interview, and will not be publishing your name or any identifying details in my final thesis project. I will also not record your name or identifying details on any of my notes or transcriptions from the interview.

You don't have to answer any question that you don't feel comfortable with, you can stop at any moment and withdraw from the interview, and you can also withdraw after the interview itself.

If you also have further questions, then please feel free to contact me after the interview.

Ask if I can either audio or video record the interview, or if interviewee prefers me to just take notes.

[As you gave consent for me to record the meeting, I will be keeping this recording in a password protected file on a computer that only I can access, and will destroy it after one year unless I get consent from you again at that time.]

If that all sounds okay, I need your verbal consent as the interviewee before we continue. This means you consent to voluntarily participating in the interview and for your data to be used in my research as I just outlined. This includes using information given by you in my final thesis, which will be accessible for anyone to read, however, your name and identifying details will not be published.

Topic List:

(First of all, could you tell me a bit about yourself and what you do in your work with refugees and migrants?)

In relation to people attempting cross to the Greek islands by boat – what are some of the most **common** issues that you have been dealing with in your work over the last year?

What are some of the more **exceptional** things you have seen or heard about in your fieldwork with people crossing to the Greek islands by boat?

What technologies are involved in border control? Unofficial or official?

How do you think the situation changed last year due to the Covid-19 pandemic? (in terms of scale, violence and methods) – can you also talk about how people on the move are or are not being protected from infection?

Can you talk a bit about the human effect of the Greece-Turkey (sea) border controls? How are people on the move physically and mentally affected?

In your opinion, how are people on the move resisting their treatment, or resisting the border? (What events have you heard about?)

How do you as both an individual fieldworker, and as an organisation, resist the border regime?

Do you think that this is an issue about race, and if so, how? (specific events/ experiences?)

What would you like people to know about this, that they don't already know about?

Is there anything you would like to add, or that you think I should know, in relation to what we just discussed?

INTERVIEW TYPE II: PEOPLE WITH DIRECT EXPERIENCE OF PUSHBACKS

Thank you for agreeing to take part.

Introduction:

I am master's student at Utrecht University and am conducting this research for my thesis. The purpose of the project is to find out more about control mechanisms at the Greece-Turkey sea border, and resistances to the control – particularly last year during the Covid-19 pandemic. **I am looking into both unofficial and official practices, as well as the unlawful practices of pushbacks, specifically in the Aegean Sea. The purpose of this interview with you is to get some insight into the effects of the border on the people who were attempting to make crossings last year.**

Consent:

Before we begin the interview, I need to inform you about what I will do with your data: I will be keeping you anonymous when reproducing any of this interview, and will not be publishing your name or any identifying details in my final thesis project. I will also not record your name or identifying details on any of my notes or transcriptions from the interview.

You don't have to answer any question that you don't feel comfortable with, you can stop at any moment and withdraw from the interview, and you can also withdraw after the interview itself.

If you also have further questions, then please feel free to contact me after the interview.

[As you gave consent for me to record the meeting, I will be keeping this recording in a password protected file on a computer that only I can access, and will destroy it after one year unless I get consent from you again at that time.]

If that all sounds okay, I need your verbal consent as the interviewee before we continue. This means you consent to voluntarily participating in the interview and for your data to be used in my research as I just outlined. This includes using information given by you in my final thesis, which will be accessible for anyone to read, however, your name and identifying details will not be published.

Topic List:

First of all, could you tell me a bit about yourself and where you're from?

Can I confirm that you tried to cross the border into Greece last year?

Could you tell me about what happened when you tried to cross the border into Greece?

- Ensure clarifications on details e.g. how many people crossed, vulnerable groups, Greek or EU border agency boat, detention, food and water provided etc.

Have you tried to cross the border more than once? If yes, how many times have you tried? [Motivation for multiple times?]

What was your idea of Europe before you entered? Did you expect to be treated the way you were treated?

How was your experience affected by the Covid-19 pandemic? How was it different, and were there precautions to protect you from infection?

How did you feel that the experience affected you as a person? How did it make you feel?

What were the short-term consequences of what happened – i.e. in the space of a few hours up to a few weeks?

What were the long-term consequences of what happened – i.e. in the space of a few months up to the present day?

How do you cope or manage with these difference consequences?

How do you think you, or other people on the move, resisted or acted against the treatment you experienced?

What would you like people to know about this, that they don't already know about?

Is there anything you would like to add, that you think I should know, in relation to what we just discussed?

APPENDIX III: INTERVIEW LIST

Below is a list of the interviews conducted for this research study:

Interview 1: anonymous, Turkey, 26/03/2021, English

Interview 2: anonymous, Turkey, 31/03/2021, English

Interview 3: anonymous, Turkey, 01/04/2021, Arabic

Interview 4: anonymous, Turkey, 20/04/2021, Arabic

Interview 5: Tommy Olsen, head of Aegean Boat Report, Norway, 28/04/2021, English

Interview 6: anonymous, Greece, 03/05/2021, English

Transcripts are available on request.

APPENDIX IV: TESTIMONY LISTS

Below is a list of the testimonies which were sampled and analysed for this study:

Pushbacks at sea:

Place	No of people	Date	Source
Skala Mistegnon	49	01/03/2020	Alarmphone
Chios	9	01/03/2020	Alarmphone
Lesvos	35	01/03/2020	Alarmphone
Lesvos	35	01/03/2020	Alarmphone
Alacati (Turkey)	80	01/03/2020	Alarmphone

Chios	40	01/03/2020	Alarmphone
Chios	45	02/03/2020	Alarmphone
Farmakonosi	15	02/03/2020	Alarmphone
Chios	20	03/03/2020	Alarmphone
Samos	55	03/03/2020	Alarmphone
Samos	38	03/03/2020	Alarmphone
Kastellorizo	25	03/03/2020	Alarmphone
Symi	31	23/03/2020	Just Security/ TCG
	10	27/03/2020	Just Security/ TCG
Farmakonosi	9	28/03/2020	Just Security/ TCG
Rhodes	18	29/03/2020	Just Security/ TCG
Lesvos	48	29/04/2020	Alarmphone
Samos	22	29/04/2020	Bellingcat/ TCG
Lesvos	24	10/05/2020	Alarmphone
Samos	30	13/05/2020	Legal Centre Lesvos
Lesvos	32	03/06/2020	BVMN
	35	04/06/2020	Alarmphone
Lesvos	unknown	04/06/2020	Alarmphone
Lesvos	32	04/06/2020	Alarmphone
Lesvos	21	05/06/2020	BVMN
Lesvos	35	19/06/2020	Legal Centre Lesvos
Lesvos	40	11/07/2020	BVMN
Rhodes	25	27/07/2020	BVMN
Lesvos	80	09/08/2020	Alarmphone
Lesvos	32	15/08/2020	Aegean Boat Report
Lesvos	44	16/08/2020	Aegean Boat Report
Lesvos	81	16/08/2020	Aegean Boat Report
Lesvos	41	19/08/2020	BVMN
Lesvos	34	19/08/2020	Aegean Boat Report
Kos	18	24/08/2020	BVMN
Samos	41	26/08/2020	Aegean Boat Report
Lesvos	55	03/09/2020	Legal Centre Lesvos
Samos	2	09/09/2021	GLAN Law
Lesvos	5	04/10/2020	Aegean Boat Report
Chios	24	10/10/2020	Aegean Boat Report
Samos	19	18/10/2020	Aegean Boat Report
Crete	197	20/10/2020	Aegean Boat Report
Cape Kafireas (mainland)	36	27/10/2020	Aegean Boat Report
Rhodes	19	30/10/2020	BVMN
Lesvos	30	04/11/2020	Aegean Boat Report
Antimilos	60	09/11/2020	Alarmphone

Lesvos	24	10/11/2020	BVMN
Samos	35	13/11/2020	Alarmphone
Lesvos	59	18/11/2020	Aegean Boat Report
Chios	33	23/11/2020	Aegean Boat Report
Samos	27	24/11/2020	Aegean Boat Report
Lesvos	31	28/11/2020	Aegean Boat Report
Lesvos	30	03/12/2020	BVMN
Kalymnos	31	05/12/2020	Aegean Boat Report
Lesvos	23	08/12/2020	Aegean Boat Report
Leros	27	15/12/2020	Aegean Boat Report
Chios	34	17/12/2020	Aegean Boat Report
Lesvos	34	18/12/2020	Aegean Boat Report
Simi	10	22/12/2020	Alarmphone
Samos	unknown	22/12/2020	Alarmphone
Lesvos	30	23/12/2020	Alarmphone
Lesvos	30	23/12/2020	Aegean Boat Report
Lesvos	40	23/12/2020	Aegean Boat Report
Lesvos	21	24/12/2020	Aegean Boat Report
Total number pushbacks	Total number people		
64	2195		

Pushbacks across the land border:

Place of pushback	Place pushed to	No of people	Date	Source
Uzunköprü	Between Orestiada and Karakasim	40	31/12/2020	BVMN
Bosna	Neo Cheimonio/Elçili	55	21/12/2020	BVMN
Feres (Greece)	Ipsala	2	16/12/2020	BVMN
Bosna/Nea Vyssa	Karakasim	80	15/12/2020	BVMN
	Edirne	1	13/12/2020	BVMN
Alexandroupolis	Ipsala	40	03/12/2020	BVMN
Serres		300	28/11/2020	BVMN
Edirne	Edirne	90	14/11/2020	BVMN
Tychero (Greece)	Istanbul (by bus)	60	12/11/2020	BVMN
Thessaloniki	Ipsala	150	08/11/2020	BVMN

Ipsala	Tychero (Greece)	65	03/11/2020	BVMN
	Nea Vyssa	200	30/10/2020	BVMN
Thessaloniki	Ipsala	80	18/10/2020	BVMN
Komotini		20	10/10/2020	BVMN
Soufli		12	06/10/2020	BVMN
Drama		55	26/09/2020	BVMN
Didimoticho		3	26/09/2020	BVMN
Thessaloniki	Evros	70	21/09/2020	BVMN
Lagadikia	Evros/ Iraq	100	16/09/2020	BVMN
Xanthi	Edirne	120	09/09/2020	BVMN
Alexandroupoli		80	06/09/2020	BVMN
Thessaloniki	Ipsala	80	27/08/2020	BVMN
Nea Vyssa		13	19/08/2020	BVMN
	Edirne	50	14/08/2020	BVMN
Feres (Greece)	Meriç	20	20/07/2020	BVMN
Mavrokklisi	Uzunköprü	68	18/07/2020	BVMN
Thessaloniki	Meric/Ipsala	120	05/07/2020	BVMN
Orestiada		55	02/07/2020	BVMN
Kastanéai	Üyükütatar	75	26/06/2020	BVMN
Alexandroupoli	Ipsala	90	21/06/2020	BVMN
	Ipsala	60	20/06/2020	BVMN
Thessaloniki	Meriç	31	07/06/2020	BVMN
	Edirne	9	25/05/2020	BVMN
Ladochori	Istanbul (by foot and car)	120	16/05/2020	BVMN
Xanthi	Evros	30	14/05/2020	BVMN
Igoumenitsa		60	03/05/2020	BVMN
Lavara	Istanbul (by foot and car)	11	27/04/2020	BVMN
Thessaloniki	Ipsala/ Uzunköprü	50	25/04/2020	BVMN
Thessaloniki		22	23/04/2020	BVMN
Thessaloniki	Edirne	76	14/04/2020	BVMN
Diavata Camp		40	31/03/2020	BVMN
Alexandroupoli	Evros	40	20/02/2020	BVMN
Alexandroupoli		16	08/02/2020	BVMN
Total pushbacks		Total number people		
43		2759		

Total number of testimonies is 107.