



Utrecht University | Department of Media and Culture Studies: Gender Studies

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## The Transparency/Opacity Conundrum: Locating Dutch Deportation Regimes at Schiphol Detention Center

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### Abstract

Airports are often regarded as sites of transition, and thus devoid of meaning. This view obscures various articulations of power and exclusionary practices involved in border and migration management. I posit that one very vital site that exist in this obscurity is Schiphol airport's immigration detention center. On facing several blocks in communication and inaccessibility of information I give a reflexive account of employing the feminist ethic of 'sticking with' failure, marking this as a feature of the site of inquiry. Using scavenger methodology (Halberstam 1998), I read visual, digital, autoethnographic and interview content for Dutch self-representative narratives that inform contemporary organization of power. Utilizing the notion of white innocence (Wekker 2016), I argue that these representations are premised on migrant exclusion which is bolstered by a cultural denial of histories of racism and colonization. I consider the implications of excluding the presence of a detention center in Schiphol airport's self-representation and trace my search for the Schipholbrand monument as a haunting reminder of the history of immigration detention at the airport. Through the informational video by the Dutch Ministry of Justice and Defence, *Immigration detention in the Netherlands* (2019) I observe that there are visual contradictions in the self-representative portrayals of logical objectivity and legality. The absencing of the centrality of airports, or what I call the transparency/opacity conundrum, made evident through the process of asylum at Schiphol cloaks the deportation regimes that inform immigration detention and deportation in the Netherlands.

*For my parents, [REDACTED]*

*May you never again have to wait outside an airport interrogation room and pray you get to  
look at your love one last time*

## Acknowledgements

My sincerest gratitude to my supervisors - thank you for painstakingly combing through my scattered thoughts, for encouraging me to stick with the failure.

For my siblings: [REDACTED] – thank you for giving me the strength to do what had to be done, even if it was far away from what was familiar

For my little world: [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED] – thank you for watching me collect the mutilated fragments of who I am and deciding to stick around anyway. I am not really a creative, so please forgive my craftsmanship, but I wish to build something in your hearts that would allow me to stay, even if just for a little while. Thank you for being my companions as I learned how to live a life.

To [REDACTED] – thank you for giving me a reason to get on an airplane again.

For [REDACTED] – thank you for letting the rivers of my love flow uphill to you.

Finally, for all those in the in-between: you're almost home. We're almost home.

## Table of Contents

<b>Introduction.....</b>	<b>7</b>
Coming to Schiphol and the Research Question .....	7
Incarceration as Absenting - the Difference Between Detention Centers and Prisons .....	9
Structure of Text.....	12
<b>Chapter 1: The Search for Schiphol Detention Center .....</b>	<b>14</b>
Data Collection, Methods and Methodology .....	14
Queer Scavenging .....	15
Visual Analysis: Semiotics and Meaning Making .....	17
Self-Representation: Discourse and the Digital .....	19
On Language, Politics of Translation and Limitations .....	22
<b>Chapter 2: Stroopwafels, Cheese, Monuments and Detention: Dutch Self-Representation and Ghosts at Schiphol Airport .....</b>	<b>24</b>
Schiphol as Meaning-Holding Space .....	24
Schipholbrand Memorial: Locating the Detention Center Through Fire and Obscurity .....	28
Ghosts and Haunting Inquiries .....	40
<b>Chapter 3: <i>Immigration Detention in the Netherlands</i>: The Visual Betrayal of Politically Correct Self-Representative Discourse .....</b>	<b>43</b>
Merely Following Orders - Logic, Law and Documentation .....	49
Detainees' Best Interest at Heart - From the Other Side of the Prison Bars .....	53
Conflations of Race/Ethnicity/ Nationality .....	58
Searching for Clarity – Activist and NGO Intervention.....	63
<b>Chapter 4: Consistency in Contradiction – Narrations of Asylum and Detention at Schiphol .....</b>	<b>67</b>
Peter and the Innocent Ignorance of the IND and DJI .....	70
Schiphol as Border .....	75
Navigating Schiphol Detention Center in the Context of Asylum .....	80
<b>Conclusion .....</b>	<b>88</b>
<b>Bibliography .....</b>	<b>91</b>

## **Introduction**

### **Coming to Schiphol and the Research Question**

One of the earliest memories I have is my mother laying out a blanket right in the middle of one of Los Angeles International Airport's lounges and placating my siblings and I with snacks while we waited for our father to be released from immigration detention. The color of his passport was more important than the visa sticker inside it, and the mood of the detention officers had more weight than God. It was nothing new, routine for my siblings and I as we had gotten used to waiting for him to come back, but the whispers to Allah under my mother's breath reminded us of the possibility that he might not. The fall of the World Trade Center on the 11<sup>th</sup> of September 2001 changed much about the world, and for my world this waiting and threat of detention centers in airports was a huge part of it. I got accepted into the GEMMA masters program when Pakistan was in full lockdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic. That meant there was a country-wide shutdown of all travel, including air – one of the few instances that had ever happened in the nation-state's 72-year history. Stories were passed around about friends, lovers and relatives being stranded in airport terminals lost under paperwork and border policies that changed by the hour, the lack of definitiveness changing the way the people around me saw air travel. My mother and I, however, met the panic around us with the strangest sense of haunting familiarity. There was much left uncertain about the state of the world's traveling trends, but there was one thing we knew for sure: don't make a move without a stack of documents to corroborate every step of it.

I moved to the Netherlands in the middle of the pandemic with my sweaty palms holding onto my passport and my manila envelope thick with copies of documents. I held on to them close to my chest more dearly than my own life, that and the only piece of reassurance my mother could offer me: as long as I manage to get through the airport, I'll be fine. I have never been a fan of traveling, or rather, the process of travel. The in-between-ness of travel always felt like a suspension of reality – I was not in the place I had left nor was I in the place I was meant to go, but somewhere else. My arrival at Amsterdam Airport Schiphol, in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic, seemed somehow a kind of miracle. Consulates and embassies around the world were closed indefinitely but I still managed to get the visa sticker that would allow me entry into Dutch territory. I was surprised to find myself in the Arrivals terminal at Schiphol Plaza in less than a

half an hour after my flight landed, the smoothest entry process of my life. The feeling I had walking through Schiphol was different than the other airports I had been through, something I couldn't quite place, but when I brought it up in conversation with my professors, they were surprised. The airport, especially Schiphol, was a place they just passed through, their European passports allowing them to bypass the worries that had marked my own arrival. What was it about Schiphol airport that left me unsettled? Or rather, what is it about a smooth transit through an airport that seemed incomprehensible to those in the Netherlands? Perhaps more than anything it was the dissonance between the significance it held for me in comparison to my peers. In an English episode of the *De Verbranders* podcast, Barak Kalir, associate professor of Sociology at the University of Amsterdam and co-director of the Institute for Migration and Ethnic Studies discusses how his series of interviews with Dutch case workers at the Schiphol Detention Center can be read alongside Hannah Arendt's concept of the banality of evil (1964), elaborating on how the layperson can be involved in committing morally and ethically questionable acts in order to further the desires of the state. Kalir insists that by focusing on the regimes that create the conditions that cause 'regular people' to perform the will of the state, in this case removing illegalized migrants from the country, a more thorough insight into migration and migratory regulation can be studied. I had already been intrigued by the site of Schiphol, partly because of my own distrust of any 'smooth' migration process, but also due to the utter lack of information that seemed to be accessible to me about its detention center. This project stems from my deeply held conviction that airports and their detention centers are vital sites for migration research. They are the places where border policy and biopolitical management of bodies and movement takes place, where capitalism and nationalism intersect and show themselves to global audiences. Airports have marked the most significant moments in my life, and I refused to believe that I was alone in experiencing them as such.

When the time to decide topics for my masters dissertation rolled around, I was house-sitting in Amsterdam while in the process of trying to secure housing for myself. The Netherlands was still in lockdown, uncertainty still loomed over the way the last term of my masters would play out and I was trying to ask myself if there was a topic that stuck with me enough to focus on for the remainder of my degree program. I wanted to talk about the airport in terms that could be specific to my broader research interests, to theoretically ground the site in feminist scholarship about borders, affect and migration. I wanted to see if I could locate the un/desirability of migrants using



Schiphol as a site of analysis, to see the way migrants fit, or did not fit within the Netherlands in particular and Europe in general. For this, I thought looking at the detention patterns of migrants at Schiphol detention center would be my entrypoint. However, after months of running into dead-ends, language barriers, inability to access demographic data, lack of textual scholarship in English and unanswered online queries I came to the disappointing realization that there was no way I would be able to conduct the kind of research I wanted to with the time and resources I had. In fact, Schiphol detention center seemed to be a source of confusion for many of the sources I directed my inquiries at, making me wonder if there was something I was missing. It is through the elusiveness of Schiphol detention center's access that led me to wonder why this site, despite its international presence, seemed to be entirely absent from literature (in English) about borders and migrant detention. This then led me to the revised form this project took. Working at the intersection of feminist, queer, critical race and postcolonial theorizing, I try to explore how the semiotics of self-representation and othering are negotiated through images of immigrant detention and bordering processes. These representations are informed through colonial and nationalistic structures of power as part of broader deportation regimes.

Keeping this in mind, my main research question for this project is: How can Schiphol airport and its detention center be read as sites where Dutch self-representation materializes vis a vis borders, processes of migration management and deportation in the Netherlands?

In order to answer this question I explore lines of inquiry that locate the history and the space(s) of Schiphol airport and detention center within Dutch migration processes and explore how interpolating Dutch self-representation as a theme vis a vis Schiphol Detention Center's presence can shed light on broader conversations about migrant desirability, belonging(s) and European border policies. Through scavenger methodology (Halberstam 1998, p.13) I explore the ways visibility can reveal national self-images and discourses that are interwoven with colonial histories and contemporary organization of power. I discuss the way inclusion, exclusion and othering are negotiated through images of immigrant detention and bordering processes. Before I elaborate on the structure of this thesis, I find it necessary to clarify what immigration detention actually is and how it differs from prison.

### **Incarceration as Absenting - the Difference Between Detention Centers and Prisons**

In the broadest of understandings, incarceration involves the utilization of space to restrict, and control the movement of the confined. Premised on the social exclusion of those subjected to it, processes of incarceration are deeply rooted in the way structures of power order and hierarchize populations. This something that many feminist, abolitionist, queer and critical race scholars<sup>1</sup> have argued reflects the desirability of these groups in comparison to the broader population. In their research regarding the spatial practices of confinement, discipline and state power, critical geographers Lauren Martin and Matthew Mitchelson define detention, imprisonment and confinement be categorized by “human beings being ‘held’ without consent by other human beings.” (2009, p.460), the severity of which is determined by the violence on the incarcerated. What distinguishes prison from other means of detention and confinement is the *criminalized* nature of the populations that are incarcerated, in other words “social relationships, *which are mutually constitutive of ‘crime’*, produce the spatial formations of imprisonment and punishment more broadly (see Hallet 2006).” (Martin and Mitchelson 2009, p. 462) (emphasis in original). Prisons are tools of the state to punish citizens and residents who have been convicted by the legal system, whereas those in detention centers are not necessarily charged for crimes. Immigration detention is a “technique of state power” (Martin and Mitchelson 2009, p. 466) to exclude those who have “uncertain citizenship or visa status, during legal proceedings, or for the *potential* to commit a violent act.” (Martin and Mitchelson 2009, p. 465). Spaces of confinement and detention are marked by ‘hiddenness’, something that I came across at many points in my research process.

Marked by absences, omissions and inaccessibility of information, the trajectory of my inquiry into Schiphol detention center shapes my research process which in turn, is illustrative of my conclusions. In my order to theoretically ground this interaction between language, image, spectacle and what is hidden I refer to the work of Avery Gordon, whose work *Ghostly Matters* gives a term to describe the “animated state in which a repressed or unresolved social violence is making itself known, sometimes very directly, sometimes more obliquely.” (Smith and Gordon 1999, p. xvi): or haunting. Haunting brings to the fore the kind of trouble, disturbed-ness or “turmoil” that happens when that which has “been in your blind spot comes in to view” (Smith and Gordon 1999, p. xvi), or in this case the difficulty in obtaining information about a detention

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<sup>1</sup> See discussion by Stanley, Eric A., Dean Spade, and Queer (In)Justice. 2012. “Queering Prison Abolition, Now?” *American Quarterly* 64 (1): 115–27. <https://doi.org/10.1353/aq.2012.0003>.

center in an airport ranked fourth<sup>2</sup> in Europe for the most passengers in 2020. Gordon argues that haunting and the appearance of specters or ghosts let us know that the things which are hidden are in fact indicators of that which is still alive, still present and still at work. Ghosts “interfere” with this concealment and show us that forms of containment and repression within which we exist and interact in are always incomplete (Smith and Gordon 1999, p. xvii). There is a lived reality that is represented by these specters, these ghosts that tell us of the haunting necessary to highlight the presence of structures that are at work.

Gordon observes that the language of haunting is especially pertinent when imperial systems of power come to the fore in terms of incarceration and detention, that what is shown to publics via the spectacle does not do much to elaborate on the ghosts themselves:

[...] in the stream of migration itself and then in the ever-growing prisons; the reporting of the presence of CIA ghosts—ghost airplanes, ghost prisons, ghost “detainees”—on the front page of the newspapers. War, slavery, captivity, authoritarianism, the theft of culture and of the means for creating autonomous, sustainable life, the attachment to epistemologies of blindness, and the investment in ontologies of disassociation remain the key problems of our time. (Smith and Gordon 1999, p. xix).

I rely on the language of haunting to piece together the elements of capitalist systems, repressive state apparatuses, the blurring between fact and fiction in representation through the analysis of presence and absences - it is necessary to look at the sites of analysis that exist as ghosts or specters of these processes. Articulating the interplay of these processes and their enactment of power in detention practices illustrate the disjuncture between what is known and what is not known. These are forms of subjugated knowledges (Foucault cited in Smith and Gordon 1999, xviii) that emerge in disjunctured ways and require, as I see it, a more scavenger approach to elaborate. Gordon urges reading into the spectacles to find the ghosts, especially when it comes to systems of detention- where they are ever present. Haunting is a part of the very make up of “modern social life” (Smith and Gordon 1999, p.7) whereas ‘hiddenness’ is an in-built part of detention practices, and I find it very difficult to talk about Schiphol - and its emphasis as a symbol of Dutch modernity - and its detention center – a site of incarceration - without them.

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<sup>2</sup> See “Schiphol | Facts and Figures from the Annual Report.” n.d. Schiphol. Accessed May, 2022. <https://www.schiphol.nl/en/schiphol-group/page/facts-and-figures/>.

## Structure of Text

I start off in Chapter 1 with a discussion on my use of methods and my data collection process, delineating the way the research question for this project changed, how I started this project with a completely different trajectory and how that quickly became marked with a sense of failure. I discuss my experience of employing the feminist ethic of ‘sticking with’ that failure and reflecting over where it got me in my research process. I talk about my use of scavenger methodology, stemming from queer theory, and its integral role in my methodology while contextualizing its place in my analysis of Schiphol detention center. I then move to discussing my reading of visual and digital sources as text and how semiotics as an analytical tool has aided in the search for meaning and underlying discourses in these sources to triangulate the site of Schiphol airport and its detention center theoretically. I discuss the intervention of feminist scholars to interpret digital data as spaces mediated by multiple layers and structures of power and what that indicates in a research project that does not rely on massive data sets. I conclude by reflecting on the politics of language, translation and interpretation in this project and how they are intertwined with my limitations as a researcher.

In Chapter 2, I introduce Schiphol airport as a site of analysis using an autoethnographic account of visiting the site itself and introducing the emergence of opacity and obscurity as themes in my inquiry. I consider the implications of excluding any mention of the presence of a detention center in Schiphol airport’s self-representation and take a step further to locate the history of immigration detention at the airport. It is through this line of questioning that I then trace my search for the Schipholbrand monument, one of the only physical markers that remains of the fire at the old detention center at Schiphol Oost that killed 11 detainees in 2005. I discuss Schiphol as a border site, a place that is haunted by the presence of immigration detention and how the presence of the Schipholbrand memorial acts as a place that points towards its haunting.

In chapter 3 I offer a visual and discourse analysis of the DJI video *Immigration detention in the Netherlands* (2019). Thinking with Gloria Wekker’s theorizing of white innocence (2016), or the position of moral superiority and enlightenment, and how that translates to the rejection of migrants from the image of a collective Dutch ‘we’, I talk about the thematic emergence of instances that display this innocence through the narratives of political correctness, such as the

reliance on the language of legality, agency and documentation. Through the video's use of racialized visuals, however, I observe a notable contradiction in this self-representative portrayal of logical objectivity when it comes to race. There is also a centrality of airports, in particular Schiphol, in the process of immigration detention and deportation in the Netherlands but very little is explicitly said about Schiphol and its detention center. I try to further emphasize the elusiveness of locating content communicated about Schiphol detention center in this video by discussing my experience of researching the site online and through instances of personal communication. The difficulty of navigating the transparency and opacity of information has been significant in trying to locate and argue for the importance of Schiphol as a site of detention and bordering and perhaps suggests the nature of the site itself.

It is because of this indication of the elusive nature of Schiphol detention center as a site and the difficulty my access to it has been that I move into Chapter 4, where I interview people who have experienced Schiphol and its detention center through the asylum procedure. Of these interviewees, one is with an IND (Immigration and Naturalisation Service) asylum officer who works on behalf of the Dutch government who communicates to me the centrality of detention in the asylum procedure at Schiphol, where *all* asylum applicants are placed in Schiphol detention center while their cases are processed. I comment on the recurrence of the themes of white innocence discussed in the previous chapter while also discussing Philomena Essed's concept of white ignorance. I trace my process of interviewing three former detainees to not only give the last word to those who directly experienced being subjected to the site, but to also discuss the connection of deportability which places Schiphol airport's asylum procedure within global deportation regimes. Finally, I conclude by discussing the nature of Schiphol detention center as existing in a conundrum of transparency/opacity. Absenting the process of asylum and the centrality of Schiphol detention center in communication about immigration detention in the Netherlands obscures the mediations of power in the practices of migration management at airports, pulling them away from their perception as neutral spaces devoid of meaning and significance.

## Chapter 1: The Search for Schiphol Detention Center

### Data Collection, Methods and Methodology

I started off this project wanting to look at Schiphol detention center and its possible connection to migrant desirability. In its initial planning stages, I intended to have two main sources of data that would be used for further analysis: visual and textual. This meant that the collected content would be analyzed through respective mixed research methods. It would have involved analyzing a video and some textual documents in order to conduct a semiotic discourse analysis to bring into focus some of the intertextual references, for example historical, cultural and national archival that could be put into focus in order to be able to illustrate the link between nationalistic belonging and immigrant detention centers in the Netherlands. The trajectory of this project however, took the direction of not only a changed research question but also dictated the methods I ended up using. Not only did I continue with my use of visual and textual methods as I had initially planned, but also involves my use of autoethnography and semi-structured interviews. The way this data was collected, however, required a more scavenger approach (Halberstam 1998) - which I will discuss in the following section - and involved oral interviews, extensive combing through digital materials, personal correspondence, unstructured interviews and translation work. The methods and sources I ended up using throughout this project were strongly influenced by many factors that work in parallel with my own positioning and politics of location<sup>3</sup>. As a Masters candidate in Gender Studies in the Netherlands working with feminist methods, along with a history of training in media studies and the social sciences, I have a strong bias towards using visual and cultural sources in my analysis. However, as a non-Dutch speaking student working within the Dutch context when conducting my research, I was met with many limitations and obstacles in my data gathering process, especially when it came to textual and archival material regarding the site as well as getting access to potential interviewees. My lack of Dutch, however, did not take away from my visual analysis as the video as well as visuals in my autoethnography were in English.

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<sup>3</sup> NOTES TOWARD A POLITICS OF LOCATION Talk for Conference on Women, Feminist Identity and Society in the 1980's, Utrecht, Holland, June 1 1984 Adrienne Rich in *Women, Feminist Identity and Society in the 1980's : Selected Papers*, edited by Myriam Díaz-Diocaretz, and Iris M. Zavala, John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1985. ProQuest Ebook Central, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/uunl/detail.action?docID=799823>.

Throughout the research process, I was caught in between a convoluted loop of opacity and transparency of information - where the Dutch Ministry of Justice and Defence (Dienst Justitiële Inrichtingen or DJI) boasts its open-to-access information and extensive research about migrant detention in the Netherlands: “DJI does a lot of research and keeps track of numbers carefully. That helps us improve our work.” (Inrichtingen, Dienst Justitiële “Dji.nl - dji.nl.”, May 14, 2013), to an English website<sup>4</sup> that has been under construction since the start of my research process.

When rarely answered, my queries (made online through email and social media) related to Schiphol airport’s detention center were met with a mix of frustration at my inability to conduct academic research in Dutch as well as multiple suggestions to redirect my research towards other sites of detention in the Netherlands. I wondered if this process of research would have been entirely different if a Dutch person was making the inquiries I was. Although these interactions highlighted an urgent need to fill gaps in migration and detention research in the Netherlands, they reinforced a view that I did not know was present: that because there was no data about Schiphol’s detention center available that a non-Dutch speaking student could access, there is no ‘use’ in studying it. So how was I supposed to “answer a research question for which there are no data?” (Murphy and Lugg 2016, p. 369).

### **Queer Scavenging**

My analysis of Schiphol Detention Center’s positioning within migration and deportation regimes in the Netherlands is a queer one - but what makes it queer? It is because I choose to employ critically queer modes of data collection and critically feminist theoretical grounding in my analysis in order to draw conclusions about the interrelatedness of race, nationalisms and Dutch border enforcement at the site of Schiphol airport. According to Murphy and Lugg (2016), it is an inherent feature of queer theory and queer methodologies to actively engage with

[...] multidimensionality and intersectionality (perspectives from Critical Race Theory and feminism, respectively) to explain the variety of interrelated biases that also interact

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<sup>4</sup>Inrichtingen, Dienst Justitiële. 2021. “Niet gevonden - dji.nl.” Webpagina. Ministerie van Justitie en Veiligheid. July 11, 2021. <https://www.dji.nl/error/404>.

within ongoing identity negotiations—such as race, gender, class, religion, and so on (Hutchinson 2001; McCready 2010; Stein and Plummer 1994; Valdes 1998) (2016, p. 371).

Taking into account the interconnectedness of themes, discourses and structures that overlap at Schiphol airport's detention center, along with my use of scavenging as methodology, which I discuss below, I found the use of queer theory vital for my discussion of Schiphol Detention Center's positioning in migration and deportation regimes in the Netherlands - regimes which are politically, racially and hegemonically ordered and charged.

A queer methodology, according to J. Halberstam, is a scavenger methodology because it “attempts to combine methods that are often cast as being at odds with each other, and it refuses the academic compulsion toward disciplinary coherence.” (1998, p. 13). Halberstam's own work, as noted by Murphy and Lugg, drew on several interdisciplinary sources that blurred categorical divisions between textual and discursive representations of queer lives - something that they deem to be theoretically and methodologically beneficial for researchers (2016, p. 372). This interdisciplinary blurring and overlapping of methods and disciplines is employed by migration and diaspora scholars such as Gayatri Gopinath in *Unruly Visions* (2018). They look at diaspora studies and indigeneity through queer studies to articulate how one can critically look at the idea of difference. This idea of critically engaging with difference hones in on key concepts, ideas and images in migration theorizing that intersect with other fields of study but are not noticed. For example, Ritty Lukose's study of migrant social and cultural words in the United States saw that diaspora theorizing at the intersection of anthropology yielded more critical understandings of nationalism, the category of the “immigrant,” and multiculturalism (Lukose, 2007). Gopinath's set up of “‘collusions and encounters’ between aesthetic practices that may seem discontinuous or unrelated’ (Gopinath, 2018) does something similar and thus explores the potential of queer regional imaginaries to shape connections that work beyond bordering practices of the modern nation state. These ‘collisions’ between Dutch migration regimes, immigrant detention and the space of Schiphol airport's detention center as a site of interaction, set up against postcolonial and queer theorizing will further nuance contemporary discussion around said themes.

The use of queer methods and theory are often surrounded by many questions. What does it mean then to employ queer methods when analyzing a site like the Schiphol Detention Center, one that is informed by many discourses, not just those that explicitly center sexuality? How would



migration regimes and queer as intersecting locations then be analyzed? By design, there does not exist a particular set of “scavenging methods”, because there is an in-built implication that a certain level of specificity and tailoring of methods and theory is required in order to answer research questions that are difficult to answer or seem unanswerable (Murphy and Lugg 2016, p. 375). Queer readings, much like critical race theory that informs it, then take on a subversive, critical stance in relation to the normative and power structures that support it and are “methodological risks” (Murphy and Lugg 2016, pp. 375-376). Although arguably queer readings cannot be tied to a singular definition as it is still a dynamic and changing concept and method, I feel it necessary for this project. In their essay *Queering Prison Abolition, Now?*, activist scholars Eric A. Stanley, Dean Spade and Queer (In)Justice<sup>5</sup> discuss the importance of queer theory and queer analysis in issues of incarceration and prison, taking particular issue with the weaponization of “law and order” and “rights based discourse” (Stanley, Spade, and Queer (In)Justice 2012, p.117). They see the sexual and gendered policing of racialized people in the United States of America to be rooted in colonization. The “exclusion of “undesirables” at the borders” (Stanley, Spade, and Queer (In)Justice 2012, p. 118), were key tools to maintain racial and sexual orders within those borders. Analysis of sites of detention, especially those related to migration, are definitionally in flux and in movement, and require methods that consider and hold room for identities and experiences constantly in formation and re-formation. Texts in various forms shape the way global contemporary realities are understood, and accordingly understanding the (re)production of power and norms through texts can be a way to dismantle power.

### **Visual Analysis: Semiotics and Meaning Making**

An integral part of my research project involves an analysis of the official informational video<sup>6</sup> by the Custodial Institutions Service (DTV), which operates under the Ministry of Justice and

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<sup>5</sup> Andrea J. Ritchie, Joey L. Mogul, and Kay Whitlock writing collectively

<sup>6</sup> Inrichtingen, Dienst Justitiële. 2019. “Immigration detention in the Netherlands - Video - dji.nl.” Video. Ministerie van Justitie en Veiligheid. April 29, 2019. <https://www.dji.nl/documenten/videos/2019/04/29/immigration-detention-in-the-netherlands>.

Defense (DJI) in the Netherlands. This video, *'Immigration detention in the Netherlands'*, according to the official website of the DJI,

“shows how immigration detention works in the Netherlands. This video also gives answers to questions such as who is being held in immigration detention, why and where and for how long.” (Inrichtingen, Dienst Justitiële 2019)

At approximately 8 minutes and 43 seconds long, the video uses a mix of animated visuals, text, English voiceover, English subtitles and footage shot at the detention center locations of Rotterdam, Zeist and Schiphol (Inrichtingen, Dienst Justitiële 2019). I find it important to incorporate this video in my analysis in order to broadly sketch the way detention centers' operating institutions choose to define themselves to the public, their role in migration management and how they portray detainees. Drawing on the themes of migrant and detainee management in this video I discuss the role of detention within Dutch border making and enforcement in order to situate Schiphol as a specific yet significant site of analysis.

In Gillian Rose's book *Visual Methodologies* (2001), she discusses compositional interpretations of moving images (film, television and videos). She highlights two methods, mise-en-scene and montage, to explain the ways in which moving images can be analyzed. Mise-en-scene deals with what to shoot and how to shoot it whereas montage deals with how those shots are presented. This includes screen ratios, screen frames, focus, camera angles and zoom; montage deals with features of editing, which includes using colors (Rose 2001). Using visual methodologies to analyze the visual composition in *'Immigration detention in the Netherlands'* aids the description, framing and representation of thematic subject matter about detention and migration. As this project is not just concerned with the content but the presentation of migrant and detention related content, Rose's compositional interpretations of the visual guides my close reading.

Semiotics is the study of signs and symbols for meaning used in visual analysis. My project, although semiological in nature, does not adhere to the classical trends of semiotics of media investigation and analysis that were pioneered in the writings of early media theorists like those of Levi-Strauss (cited in Chandler 2007, 6), Saussure (cited in Chandler 2007, 14) and Charles Pierce (cited in Chandler 2007, p. 29) to name a few. Their analyses revolved around the relationship between two key aspects of analyzing signs: the signifier and the signified i.e. the means of representation and the represented concept respectively. According to early media theorists,

meaning-making in the visual was determined in the way the signified was illustrated by the signifier. This simplistic view of the way media can be interpreted across space(s) and temporalities, although pertinent during post-World War eras, does not hold up well with the layers of meaning that can exist across media spheres and platforms i.e. intertextually (Barthes 1991 as cited in Chandler 2007, 8), a notion that I discuss briefly when elaborating on my use of discourse analysis. In this project however, my methodological logic has more affinity to Ella Shohat and Robert Stam's argument that the visual is "language" i.e. is interlinked with other senses, discourses, texts and institutions thus highlighting multiple contexts and histories at the same time (Shohat and Stam cited in Mirzoeff 2002, 55-57). In their view, analyzing pieces of visual culture, which includes art and film, enables a critique of, what they see to be, an embedded narrativization of privilege (Shohat and Stam cited in Mirzoeff 2002, 57). Which is to say, visual culture contains within it certain locations and geographies that are hierarchized and put over others. Privileged visual culture(s) are often within a "stacist and 'progressive' history" (Shohat and Stam cited in Mirzoeff 2002, 37), highlighting that there are active processes of narrative construction that reiterate previously established discourses of power and hegemony. This polycentric (Shohat and Stam cited in Mirzoeff 2002, 55) view of visual culture embeds itself methodologically in the idea of being "imbricated in a whole series of apparatuses - the museum, the academy, [...] the nation state - which govern the production, dissemination and legitimization of artistic production." (Shohat and Stam cited in Mirzoeff 2002, 55). Although I do not treat the video by the DJI as an object of art in this analysis, I do see it as a part of visual culture and is thus an "integral part of a culture and history, not in the sense of a static backdrop but rather as a complexly activating principle." (Shohat and Stam cited in Mirzoeff 2002, 55). Therefore, in order to understand the power that informs the creation, curation and depiction of images in the video, it is necessary to treat the video as a piece of visual culture that depicts sites, like detention centers, that are shaped through various discourses of space, power and politics of visibility.

### **Self-Representation: Discourse and the Digital**

Due to the scavenger and interdisciplinary nature of this project, I make use of feminist critical discourse analysis to highlight some of the intertextual references between the visual and digital content I analyze as well as the semi-structured interviews conducted. According to Lazar, feminist

discourse studies shows “the complex, subtle and sometimes not so subtle, ways in which frequently taken-for-granted gendered assumptions and hegemonic power relations are discursively produced, sustained, negotiated, and challenged in different contexts.” (2007, 142). This is done as part of my employment of scavenger methodology to try and argue the relationship between Schiphol’s detention center as a border site and its link to migration management and deportation regimes in the Netherlands. Due to the intertwined relationship between gender, race, migration and power in visual, textual and interview-based interpretations, and my desire for this project to speak to the corpus of critical feminist work, I borrow the tools provided by feminist critical discourse analysis in its “theorization of the relationship between social practices and discourse structures” (Lazar 2007, 144). I find Lazar’s conceptualization of FCDA particularly useful for the way it speaks to language and linguistics - the latter not particularly the focus of this study. I have grappled with language throughout this project, using many in-built translation tools on web browsers and applications to conduct research in English in the Netherlands while not being able to speak Dutch. FCDA research acknowledges a multi-modal dimension to research where language exists simultaneously with other modes of semiotic analyses. Rather than ignore or write-off the difficulty of language and translation in this research process, I see it as a way of exercising critical praxis-oriented research, one that “cannot and does not pretend to adopt a neutral stance; in fact it is scholarship that makes its biases part of its argument.” (Lazar 2007, 146). I discuss my positionality as a non-Dutch speaking researcher in my reflections on language and translation in the next subsection and its connection with, what I term as, the opacity/transparency conundrum that I was caught in while researching Schiphol detention center. First, however, it is necessary to talk about the role the digital has in this project and my use of digital sources as data.

I make use of several online and digital sources in my exploration of Dutch self-representation in the context of Schiphol detention center. These consist of the DJI webpages<sup>7</sup>, the webpages of the Global Detention Project<sup>8</sup>, The European Council of Refugees and Exiles<sup>9</sup> and The Hotline for

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<sup>7</sup> Inrichtingen, Dienst Justitiële. 2013. “Dji.nl - dji.nl.” Webpagina. Ministerie van Justitie en Veiligheid. May 14, 2013. <https://www.dji.nl/>.

<sup>8</sup> “Netherlands Immigration Detention Profile.” n.d. Global Detention Project. Accessed May 2022. <https://www.globaldetentionproject.org/countries/europe/netherlands>.

<sup>9</sup> “European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE) |.” n.d. Accessed May 2022. <https://ecre.org/>.

Immigration Detention<sup>10</sup>. My reliance on the digital is especially significant as I provide an anecdote of another instance of confusion about my focus on Schiphol detention center. I then detail my process of going through the public-access content available on the DJI's website that is specifically about migrant detention and then comparing that with the information available online from NGOs in the Netherlands that do work related to migrant detention. My analysis of the digital content available as data is in line with a prevalent principle of feminist discourse analysis - that no data nor information is objective and is inevitably informed by the structures and institutions they exist within. The sources I draw from reveal a partial view of the detention center, one which reiterates the construction and presentation of information as knowledge. I look at these presentations, to refer to Donna Haraway's terms, to reflect bias and power as "all drawings of inside-outside boundaries in knowledge are theorized as power moves, not moves towards truth" (1988, 576). This project does not utilize big data<sup>11</sup> sets in its analysis, but rather uses webpages of NGOs as well as the official webpages of the DJI to draw its inferences from. Large, quantitative datasets that are oft associated with empirical validity in research, were not available to me and instead of abandoning the project due to their absence, I saw the webpages available as contextually informative and relevant. In order to move away from the underlying assumptions of objectivity surrounding the use of digital data, I draw on feminist reiteration in the study of 'small' digital data - in the form of the websites related to Schiphol detention center, as an

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<sup>10</sup> "https://Meldpuntvreemdelingendetentie.Nl/Informatie-Schipholwakes/." n.d. Accessed May 2022. <https://meldpuntvreemdelingendetentie.nl/informatie-schipholwakes/>.

<sup>11</sup> "Big Data is: huge in volume, consisting of terabytes or petabytes of data; high in velocity, being created in or near real-time; diverse in variety, being structured and unstructured in nature; exhaustive in scope, striving to capture entire populations or systems (n=all); fine-grained in resolution and uniquely indexical in identification; relational in nature, containing common fields that enable the conjoining of different data sets; flexible, holding the traits of extensionality (can add new fields easily) and scalability (can expand in size rapidly)" (See Kitchin, Rob. 2014. "Big Data, New Epistemologies and Paradigm Shifts." *Big Data & Society* 1 (1): 205395171452848. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2053951714528481>).

“operationalising data as a new regime of power and knowledge” (Leurs 2017, 115). By premising the idea that there exists a partiality in perspective that informs this data collection and analysis, a more nuanced view of the interplay between power and knowledge production in self-representation can be seen.

### **On Language, Politics of Translation and Limitations**

Although not intended to be a project on translation, language and the barriers it has posed in conducting research has inevitably made it worthy of note as part of this project’s methods. I borrow the words of Patricia Hill Collins who says that in order to have the necessary conversations required to create collaborative feminist theories and praxis-oriented work, this work must be collaborative in language.

“I wish I were fluent in all the languages, communication styles and cultures of the world that would enable me to communicate with anyone. I wish I had the skills to talk with and understand everyone as they wish to be understood. But I’m not. None of us is, so by default we depend on others to translate for us. Yet, because our efforts to understand others and make ourselves understood occur within a world characterised by hierarchical power relations, as much as we might wish it to be otherwise, there are limits to what we can each see and say from our distinctive social locations” (cited in Castro and Emek Ergun 2017, xi)

Language is imbued with power; translation even more so. I was faced with many negotiations in terms of my personal feminist politics, desire to conduct ethical research and the constraints of my abilities and time. The data collection of this project is strongly influenced by the fact that I just did not have access to many of the social networks, information hubs and scholarship about the detention and migration in the Netherlands by Dutch scholars. I was met with textual bureaucracies I was unfamiliar with, relying on my browser’s translation plug-in to help me. This research reflects the limitations of my reach, one where a student cannot possibly tackle the issues of language accessibility in the deportation and migration regimes at play at Schiphol airport within the course of a few weeks. It highlights how much power resides in the politics of translation and language in the Netherlands. Where my email inquiries written in English would take weeks before a follow-up, if at all, my Dutch friends who offered their help got responses within minutes - of course their respective emails were in Dutch. I was aware, and frequently reminded by the people who I reached out to, that my focus on Schiphol’s detention center for this project did not

really ‘make much sense’ and that I should redirect my focus to the larger detention centers of Rotterdam and Zeist. Perhaps this reflected on my part, a lack of understanding of the way Dutch detention and migration processes worked - or maybe people simply did not want to respond to someone who did not speak Dutch. Whatever the reasons for these information gaps were, I find them vital in not only defining my process of data collection and research, but also in reflecting my positionality as a researcher.

On a more hopeful note, I also found this project to be an interesting exercise in not only literal translation, but also of trying to put into interaction the detention center, airports and visual media, in effect “translating” interdisciplinary theories into conversation with each other (Hill Collins cited in Castro and Emek Ergun 2017, xv), effectively having a conversation about deportation and migration regimes in a different register. In the *De Verbranders* podcast, Barak Kalir uses the term ‘illegalized’ instead of ‘illegal’ to refer to migrants in immigration detention and at risk of deportation, something that I also do in this thesis. This choice in language is a political one as it does the work of redirecting blame from the migrant to the structures that are directly impacting their lives.

I do not claim, at any point, to fully understand, translate or dismantle the structures I discuss, but I hope to theoretically ground the presence of a site within certain frameworks of analysis for meaning. Meaning making as an exercise in itself has many facets and layers, rather than attempting to create new meanings across these texts, this project has aimed to make clearer the intertextual themes that exist in current modes of self-representation and how they can be theoretically ground in migration and deportation regimes. It is also because of my very particular and specific experience when researching this site that makes this project all the more significant, as the importance of Schiphol detention center eluded many who I approached about it.

## **Chapter 2: Stroopwafels, Cheese, Monuments and Detention: Dutch Self-Representation and Ghosts at Schiphol Airport**

Present-day Amsterdam Airport Schiphol (referred to as Schiphol or Schiphol Airport) boasts itself to be the product of over a century of “courage and pioneering spirit” (“Schiphol | Airport History”, 2022) that has changed it’s status from a “muddy puddle” (“Schiphol | Airport History”, 2022) to the Netherlands’ national airport. Located in the middle of one of the most densely populated urban spaces in the Netherlands, Schiphol as a site has been marked with constant scrutiny, regulation and people - national and international alike<sup>12</sup>. Since 1916, the airport has changed from being a military airfield to the international airport or “global hub” (“Schiphol | Airport History”, 2022) it is today.

In this chapter I establish Schiphol as a space and site that holds multiple layers of meaning and power that are important for analysis. I trace the historical trajectory of Schiphol and discuss previous scholarship that refutes the previously held belief that airports are non-places that are devoid of the influence of political structures. I discuss the efforts made by Schiphol airport to establish itself as a ‘Dutch’ space and argue that in doing so, have constructed a site of self-representation where reiteration of an idea of a Dutch ‘us’ can take place. I later discuss the detention center and Judicial Complex Schiphol (JCS) as being excluded from the narratives and historical analysis of Schiphol despite being very active parts in the running of the airport. The significance of the fire at the Schiphol-Oost detention center – Schipholbrand in 2005 - has also been excluded from these studies. Using an autoethnographic account of my visit to Schiphol airport Plaza and the Schipholbrand Memorial, I reflect on the exclusion of the detention center from the airport’s practices of self-representation as well as my feelings regarding the difficulty to access the memorial and the theoretical implications thereof. Finally, I trace the semiotics of haunting and its significance to my interpretation of the contents I analyze in this project.

### **Schiphol as Meaning-Holding Space**

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<sup>12</sup>For more information, see “Schiphol | Facts and Figures from the Annual Report.” n.d. Schiphol. Accessed May, 2022. <https://www.schiphol.nl/en/schiphol-group/page/facts-and-figures/>.



Schiphol airport is described to be a “well-known Dutch phenomenon” (Burgers 2021, p. 14), as a culturally significant and historically informed series of events that have led to its place as a site of importance. It was given the label of the Netherlands’ “mainport” by the central government in 1988, cementing its centrality in not only the financial workings of the country but also, as historian Iris Burgers argues, in the imagination of contemporary Dutch culture (2021, p. 14-15). Schiphol airport, as Burgers observes, can be interpreted as a culturally significant site for the Dutch imagination, where it served a function of being a symbol, an image, of the progress and modernity of the nation. This association with progress and development, in turn, has been “used” by the airport as a way of “validating its existence” (Burgers 2021, p. 15) to the public with regards to the importance of aviation in the 1920s. Burgers observes that in order to combat the initial skepticism surrounding the need of air travel, Schiphol actively used its popularity as a recreational site, something that was achieved through the creation of a practice called “airmindedness” (2021, p. 15-16). Airmindedness meant an embracing of the idea that aviation and its related facets were essential markers of modern societies, something that the main user of Schiphol airport, KLM (Royal Dutch Airlines), “cultivated” (Burgers 2021, p. 15-16) in order to reinforce air travel and Schiphol itself. This meant that, as a key site where the visualization of air travel and Dutch cultural importance informed each other, Schiphol airport became an inextricable part of Dutch ideas of modernity and social life. Schiphol itself then, became an ‘image’ within the Dutch imaginary and an important site where they could connect their own self-perception as a modern society. The relationship between this image and its importance to Dutch cultural perception, Burgers argues, has greatly influenced the spatial development of the airport. However, what I found notably absent was the lack of mention of the role of migration management in this spatial construction and ordering. Burgers’ thesis traces the role of Schiphol as an image from 1919-2006, but leaves out the role international migrant presence and how migrant management practices has influenced the space of the airport or its image in the Dutch imagination. Instead of grounding Schiphol airport into the international connections and bordering processes that make up and influence the cultural and spatial sites of contemporary air travel, Burgers’ historical study of Schiphol restricts it to still be a very ‘Dutch’ space. This is not to say that it is not vital to contextualize the nature of the airport as a national project, but the absence of the influence of bordering processes and migration in this image arguably does take away from the situated-ness of Schiphol. The architecture of one

of a vital site within Schiphol airport which is the focus of this thesis, its migrant detention center, are not mentioned.

What does it mean to exclude a detention center from being identified as part of the main space of the airport? What happens when a site that holds migrants who arrive through the airport, is omitted when analyzing the architecture of the airport itself? Where does the detention center exist then in the imagination of the airport? These were questions I found myself often coming across when trying to find information about the Schiphol's detention center, especially when I found that the webpage about the center to be unavailable<sup>13</sup> since the start of my inquiry in December 2021. However, before detailing my experience with trying to locate Schiphol detention center, I find it important to trace the attempts made by scholars to ground airports as essential meaning-making and political sites. This aids in my understanding of detention centers, and their presence within the functioning of airports, as significant sites where meaning relevant to national self-image, global migration management patterns and power is produced. In literature, airports are often seen as generic sites that are spaces of transit, making them liminal. These liminal or in-between spaces do not hold meanings, histories, or identities themselves but exist/function as pathways to them, thus not seen as part of political structures. Due to this, they are considered spaces, but not quite places. This belief that airports are thus “non-places” was introduced by anthropologist M. Augé in 1995, claiming that airports in fact take away identity from those who pass through it (cited in Burgers 2021, p.23). These make them places of non-belonging (Braidotti, 1994 cited in Jaworski and Thurlow 2013, p. 5). This notion has been refuted by scholars who have problematized Augé's argument as being that which ignores the multiple processes of exclusion (Sharma 2009), identification, class (Cresswell 2006), nationalism (Cresswell 2006) and regulation of movement (Adey 2007) that airports stand to represent (cited in Jaworski and Thurlow 2013 p. 5-7). On the contrary, through their semiotic analysis of airport signage and language use, Jaworski and Thurlow found that the way airports language their functions and locations reifies them as spaces that center and de-center people, identities and environments (2013, pp. 17-22). It is with this assumption that I approach my research into Schiphol's detention center and its place as a

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<sup>13</sup> Inrichtingen, Dienst Justitiële. 2021. “Niet gevonden - dji.nl.” Webpagina. Ministerie van Justitie en Veiligheid. July 11, 2021. <https://www.dji.nl/error/404>.

significant, meaningful site in Dutch self-representation vis a vis borders and migration management in the Netherlands.

As a site of study, Amsterdam Airport Schiphol has been analyzed by scholars as important as a significant space in the context of borders and Europe's Schengen zone, highlighting it as a particularly *placed* space and place. According to Tim Cresswell's ethnography of Schiphol, like other airports, it definitely is a place of movement, but to dismiss it as a generalizable feature that is possessed by all other airports would diminish its "uniqueness" (2006 cited in Jaworski and Thurlow 2013, p. 5). Cresswell goes so far as to say that airports are the "space[s] par-excellence of postmodern, postnational flow" (2006, p. 220) and are central to understanding the politics and mechanics behind mobility, movement and identity and their relationship to space. He calls Schiphol a "truly remarkable kind of place" (Cresswell 2006, p. 230) because of the way it has managed to expand itself into multiple commercial and economic sectors as well as in terms of real estate. What I found particularly interesting about his ethnographic account of Schiphol was that its architect at the time described it as a place that "is never finished but is always *becoming*" (Bentham in Cresswell 2006, p. 232) (emphasis in original) and as a part of this constant becoming, it changes according to rules around the Schengen Agreement. Before the Schengen agreement, Schiphol operated mainly as an international airport and dealt with passengers as such, but now it dealt with those in the territory of the Schengen zone as domestic passengers as well. This meant that Schiphol had to change its physical space according to who had to pass through passport control (Cresswell 2006, p. 235) and bodies were categorized according to the definitions provided by the European Union.

Airports are marked by discourses of movement and borders, relative to the working of "unequal and hierarchical power relations" that exist in those respective spaces (Paasi 2001 cited in Trakilovic 2019, p. 138). I find Milica Trakilovic's decolonial observations about the space of Schiphol Airport to be one that heavily enforces its spaces through processes of detainment and control, to be very important in grounding my study of the detention center. They observe the space of Schiphol to not only be a particularly Dutch space, but also a European space - one that represents "a site of a specific and enforced notion of cultural heritage, a notion which is also always contested and under threat" (Trakilovic 2019, p. 146). It is due to the regulatory nature of space in the airport that Trakilovic also brings to attention that the detention center's function as a

“part of Schiphol’s well-oiled machine” (Trakilovic 2019, p. 149), exists as an antithetical space from the airport. Where Schiphol airport encourages “free movement”, the detention center restricts, controls and monitors all movement (Trakilovic 2019, p. 149). The feature of movement is marked as one of the most significant aspects of performing European identity (Cresswell 2006, p. 236) and by denying freedom of mobility to certain people, they are also clearly demarcated as being not European. Schiphol, through both its detention center and airport, acts as a space of population management that cannot be dismissed as empty “non-places” as it is a site where power interacts with people and environments.

### **Schipholbrand Memorial: Locating the Detention Center Through Fire and Obscurity**

Theoretically, and later physically, locating Schiphol’s detention center was one that proved to be difficult to access for many, not just me. Schiphol detention center is located within the larger structure of the Schiphol Judicial Complex (JCS) located at Schiphol-Noord. It is a location of the Custodial Institutions Service (DJI) and operates as a public-private partnership between the Dutch government and private institutions (Dienst Justitiële Inrichtingen 2020). This complex holds the offices of the Immigration and Naturalisation Service (IND), Schiphol’s detention center and a court (Dienst Justitiële Inrichtingen 2020). The JCS is located right next to Schiphol airport and is still part of the larger compound of Schiphol, which makes it an interesting site not only due to the multiple functions the space holds but also due to its proximity to the airport itself. Detention centers are “routinely placed in remote and rural areas” (Trakilovic 2019, p. 149), unlike the one at Schiphol. The website<sup>14</sup> lists only one paragraph detailing the actual detention center, which reads as follows:

With more than 450 (mostly two-person) cells, the DCS offers *accommodation* to asylum seekers in procedure, drug swallows and illegal or failed aliens. Detainees who are detained for a maximum period of 8 weeks (arrested persons) or awaiting a verdict (house of detention) also *stay* in the Schiphol detention center. Schiphol detention center is the largest user of the judicial complex. (Dienst Justitiële Inrichtingen 2020) (emphasis added)

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<sup>14</sup> See Inrichtingen, Dienst Justitiële. 2020. “Justitieel Complex Schiphol - Locatie - dji.nl.” Locatie. Ministerie van Justitie en Veiligheid. September 24, 2020. <https://www.dji.nl/locaties/s/justitieel-complex-schiphol>.

I find it pertinent to highlight at this point, that despite being the largest user of this facility, there is very little that the DJI actually tells us about the detention center itself. They language their detention of persons as a provision of a service, in terms of ‘accommodation’ and ‘stay’ - as if these are a part of the broader, voluntary travel-related movement and not an enforced form of incarceration. As I could not find more about the site using the official website, I emailed the detention center in order to visit the site itself, but, citing rules due to COVID-19, they said it was unlikely that I would be allowed there. Detainees at Schiphol detention center are only allowed two hours of visitors per week that were not ‘official’ or ‘privileged’ contacts (such as lawyers, case workers) or family. Detainees are responsible for making these visitation appointments themselves. Since I did not count as an official or privileged contact, this combination of reasons were cited to deny my entry to the center. The center also reserves the right to terminate any visit the staff sees as “rules being broken” (Dienst Justitiële Inrichtingen 2020). If approved, all visits, according to DJI’s concerns about COVID-19, are to take place behind plexiglass, the imagery of which resembles more of a prison than the language of the ‘stay’ and ‘accommodation’ the DJI described, but I will go more into detail regarding this in the next chapter. After receiving this information, I felt that not only was I relegated to an unimportant status by the operators of the center, who did not indicate they even asked the detainees’ views about talking to me, but also that I was misplaced to think I would get access to the complex despite its proximity to the airport. I also felt it was ethically not my place to take up the time of detainees who only had two hours of time a week to see visitors.

Where was I to go to find out more about the detention center, if I could not access the center itself? When combing through the DJI’s website for any more information about the detention center, I came across a webpage that said “After the Schiphol fire, DJI started a fire safety analysis” (Dienst Justitiële Inrichtingen 2019). The interim report details the events of the fire in order to better the fire response places of incarceration in the Netherlands can have. One of the most significant paragraphs that this report has was the way the people who were there in the center the night of the fire were talked about:

“The fire in ‘K wing’ of the detention center developed extremely quickly. When *alarmed* guards arrived in K Wing, they saw smoke coming through the cracks in the door of Cell 11. The occupant of this cell was immediately released. After opening the door, the smoke

spread over the fifty-meter-long corridor of K Wing in a space of one minute. Given the life-threatening conditions in the smoke-filled room, it was *impossible for the guards to free all of the detainees*. The Dutch Safety Board has not yet been able to fully determine the cause of the rapid spread of smoke.” (Dienst Justitiële Inrichtingen, 2019) (emphasis added)

What I find to be interesting is the way the guards in this scenario are almost given the most empathy, where their response time is lauded and the lives of detainees, despite being the responsibility of the detention center and its employees, were written off in less than a sentence.

This intrigued me as there had been no mention of a fire anywhere else on the DJI’s website. I was not even aware that the JCS was a new site and that there was another detention center at Schiphol. I then turned my search to English news articles online and in doing so, came across an article by Octavia Aronne. She detailed her 2016 visit to the JCS as well as the memorial of a fire that took place in the old detention center at Schiphol-Oost that killed 11 detainees in 2005. As her fieldwork took place before COVID-19, she was able to at least see the JCS site from outside, something that I had not yet managed to do. Her visit coincided with a group called Schiphol Wakes<sup>15</sup> and she details her mixed feelings of anxiety, discomfort, sadness and difficulty when trying to reach the memorial (Aronne 2016). The existence of a site that was accessible, as well as the feelings of someone who had similar mixed feelings about inquiry into the site of Schiphol detention center gave me the push I needed to continue my investigation in-person. In self-ethnographic fashion, I trace my experiences of trying to find the memorial and in doing so, more details about Schiphol airport’s treatment of this fire in its contemporary self-image.

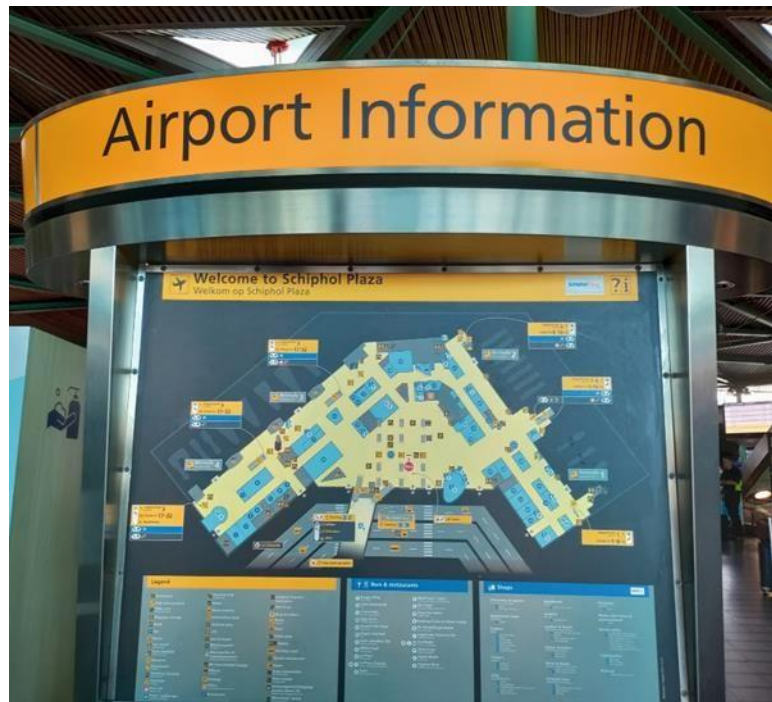
After getting off the train underneath Amsterdam Airport Schiphol, a friend and I meander through the crowds of luggage-bearing people making a beeline for the escalator that opens up into Schiphol Airport Plaza. Immediately I am surrounded by the neon signs and yellow-orange screens detailing arrival and departure gates that have become characteristic of airports (Jaworski and Thurlow 2013, pp. 8-13). Being someone who frequently flies, I found myself having to

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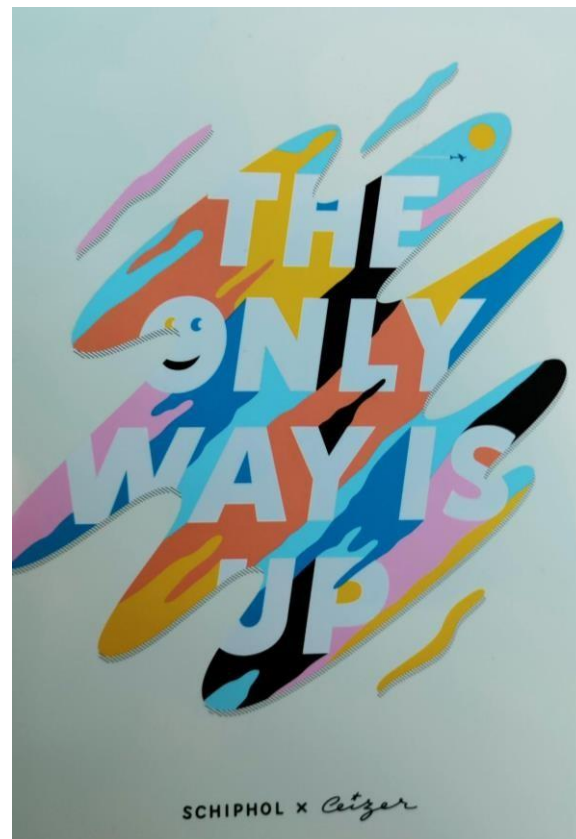
<sup>15</sup> “a non-profit organization formed primarily of churchgoers and activists against arbitrary detention. Between Christmas and Easter, on the first Sunday of each month, a different church hosts a vigil.” (Aronne 2016)

On trying to contact Schiphol Wakes, I found that their Facebook page has been inactive since the Winter of 2018.

consciously redirect my path away from the departure gates to those of the information boards and security officers. The information board only detailed the layout of Schiphol Plaza, where to find the arrival and departure gates as well as extensively listing the commercial recreation spots. Schiphol has over 271 private commercial outlets in operation and earned over EUR 688 million in 2020. (“Schiphol | Facts and Figures from the Annual Report” 2021). Underneath the information board were several postcards, all in English, available for free. The use of English in the space of the airport is important in placing Schiphol within global hegemonic ordering. Jaworski and Thurlow point out that the use of English at airports is an indication of its use as the “language of globalization, efficiency and neutrality” (2013, p.6). Schiphol’s use of English in its signage over Dutch is something that Cresswell also notes in his ethnographic research (2006 cited in Jaworski and Thurlow 2013, p. 6). I find it important to highlight the use of postcards as a way of reading Schiphol’s languaging of self-representation, as Burgers also notes their use as images by the airport as a means of advertising, historicizing and self-representation (2021, p.22, 29, 69). Postcards were often used to provide information to the public about Schiphol to detail what they could expect from their visit (Burgers 2021 p. 29), to advertise KLM (Burgers 2021, p. 101) and the history of the Netherlands for example during the World War II period (Burgers 2021, p. 199). However, in my quick perusal of the cards, I found more text than images, one of which I found particularly interesting that read: ‘The only way is up’, indicating not only a feature of aviation and the sky, but also discourses of progress and development. This ties together with scholars’ observation about Schiphol’s attempts to be identified as “efficient, reliable, sustainable, and inspiring” (cited in Trakilovic 2019, p. 137). However, the signage and information available was insufficient for me to further any inquiry into the detention center or memorial, so I decided to try and talk to some of the employees at the airport.



*Image 1: Airport Information Board at Schiphol Plaza*



*Image 2: Postcard by Schiphol Airport that reads: THE ONLY WAY IS UP*



Being a non-white person, I was very uncomfortable and hesitant at the prospect of having to talk to the security personnel about the location of the memorial or if they had any information regarding the detention center fire. Although I was surrounded by English - signs, posters, advertisements, outlets, schedules - I was conscious of my inability to speak Dutch and how that could, once again, prove to be an obstacle in this research. I revisit these reservations and reflections on language in the following chapters. My friend who accompanied me noticed my hesitation and stepped up to approach security personnel in my stead. Although she too is not fluent in Dutch, she did the best she could to ask security personnel on the floor of Schiphol Plaza if they knew where to find the Schipholbrand memorial as I took field notes. As I had anticipated, security workers initially had a hard time trying to understand our questions - not only did they have a hard time figuring out what 'detention center' meant, they had no idea there was even a fire at Schiphol; the fact that people died and that there was a memorial about it was out of the question. They shrugged as a way of apology for not being able to help, and continued on their way. We then decided that perhaps someone with more general information about the airport might know a little more than people who worked strictly in the Plaza. We followed several signs and made our way to the Airport Information desk, which is now fully automated and only seemed to give information regarding flight arrivals, departures and locations of recreational or food outlets. However, at the bottom of the screen there was an option to 'Call an agent', which I decided to choose. I was briefly connected to an agent on the screen and, after repeating our query regarding the Schipholbrand memorial, was met with the same incredulous response, but with a promise of aid: "Let me look that up for you on Google, I didn't even know there was a fire!". After several minutes of conversing with her colleague in Dutch, she came back with an exclamation: she had found an address for us. The easiest way to get there would be by car, she said, but we explained that we didn't have cars and asked if there was another way of getting there. After another round of searching on her screen, which I could not see, she directed us to the one bus that would take us to the nearest bus stop - "You would have to go on foot from there, but it is a lovely day!" she said slightly apologetically. Wishing us luck, thanking us for the new bit of information and offering reassurances that the memorial is a public monument so there shouldn't be an issue in accessing it - she hung up the call.



*Image 3: Electronic information desk*

Walking around the airport to get to the bus stop, I saw other forms of signage that Schiphol uses to welcome passengers to the Netherlands. These signs, also in English, read: ‘Say cheese to Dutch cheese’ and ‘Stroop-wafels are amazing’. It became increasingly evident that arguments regarding airports being neutral places did not hold, as a curation exists in the way Schiphol chooses to represent Dutch-ness to audiences - cheese and stroop-wafels made the cut.



*Image 4: Schiphol Advertisement that reads: Say cheese to dutch cheese*



*Image 5: Schiphol Advertisement that reads: Stroop-wafels are amazing*

Continuing to follow the instructions of the information desk officer, we set out to find the monument at Breugerlaan 67, Oude Meer - the location of the old detention center and the Schipholbrand monument. The bus took approximately 20 minutes, slowly circling the entirety of the Schiphol area and dropped us off a 3-minute walk from the address provided to us. After hurriedly crossing the street to try and avoid the speeding cars and cargo trucks, we found ourselves at a body of water with a monument of an airplane in the middle of a small body of water, almost like a canal, commemorating the Fokker airplane manufacturing company. There was no sign of the Schipholbrand memorial, so we kept walking along the body of water among the tall grass until we came across a fence. After looking at the maps application on my phone to see if we were in the right place, I saw a sign a few feet away from us that read: Monument Schipholbrand.



*Image 6: Model airplane in front of old site of Fokker airplane factory*



*Image 7: Path leading to Monument site - in between two private logistics company buildings*





*Image 8: Street sign that reads: Monument Schipholbrand*



*Image 9: Sign next to fenced area that reads: Monument Schipholbrand*

Almost hidden by the tall bushes, the memorial itself consisted of eleven wooden markers with the first names of each victim, the top of the black stone monument at the center reads: ‘In memory of the victims of the fire in the detention center 26-27 October 2005’ (Translation by Google) and along the sides are the last names of the same eleven victims. Unlike Aronne’s autoethnographic

account of the memorial<sup>16</sup>, I found there to be no evidence that the monument was visited recently apart from a broken candle holder at the base of the black stone monument. There was no indication of where the actual ruins of the Schiphol-Oost detention center were, so the exact location of the previous site was unknown to me. Aronne discusses a feeling of “desertion and physical decay” (2016) when visiting the memorial, but I found myself to be overwhelmed with a feeling of being lost. Obscured in the most blatantly hidden of ways, here was a memorial that nobody could access. Just as Aronne before me, I found that Schiphol’s detention center - especially its bloody history, was cloaked under the literal smoke of the difficulty of access to information. The memorial exemplifies how people who do not fit into the Dutch image of self-representation are tucked away to be forgotten. In an almost haunting fashion, there are sites within the larger schema of the airport that exist almost intangibly out of reach, out of scrutiny, out of the realm of inquiry. The emptiness of the fields of overgrown grass behind the memorial made it seem far away from the airport, despite Schiphol’s control tower peeking directly within sight.

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<sup>16</sup> “Dried flowers in broken vases, melted candles, weeds, and empty snail shells are collected at the foot of the memorial. A faded sash with the words “Daddy we miss you” wrapped around one of the victim’s pedestals.” (Aronne 2016)



*Image 10: Black Stone monument that reads: 'In memory of the victims of the fire in the detention center 26-27 October 2005' (Translation by Google)*

The underwhelming nature of this memorial and the obscurity within which it existed was unsettling and, in some ways, disturbing. Almost nonchalant in its “nastiness” (Smith and Gordon 1999, p. xvii) is the fact that Schiphol’s detention centers - old and new- and the memorial of the fire that killed eleven detainees are purposefully excluded from all activities related to the airport. The omission of Schiphol’s detention centers from histories related to the airport site, aviation and Dutch self-representation are notable absences and drive this research to argue their importance as sites of analysis. Despite these active exclusions, these sites do exist and do still make up a part of the airport and therefore testify to the fact that there is something to be concealed in the first place. I understand Schiphol’s detention center and the Schipholbrand monument to be markers of this opacity.



*Image 1: Black stone monument with initials and last names of the victims in the foreground, wooden pedestals with the first names of the victims in the middleground, Schiphol airport visible in the background*

## **Ghosts and Haunting Inquiries**

I cannot claim to have reached any definitive conclusions regarding the exact ways the workings of power present themselves at the airport when trying to locate Schiphol detention center within broader discourses of Dutch self-representation, but I do argue that we cannot rule out the active inclusions and exclusions that are present there. Placing the detention center against the discourses of self-representation at the airport as well as the migration management systems that are also at work in the wider regimes of its detention practices are all imbued with power. As Avery Gordon



so beautifully puts it, “Power can be invisible, it can be fantastic, it can be dull and routine. It can be obvious, it can reach you by the baton of the police, it can speak the language of your thoughts and desires” (Smith and Gordon 1999, p. 3). Power, I argue, presents itself in the way systems choose to represent themselves, an element that is ever-present at Schiphol. As I discuss in the next chapter when analyzing the informational video by the DJI on detention in the Netherlands, this can be seen in the way Dutch systems of migration choose to talk about themselves and those they detain.

“Schiphol has ghosts in its mobility machine” (Cresswell 2006, p. 256-257). Cresswell’s ghosts are the individuals at Schiphol who rummage through the trash, who ask for money to shower at homeless shelters and who arrive on flights and seem to somehow informally gravitate around the airport space. I see the Schipholbrand Memorial and the Schiphol detention center as ghosts, but in a way that differs from Cresswell. This is because ghosts not necessarily need to mean a dead or missing person - which there evidently are - but can be understood as indicators that draws attention to that which is “lost, or barely visible, or seemingly not there to our supposedly well-trained eyes” (Smith and Gordon 1999, p. 8). They testify to a haunting that takes place in Dutch self-representation at Schiphol airport in the form of the detention center and migration management practices that take place there. I use visual media and online text that I read as images and discourse to read for recurring themes and exclusions that occur across mediums of these practices. Historical and anthropological investigations of Schiphol airport have drawn attention to the multiple workings of power that are at play, but do not factor in the presence of the detention center in their readings. This absence is symptomatic of sociological research (Smith and Gordon 1999, pp. 14-16) as they focus on trying to convey an unproblematic view of what is real, of what can be seen. They do not regard the impact of structures that may not be as explicitly seen or experiences but impact the environment regardless.

In this chapter I discuss my inability to access the current site of Schiphol detention center. This failure led to my autoethnographic tracing of locating the only remnant of the previous Schiphol-Oost detention center, the Schipholbrand monument. There are certain facets of Dutch self-representation at the airport that are made hypervisible, examples of which I read in the signage, the promotional material, the information on the official websites, the documentation they publish etc. Due to this stance of visibility, there does not seem to be room for ghosts and especially not

for inquiries into those ghosts. If, because of this seeming hypervisibility of information regarding the airport and the detention center, there is a belief that “neither the repression nor the return of the repressed, in the form of either improperly buried bodies or countervailing systems of value or difference, occurs without any meaningful result ” (Smith and Gordon 1999, p. 16). I have been met with an incredulity at my interest in Schiphol’s detention center by journalists, refugee organizations and NGOs who cite the importance of the themes of the project, but not the site. The popularity, visibility and numbers of the other detention centers in the Netherlands - Rotterdam and Zeist, seemed to be a more obvious research choice. I do not deny the importance and necessity of studying multiple sites across scales and appreciated their feedback, however I also found the deflection from Schiphol’s detention center as a meaningful site significant. It was in fact, the ghosts of Schiphol-Oost detention center that reiterated the importance of Schiphol detention center to the fore for me, something that was not deemed important enough by many. The fire at Schiphol’s detention center killed people, as evidenced by the memorial put up and thus proves three things: that migrant detention is a part of Schiphol, various institutions are at work in its maintenance and yet there is a lot about this site that is actively hidden from the other elements of Dutch self-representation that are active at the airport.

### **Chapter 3: *Immigration Detention in the Netherlands: The Visual Betrayal of Politically Correct Self-Representative Discourse***

In the previous chapter I discussed Schiphol airport's position as a site of significance in the Dutch imagination, a site that contributes in placing themselves as a nation within, what they see as, global trends of modernity and progress. This raises an angle of inquiry, if at Schiphol we can find that there are certain aspects of themselves that the Dutch wish to project to the world, then there also exists certain narratives that the Dutch do not wish to include in their image of themselves. In her book *White Innocence* (2016), Gloria Wekker discusses a running theme of oxymoronic modes of Dutch self-representation when compared to that of the actual historical, political and material realities of its cultural and governing histories. She argues that there exists a cultural archive, a complex interplay of feelings and beliefs from a history of imperial rule that has embedded itself in the structures and functioning of Dutch society. Historically, as Theo Goldberg observes, the Dutch have "presented themselves and acquired a reputation as a modern bastion of liberal hospitality, a generous host to political exiles fleeing from more repressive regimes (2014, p. 408). A feature of this self-representation, Wekker observes, is that the Dutch do not want to identify themselves with migrants and migration (2016, p.6). Instead, according to Wekker, they wish to "stubbornly" hold on to their self-positioning as a "small and ethically just nation that has something to offer to the world." (2016, p.5). In other words, they attribute themselves as distinct, those who 'offer', from those that are 'offered'. Looking closely at Schiphol airport and its detention center as sites, I argue, can be seen as sites where this self-representation materializes as hypervisible in some aspects and unacknowledged in others. This cultural archive that constructs and informs a wider Dutch collective consciousness and canon is not concentrated at a particular physical location or a collection of texts in a box but rather "an accumulation of thoughts, feelings and affects" (Wekker in Trakilovic 2019, p. 153). The selectiveness of the memories and information that informs Dutch canon that makes up the archive, according to Wekker, is then "cemented in policies, organizational rules, [...] and commonsense everyday knowledge" (Wekker in Trakilovic 2019, p. 153). The importance of this archive is something that Wekker strongly urges an acknowledgement for, especially the influence it has on dominant Dutch meaning-making processes - including perceptions and representations of the self - goes unacknowledged. Wekker sees the unacknowledged centrality of race alongside its intersections of gender, sexuality and

class in this archive to elicit strong responses from dominant Dutch narrations as it does not align with the discourse and image they have of themselves (2016, p.1). Scholars who study race and migration in the Netherlands have observed that one of the ways dominant Dutch self-image is maintained is through strategic repetition (Essed and Hoving 2014; Ghorashi 2014; Goldberg 2014, Vasta 2014; De Leeuw and Van Wichelen 2014). This repetition not only takes place in policy, expressions of language and structural procedures, but also in state-sanctioned media.

Wekker argues that the modern Dutch self is “a racialized self, with race as an organizing grammar of an imperial order in which modernity was framed” (2016, p. 20), where conceptualizations of race are inextricable from cultural desires and anxieties. This can be demonstrated with the uneasiness that surrounds the use of ‘race’ as a term itself, where ethnicity is a preferred “softer” way of marking cultural differences. In the Dutch context however, biology and culture have become interchangeable terms, where the other/ ‘they’/*allochthones*<sup>17</sup> are always the racialized ‘them’ against the white Dutch ‘us’ (Wekker 2016, p. 22). An observable theme of avoidance (Wekker 2016; Essed 2014), anxiety (Wekker 2016) and denial (Vasta 2014; Ghorashi 2014) of race in the Dutch context has made it possible for whiteness to exist as invisible, ordinary and “as nothingness” (Wekker 2016 p. 59). Postcolonial scholars like Sara Ahmed have noted that when whiteness is taken as ordinary, the power it possesses as an orienting force for bodies of color only becomes noticeable when non-white bodies occupy white-oriented spaces (2007). Whiteness then becomes an institutional habit that functions as the background of all processes and interactions in those spaces, something that Europe and European spaces and territories have actively enforced in the form of border policy - to keep its territories white (Goldberg in Trakilovic 2019, p. 141-142). Similarly, the airport’s perception as an ‘empty’ site effectively erases the institutional whiteness and power that inform its operations.

In order to construct, stabilize and reiterate a Dutch self that is progressive and tolerant, postcolonial and critical race scholars observe that national homogeneity is often used to this end.

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<sup>17</sup> “the binary pair *autochtoon*-*allochtoon*/*autochthones*-*allochthones*, race is firmly present, as well as in the further official distinction in the category of *allochtoon*: Western and non-Western. Both concepts, *allochtoon* and *autochtoon*, are constructed realities, which make it appear as if they are transparent, clearly distinguishable categories, while the cultural mixing and matching that has been going on cannot be acknowledged. Within the category of *autochtoon* there are many, as we have seen, whose ancestors came from elsewhere, but who manage, through a white appearance, to make a successful claim to Dutchness.” (Wekker 2016, p. 23)

Dutch white supremacy, although not unique in doing so (Gilroy in Essed and Hoving 2014, p. 21) relies on a shared feeling of “being good” (Jordan and Minnaard in Essad and Hovind 2014, p. 20), innocent (Wekker 2016) and ignorant (Essed and Hoving 2014) about any racist implications this may have. Dutch self-image is grounded in a sense of moral and cultural superiority, conveniently ignoring or glossing over contradictions that may suggest otherwise and a strong rejection to the accusation of discrimination on the basis of racial or ethnic difference - to a point where Essed and Hoving have observed it to be some of the “unmistakably recognizable elements” of Dutch culture (2014, pp. 24-25). In this chapter I trace the way the video *Immigration detention in the Netherlands* (2019) may portray the white Dutch self as well as the racialized/ethnicized other. I first discuss the importance of visibility and visual sources to look for indicators of this self-representation. This is then followed by my description of the video as well as identification of some prevalent themes that emerge.

### ***Immigrant detention in the Netherlands – Searching for Meaning in the Video***

Overlooking the role of visibility in the expressions of self-representation would mean dismissing what Nicholas Mirzoeff calls the “intersection of power with visual representation” (2002, p. 4) where globalized imaginations of the self and the other interact. By explicitly honing in on the *cultural* roots of discursive formation and understandings, Mirzoeff emphasizes the inherent politics involved in image production, interpretation and dissemination; where other means of disciplinary investigation either become too limiting or restrictive (2002, 6).

Migration becomes deeply entangled in narratives of culture, especially when - for instance at the site of the airport - globalization, citizenship and multiculturalism come to the fore (De Leeuw and Van Wichelen 2014, pp. 337-338). In fact, in their analysis of the film *Naar Nederland (Coming to the Netherlands)*, De Leeuw and Van Wichelen argue that expressions of culture that glorify certain parts and obscure others is

a violent mechanism that appeals to exclusionary mechanisms of racialized, classed, and gendered identification, that reduce groups of people to essentialized characteristics and that affirm constructions of “us” and “them” by using them as absolute forms of differentiation (2014, p. 338).

As part of the Dutch civic integration exam that most non-EU migrants are required to take in order to obtain a Dutch residence permit or citizenship, *Naar Nederland* or *Coming to the Netherlands* is a one-and-a-half-hour long video that is meant to give migrants an overview of

basic knowledge of - what the Dutch government and migration management bodies claim to be - Dutch society, values, and culture. The video is “guided by a female presenter who seems to stand for both the image of the modern Dutch woman and, through her narrative, for the voice of the state speaking to its new immigrants.” (De Leeuw and Van Wichelen 2014, p. 338). The Netherlands has used film and visual media as a way of communicating to potential immigrants a homogenized representation of a united Dutch self, or as De Leeuw and Van Wichelen put it, “we explain exactly what our cultural codes are and, thus, what you need to do to be included in the Dutch *we*.” (2014, p. 340) (emphasis in original). The use of informational or explainer videos as a deterrent of migration and asylum seekers is not limited to just the Netherlands, as Vasta observes in the case of Australia who uses images of nature and harsh weather conditions (2014, p.390). The Netherlands' framing of informational videos about culture as a deterrent, especially to Muslim migrants, has been a source of intrigue, especially because, as many scholars argue, race is an inextricable part of the Dutch conception of culture.

Under the subheading “Documents”, the DJI has a video titled *Immigration detention in the Netherlands* detailing “how immigration detention works in the Netherlands” (Dienst Justitiële Inrichtingen 2019). I see this video as part of this wider corpus of informational videos that can act as deterrents to migration - only this time, it includes migrants already existing within the Netherlands who may be at risk of being, or already are illegalized. According to the webpage, the video covers four aspects of migrant detention: who, why, where, and how long illegalized migrants are kept in detention until they are either granted residence status or must make their “departure” (Dienst Justitiële Inrichtingen 2019) from the Netherlands. At little over eight and a half minutes long, the video has a voiceover in English, is downloadable and is also available on YouTube. Although closed captions are available on YouTube for this video, the official DJI website does not display closed captions nor subtitles. It is through this use of English as the mode to communicate the above that I see it as a video particularly made to target international audiences and thus as a way of projecting a self-image to those audiences. It is by defining who *is* in detention - non-white illegalized migrants - that the DJI also tells us who is *not* - white Dutch citizens. In the Netherlands, there is one overarching end-goal to migrant detention: deportation. However, not once is the word deportation mentioned in the DJI’s video. The topics the video does cover are: why the Netherlands detains immigrants, who is held in immigrant detention, the locations of detention centers in the country, what happens in detention centers, cooperating

organizations involved in the process of detention and the length of stay in detention. The Immigration and Naturalisation Service (IND) are responsible for the granting and revoking of residence permits and hold offices within the JCS at Schiphol. I was fortunate enough to be put in contact with an asylum officer who volunteered to talk to me about Schiphol's detention center and give me a bit more insight about the inclusions and exclusions of information the DJI has given on their website and video, but I go more into detail about this interview in the following chapter discussing deportation regimes.

*Immigration detention in the Netherlands* (2019) starts off with the visuals of people of color walking down the sunlit streets of the Netherlands, a woman walking along a street with groceries, she cleans an apple on her shirt and proceeds to take a bite. A man walks to a fruit stall with the name "IBRAHIM" and talks to, who we assume, as the shopkeeper (Dienst Justitiële Inrichtingen 2019, 0:04-0:11). We see another man lean up against a fence and stare in the direction of the Turkish mosque in Utrecht. All the people we have seen so far are people of color, who the video codes as migrants. The voiceover introduces the video with the following lines:

*[Voiceover]: Many people come to the Netherlands each year planning on living here. A large number of them submit an asylum application. The Immigration and Naturalization Service - IND - handles each application based on the policy rules on foreign nationals. Foreign nationals who are not entitled to a residence permit or who have not followed the entry procedure are here illegally and must leave the country.*



*Image 2: A man approaches the seller in front of the fruit stand. The name IBRAHIM is clearly visible*



*Image 2: A man stops to look at a mosque in Utrecht*





*Image 3: A graphic of the world map that shows arrows leaving from the Netherlands to central Asia, the 'Middle East', Africa and South America*

Through the video, the DJI immediately establishes the perspective from which they speak from, which is on behalf of the Dutch people and the Netherlands and who the subject of their discussion is - i.e., illegalized migrants. This is made evident through the use of the word 'here', where they address audiences from the perspective of already residing within the Netherlands. By specifying the entry of 'foreign nationals' and 'asylum' applicants within the territory of the Netherlands during the first few seconds of the narration, the DJI conflate the two terms to be the same - as if all people who come to the Netherlands must be asylum seekers. The use of the terms then positions migrants into the frames of foreign or othered-ness of the presence of migrants in the Netherlands. They also introduce the role of the IND in this process, effectively legitimizing all actions made by the institution regarding detention as it adheres to policy. I briefly discuss the themes of detention, deportation regimes and border practices that emerge in the video, but I go more into detail in the next chapter. Focusing on the DJI's video, I notice some themes that stand out in the way the DJI present themselves and the Dutch people, compared to how they present those who are in detention. In the next section, I discuss the affinity Dutch self-representation has with a perceived adherence to law and policy - where the Dutch follow the rules versus the 'others' who do not.

### **Merely Following Orders - Logic, Law and Documentation**

A prevalent theme I see in the way the DJI present themselves, and by proxy the Dutch people, in the *Immigration detention in the Netherlands* video, is the recurrent imagery or mention of law and documentation, using legality as the framework that can then be a stand-alone justification for the practice of migrant detention. The voiceover reiterates this by stating that the reasons why immigrants are placed in detention is to prevent them from running away. During this narration, the visuals show an employee of the DJI collecting a suitcase from storage with a baggage claim sticker that states that the location is at Amsterdam Schiphol, and therefore we can assume that a detainee is being deported via the airport:

*[Voiceover] Foreign nationals are placed in a detention center to avoid absconding. They are not convicted of a crime but it has been stipulated that they must leave our country.*

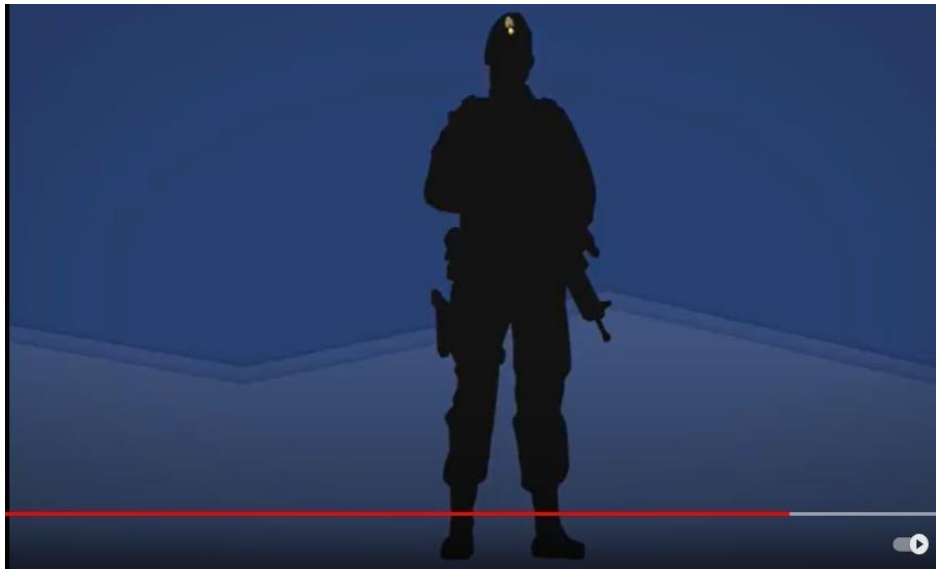
The assumption here is that although there has been no crime that illegalized migrants have been convicted of, they are still placed in detention as a preventative measure. Their ‘illegality’ as people who cannot legally reside in the Netherlands means that they will be treated as convicted criminals but will not be called as such. This distinction from being convicted criminals facing punishment is what, in technical terms, distinguishes a detention center from a prison (Martin and Mitchelson 2009). Detention comes under the mandate of the DJI under Dutch law, in particular article 59 of the Aliens Act. In fact, the process of placing an illegalized migrant in immigrant detention involves apprehension by any means of arrest or search:

*[Voiceover]: A foreign national is taken into custody by the Aliens Police, The Royal Netherlands Marechaussee or by the Repatriation and Departure Service (DT&V) and is then brought to a detention center by DJI’s transport and support service, DV&O.*

The number of institutions, including the levels of police and apprehension services involved in taking an illegalized migrant into custody does not suggest that these illegalized migrants are not treated like criminals. All the visuals during this segment of the video are animated drawings and the different levels of institutions are illustrated using silhouettes - the Aliens Police and the Royal Netherlands Marechaussee are depicted to have guns. The responsibility for being detained for extended periods of time is also placed upon the migrants’ inability to provide legal documentation. The illegality of the migrants and the adherence to [inter]national law and policy is also reiterated in the case of presenting documents, where illegalized migrants are “on average” detained for 70 days but:

*[Voiceover][...]this may take longer when they don't have valid passports or when a foreign national does not cooperate.*

This brief statement highlights a tone of matter-of-factness about the length of time migrants' cases can be in the detention and deportation procedure. The DJI fully places the reasoning behind the length of detention and any delay in the act of deportation on the migrants themselves, for it is 'they' who are not adhering to not just the law but also to moral, cultural and systemic scripts and expectations, not 'us'. The video's vagueness of what exactly a 'refusal to cooperate' entails, leaves much unanswered. This ambiguity gives precedence to the DJI to not only define but modify the grounds on which length of detention is determined. This means that case workers at the detention center are integral to not only the wellbeing of detainees during their time there, but also how long they will be held. In the next section I discuss the video's portrayal of detention workers and the emergence of strict benevolence as a theme that acts as a self-representative feature that not only distinguishes the Dutch from the detainees, but positions themselves as morally superior.



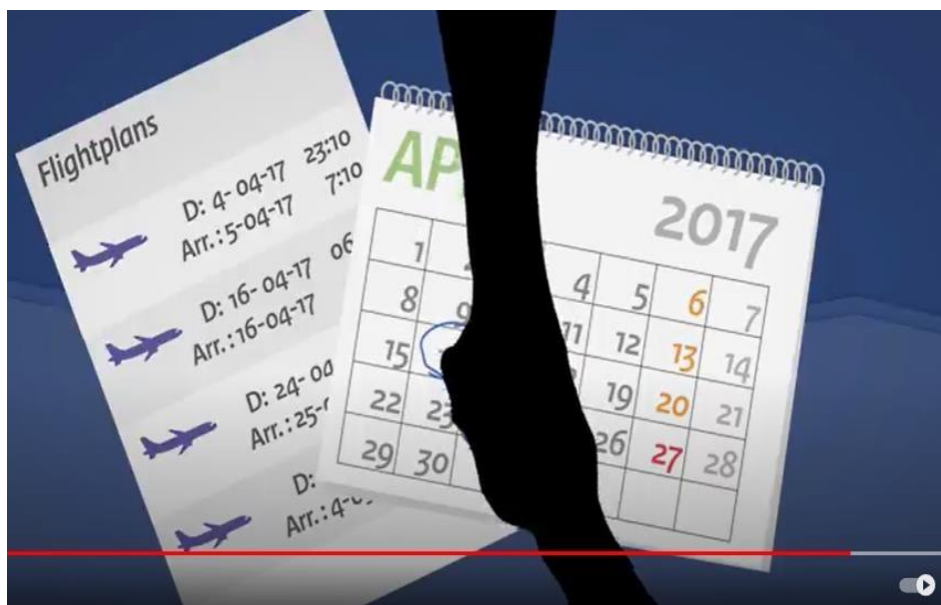
*Image 4: Graphic that shows the silhouette of the Royal Dutch Marechaussee*



*Image 5: Graphic of the outside of a detention facility*



*Image 6: Graphic of an interview between a detainee and a DJI case worker*



*Image 7: Graphic of a calendar with the circled date as 15<sup>th</sup> April 2017 and a flight plan. A silhouette of two arms shaking hands symbolize what a mutually agreed upon deportation plan looks like*



*Image 8: Graphic depicting the absence of residence permit as grounds for detention under Section 59 of the Aliens Act*

## **Detainees' Best Interest at Heart - From the Other Side of the Prison Bars**

The video by the DJI presents themselves and the detention process as something they only enforce as a last resort. Detention seems to be the only viable option if, again, the DJI feels that the illegalized migrant will not fulfill the responsibility of leaving the country themselves:

*[Voiceover]: “Foreign nationals who are not allowed to stay in the Netherlands are given time to leave voluntarily. they can receive assistance with their departure from various organizations. If the foreign national fails to leave the Netherlands voluntarily, supervision measures may be imposed to arrange for the forced departure. This may entail that a person must report to the police office regularly. If it is suspected that the foreign national will not observe the supervision measures he or she may be placed in immigration detention. Not all foreign nationals by a longshot are placed in immigration detention because this is only used as a last resort.” (emphasis added)*

Police surveillance is coded as ‘supervision’ and the nonchalant notion of who actually is in detention seems to reiterate the fault of the illegalized migrants themselves. The video suggests that the Netherlands does not want to detain people at all, but that they have no choice but to do so. Suspicion of absconding is enough, according to the DJI, to place illegalized migrants in detention but they reassure the listener that it is only “by a longshot” that some ‘actually’ are. This phrase adds a layer of innocence almost to the DJI, positioning themselves as an institution that represents a country that is otherwise friendly towards migrants; that detention is the exception not the rule. Almost as if to combat possible raised eyebrows and questions as to the necessity of enforcing migrant detention and the similarities the process of detention has to incarceration, the video proceeds to use the testimonies of detention officers and case workers to illustrate the ‘care’ they provide to detainees and to parrot the DJI’s stance related to migrant detention:

*[Kimberley, detention supervisor] [in Dutch]: “The atmosphere here is very open and humane. We treat each other with much respect. They are not criminals, after all. They have considerably more freedom here compared to a prison...allowing for much more leeway, also for us, to have a chat occasionally.” (emphasis added)*

I see the description of the detention center by the detention supervisor to be illustrative of how Dutch-ness sees itself and wants to be seen by onlookers - open, humane and different by *comparison*. Wekker observes that there exists an adamant insistence that the Netherlands view themselves as “a place of extraordinary hospitality and tolerance toward the racialized/ethnicized other” (2016, p.1), where the illegalized migrant detainee occupies this position of the other. The give-and-take nature of this interaction is also very interesting to observe here, as if it completely

overlooks the fact that detention officers and DJI workers are still, in essence, imprisoning illegalized migrants.

The nature of the detention center as a site of incarceration seems to be diminished by the DJI's description of the sites as well as life in detention. Here, I see what Trakilovic also observes is the notion of the "good prison" (2019, p. 138) - where provision of facilities somehow stands in for a hallmark of how the Dutch want to present themselves; compassionate but firm. DJI workers are portrayed as facilitators, service providers and, paternalistically so, seem to have the best interest of detainees and illegalized migrants at heart, especially the children.

*[Bert, department head] [in Dutch]: "The level of supervision is sufficient but we find it important for families to get through this period as self-sufficient as possible. Our task is to facilitate this. We provide support where needed but the families arrange their own affairs. The guiding principle is to offer the utmost child-friendly care so children experience the least amount of restriction and can just be children."* (emphasis added)

Bert's testimony in the video also suggests that there may be a contradiction within the 'support' the DJI case workers provide versus how the families wish to conduct their matters. There is also, as I read it, an implication that children are unable to "be children" in detention because of the decisions of their parents - not the DJI nor the Netherlands for illegalizing them in the first place. Blame of depriving children of their childhood is deflected onto the detainees rather than those who detain. This "glossing over" (Wekker 2016 p. 15) of Netherlands' own role in the disruption of the lives of migrant children because of the government's role in illegalization of their parents and themselves allows them to be innocent from it.

*[Marij, detention supervisor, in Dutch] The foreign nationals staying here must leave the Netherlands. This means we cannot offer any work or schooling for adults here during their stay. What we can offer, however, is access to the open air area where they can play games, a fitness area, the library, a creative area and the YouTube room where people can entertain themselves a little to make the time here somewhat more enjoyable. This helps ease the boredom, which I think is the most important thing.* (emphasis added)

The extent of the DJI and the Netherlands' compassion towards illegalized migrants in detention seems to operate on a sort of logic of: you've gotten yourselves here on your own accord, so you might as well make the most of what we've graciously given you on your way out of here. This echoes Wekker's observation that any responsibilities that may have been assumed by the state in the past as facilitators for ethnic minorities have "dwindled and it is now their own, individual responsibility to integrate" (2016, pp. 55-56). What else marks a failure to integrate - and thus

denoting the undeserving-ness of care - than that of an illegalized migrant being detained with the eventual end-goal of deportation.



*Image 9: Kimberly, detention supervisor. Text on screen: The atmosphere here is very open and humane*



*Image 10: Pictured: detainee. Speaking: Kimberley detention supervisor - We treat each other with much respect. They are not criminals after all*





*Image 11: Inside a detention center. Foreground: migrants playing ping-pong. Middle and background show the cells detainees are kept in*



*Image 12: A detained child is talking to a case worker. Text on screen: The guiding principle is to offer the utmost child-friendly care*



*Image 13: Marij, detention supervisor. Detainees can be seen playing sports in the background. Text on screen: The foreign nationals staying here must leave the Netherlands*



*Image 14: Detainees engaged in recreation activities. Text on screen: This helps ease the boredom, which I think is the most important thing*

### **Conflations of Race/Ethnicity/ Nationality**

Throughout the DJI video, rather than explicitly mentioning race, there are more implicitly implied visuals of ethnicity coded under the term “foreign national”. Gloria Wekker sees this conflation of race and ethnicity as a fundamental part of the Dutch understanding of difference (2016, p. 22). In the context of this analysis, I go one step further and see that nationalities that are illegalized in

the Netherlands can also be read through racial/ethnicized systems of understanding. Disavowal and denial of race as a “fundamental organizing grammar” (Wekker 2016, p. 24) in the Dutch understandings of themselves and of others can be interpreted through the media they use to represent themselves. In the filmed portion of the video, when “foreign national” was mentioned, there would be visuals of either a person of color on the screen or an animated graphic. The entire segment of the DJI video “*Who are held in immigration detention*”, was animated and detailed descriptions of legality, gender, average age and absence of documents rather than data on nationality or race. Information about who makes up the population in migrant detention is omitted and left to speculation; where audiences interpret instead the visuals in the filmed sections to fill in the gaps. This guise of racial and ethnic neutrality through the use of “foreign national” merely acts as a deflector of what can be “invisible forms of racist expressions and well-established patterns of racist exclusion.” (Essen and Nimako in Wekker 2016, p. 51). One example of a more hidden but still racist expression can be seen in the animated visuals of the DJI video. The depiction of illegalized migrant women, their silhouettes show them wearing the hijab and burqa - both of which clearly demonstrate a very racialized idea of who migrants in detention are - “Islamic people, constructed as the ultimate other” (Wekker 2016 p. 23). Muslim women are no longer the receivers of white paternalistic concern or pity (Essed and Hoving 2014, p. 17) but are now a means of illustrating demographic information about detained illegalized migrants. This simultaneously reaffirms the sentiment that, Muslim women in a hijab and burqa cannot be a part of the collective ‘we’ in representations of Dutch self-image.

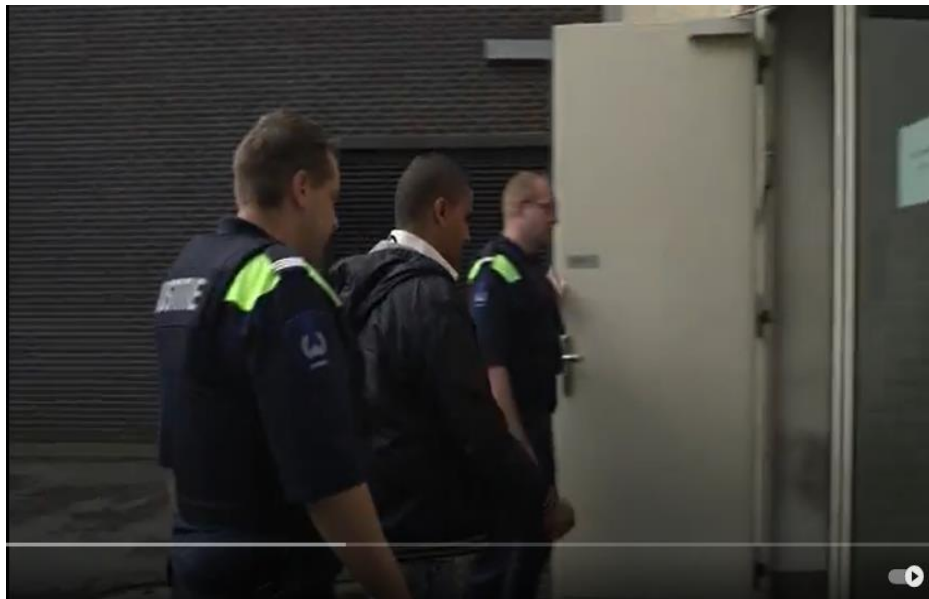
All the employees of the detention centers and the DJI who were given speaking roles in the video, however, were white and spoke Dutch. What became apparent to me, especially as the video was nearing the end, that there was a very deliberate portrayal of people to fulfill certain roles, and in order to do so there was an intentional categorization/ordering done pre-production to illustrate this. As Wekker points out:

This silent ordering of people, which is at the same time vehemently denied when it is pointed out—or rather, bad intentions or consequences are denied, since the sorting itself cannot be—is so much part of common sense thought that it automatically and immediately presents itself in organizational and discursive principles in the Dutch context...exclusionary consequences of the dissociation of gender and race/ethnicity, the evacuation of whiteness as a racial/ethnic positioning, and the hierarchization of racial/ethnic positionings are far-reaching. (Wekker 2016, p. 63)

The image of the Dutch self is white, tolerant, hospitable, compassionate yet law abiding, whereas the illegalized migrant detainee is not and will then be treated as such.



*Image 15: Graphic showing silhouettes of a detained woman, man and child*



*Image 16: Detainee being escorted by DJI officers*



*Image 17: Detainees in the family center*



*Image 18: Detainees are housed two to a room, depicted to be playing a boardgame together*

The filmed portions of the DJI video are at the detention locations of Rotterdam, Zeist ad Schiphol - but audiences are not told which ones they are in the duration of the video itself. What I found interesting is that despite the video clearly stating that “Foreign nationals usually leave the Netherlands by airplane” - there is no mention of Schiphol detention center at all when the locations are described. The omissions in this video are almost as, if not more, significant in trying to understand Schiphol detention center’s role in Dutch self-representation. Since I do not have



access to the visuals of the center at Schiphol, I rely on my interviewees' descriptions regarding the space itself, which I elaborate in my next chapter on deportation regimes.



*Image 19: Detainee being transported to Schiphol airport. Schiphol Airport tower seen in the background*

*Immigration detention in the Netherlands* shows us what the DJI considers to be important information to know regarding the process of migrant detention and deportation. In doing so they address two audiences: to themselves as a form of self-representation and to international audiences about where the Dutch position themselves regarding migrant detention. I find it important to restate the fact that this video is available on the DJI's website, which is in Dutch but the video itself is recorded in English originally. This inference on audience(s) being addressed is based on my interpretation of multiple points through the video. What I find to particularly be of relevance is the way the centrality of Schiphol and its detention center fails to stand out in the video at all. Despite the recurring themes of airplanes, flight plans and the mention of 'departure' via air travel as being central to the process of deportation - the seeming end goal of migrant detention - Schiphol's centrality in this deportation process is not highlighted. The last filmed shot in *Immigration detention in the Netherlands* clearly shows Schiphol airport, even if it is not explicitly named. The video, meant to be informative, does give some indication to push for the inquiry into the airport's role in immigrant detention, remains elusive about the specificity of Schiphol.

## Searching for Clarity – Activist and NGO Intervention

As I discuss at multiple instances in this thesis, my attempts to contact organizations for any in-person contact that would be interested to discuss anything related to Schiphol's detention center were met with either rejection, refusal or silence. It is because of these dead ends that I then turned to digital and online published content by these NGOs and activist organizations to try and home in on a bit more specificity on Schiphol's detention center and see what they have to say about these self-representations by the DJI. Feminist digital geographers have observed that incorporating online methods in research often makes their research a target of critique; that are seen as being "too quick and dirty and lacking the depth (and truthiness?) that comes from face-to-face interactions" (Hine 2000; Beaulieu 2004 cited in Morrow, Hawkins and Kern 2015, p. 532). However, I found that when researching images, representations and sites like Schiphol detention center that were difficult for me to access, digital and online spaces became vital sources of archival data and became an integral part of my scavenger methodology. In this section I look at the themes that emerge in my online engagement with NGO and activist content related to Schiphol detention center in order to trace my research trajectory to try and theoretically locate it. Online space is political space and digital data is never "innocent, complete or self-explanatory" (Leurs 2017, p. 131) and thus never objective. As much as online content informs in terms of what is visible, there is also so much that is also not visible. I see the information I obtain from the online webpages and archives of NGOs and activists as a means of grounding and making material (Morrow, Hawkins and Kern 2015, p. 539) the places of conflict and connection that emerge at Schiphol detention center.

The *Immigration Detention Hotline (Meldpunt Vreemdelingendetentie)* is an initiative that operates under the LOS (*Landelijk Ongedocumenteerden Steunpunt*) foundation in the Netherlands. They primarily work as a focal point to collect complaints related to immigration detention in the Netherlands and acts as a database for information regarding the same. They also do the work of explicitly identifying detention "as part of the Dutch deportation policy" (Het Meldpunt Vreemdelingendetentie n.d.) and "plays an active role towards the government and media in the context of advocacy and undocumented image forming." (Het Meldpunt

Vreemdelingendetentie n.d.). The *Hotline*'s intervention in image formation and creation on behalf of migrants in detention indicates the importance of representation and speaks to absences that exist in that representation. According to the *Hotline*, migrants can be detained for up to 18 months in the Netherlands as long as there is a "reasonable perspective" on deportation, where the "blame" of prolonging that detention period is put on the shoulders of the "foreigner" (Het Meldpunt Vreemdelingendetentie n.d.), something that we see in the DJI video as well. The *Hotline* also points out that children can only be detained for a maximum of two weeks, which then means that parents who accompany them can also only be detained for the same amount of time. However, Schiphol detention center is the exception to this and both illegalized children and their parents can be held for longer<sup>18</sup>, information that is entirely omitted from the DJI video and their official website. This revelation by the *Hotline* and omission by the DJI struck out to me as something that raised the inquiry as to why Schiphol detention center as a site supposedly had a different set of rules and procedures as well as why this information was not readily available

In an attempt to find out more about the variation in information in the DJI video and that detailed by the *Hotline* about Schiphol, I reached out to one of the *Hotline* coordinators briefly detailing my project and interest in Schiphol detention center. After a few days of no response, I received a reply via email that shed a little more light as to why Schiphol detention center is not considered to be of much interest:

"[...] why do you focus only on Schiphol? Schiphol is *just* border detention (art. 6 Vreemdelingenwet 2000) and for a maximum of some weeks. Since some years most of the migrants who stayed longer in Schiphol are transferred to Rotterdam. So there still are some migrants in Schiphol, but *not too many and just for a short period*." (email message to author, 15th March 2022) (emphasis added)

The significance I saw in Schiphol's detention center *because* of its presence at the border was not shared. The number of people and length of detention is determined short and thus, not deemed

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<sup>18</sup> For more information see Het Meldpunt Vreemdelingendetentie. N.d.

"<https://meldpuntvreemdelingendetentie.nl/immigration-detention/?Lang=en>." *About the Immigration Detention Hotline* (blog). Accessed May 5, 2022. <https://meldpuntvreemdelingendetentie.nl/immigration-detention/?lang=en>.



substantial or valid enough as a research site. I was no stranger to people and organizations question my judgement as a researcher, but this was the first time I was given an indication as to why. Studying Schiphol detention didn't make sense to many – it was causing trouble in the ideas of what is deemed to be a 'worthy enough' site of research.

In my attempt to embody the feminist imperative of “stay[ing] with the trouble” (Haraway 2016 in Elwood and Leszczynski 2018, p. 639) by locating themes of self-representation that were recurrent in my investigation of the detention center, I continued to go through the digital archives of NGOs. This brought me to the *Global Detention Project*, a Geneva based research center that documents the “use of immigration detention as a response to migration and refugee movements” (Global Detention Project 2020). The *Project's* 2020 report on the Netherlands states that asylum seekers are the primary ‘category’ of detainees at Schiphol (Global Detention Project 2020). Asylum seekers were only mentioned once at the start of the DJI video, so by specifying that they are the primary kind of migrant detained at Schiphol, the *Project* points out an omission made by the DJI and migration management bodies regarding the information they give out about migrant detention in the Netherlands. This brought into focus the role of the process of asylum - that was not elaborated upon by the DJI nor the *Hotline*, at least not explicitly - in the migration and deportation process at Schiphol. The *Project* also cites concerns by Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International Netherlands about the Netherlands' increase in frequency of migrant detention. I discuss more in detail the connection of the asylum process to deportation regimes, including the experiences of asylum seekers who were detained there in the next chapter. This running engagement I have had to have with opacity and transparency of information for this project and the role of the digital in trying to navigate these rejections and information silences illustrate the nature of the detention center itself – how it exists as a site of contradiction.

Perhaps as a means of reading these silences and rejections as specters or indications of haunting (Smith and Gordon 1999), I stay with this conundrum by keeping critical race scholar Simone Browne in mind, whose research on her book *Dark Matters: On the Surveillance of Blackness* also emerged from a place of rejection. The CIA refused to “confirm nor deny the existence or nonexistence of records responsive to [her] request” (2015, p.1) for documents she was looking for regarding Frantz Fanon's time in the United States. She sees redaction, omission or refusal to speak as “willful absencing (Browne 2015, p. 13) of record and as the state's disavowal of

bureaucratic traces” (2015, p.2) that reflects modes of surveillance, particularly racialized surveillance and population management.

In this chapter I analyze the DJI video *Immigration detention in the Netherlands* (2019) for themes that I read with Gloria Wekker’s theorizing of white innocence (2016). This strategic positioning of the Dutch self as morally superior translates to the rejection of migrants from the image of a collective Dutch ‘we’, as racialized and migrant bodies are not included. I talk about the thematic emergence of instances that display this innocence through the narratives of political correctness shown in the video, such as the reliance on the language of legality, agency and documentation. The video uses racially loaded visuals, however, and contradicts the self-representative discourse of objectivity and logic when it comes to depicting the immigration detention procedure. There is an absence of explicit mention of Schiphol airport despite the centrality of air travel in the deportation process. I further emphasize the elusiveness of locating content communicated about Schiphol detention center in this video by tracing my experience of researching the site online through activist and NGO webpages. I provide a brief anecdote about the recurrence in a prevalent theme in this research process, where the significance of Schiphol detention center as a site of study is again called into question. I discuss the varying levels of transparency and opacity when it comes to Schiphol’s detention center, finding there to be almost a “willful absenting” of information regarding it. The frequency of this contradiction, this dodging of clarity of information, gives enough evidence to suggest that perhaps the nature of the site itself exists in a conundrum of transparency/opacity. In my next chapter I bolster this argument by discussing thematic omissions and presences in the asylum process at Schiphol airport’s detention center and the persistence of white innocence as well as emergence of white ignorance are present under Dutch migration and deportation regimes.

#### **Chapter 4: Consistency in Contradiction – Narrations of Asylum and Detention at Schiphol**

Throughout the data collection process for this project, asylum has been a recurring theme that seems to be inextricable from any inquiry made from my side into the site of Schiphol's detention center. All of my interviewees were connected to Schiphol detention center in some way through the asylum process - either as the enforcer of Dutch policy or those who were on the receiving end of it. This raises the question: what relationship does asylum have with immigration detention and how does Schiphol's detention center bring this relationship into focus? Immigrant detention can be located as a means of enacting government policy onto migrant populations, which is something I have referenced at multiple instances in previous chapters. These migrants are either illegalized or unauthorized, and asylum seekers can fall under both categories. Immigration detention is, according to political theorists Sampson and Mitchell, "a preferred means for states to maintain and assert their territorial authority and legitimacy" (2013, p. 98) and thus an essential part of border management and security. Broadly speaking, there are three elements that define such kinds of detention: a deprivation of liberty, that takes place at a particular site, which is executed to reach an immigration-related goal (Silverman and Massa in Sampson and Mitchell 2013, p. 99). However, Sampson and Mitchell point out that this definition does not include modes of detention that is enforced through means that may not be initially migration related - for example health checks (2013, p. 100) and has consistently been used during deportation procedures (2013, p. 100).

This is where migration and border scholars intervene, noticing that the use of detention as a state response to migrant presence becomes an essential part of undocumented migration not just as the step before deportation: where it becomes "effectively defined, enforced and lived as a more or less *susceptibility* to deportation" (Peutz and De Genova 2010, p.1) (emphasis added). Peutz and De Genova's observation of European deportation regimes emphasize the interconnectedness of the discourses of migration, nation states and deportation and terms it as the global deportation regime. Asylum seekers, who are then "deportable" migrants (Peutz and De Genova 2010 p. 5) get entangled in this regime. Peutz and De Genova argue that the "normalization and standardization" (2010, p.5) of deportation then obscures the production and imposition of deportability - the susceptibility or possibility of deportation - in political and administrative processes of nation

states and border agencies (2010, p.6). Immigration detention are sites of exception and seem to be “immune” from the “mandates of international law and human rights discourses” (Peutz and De Genova 2010, p. 10), where segregating migrant populations maintains the sovereignty of the modern nation-state’s borders. According to this current deportation regime, the illegalized migrant is a figure, an image that exists even before migrants cross into a border of the European Union (Cleton and Chauvin 2020, p. 297; Peutz and De Genova 2010, p. 11), maintaining an illegality of the deportable migrant both inside and outside the site of the detention center. Processes of asylum then emerge as a part of this deportation regime because of the deportability of migrants. Schiphol detention center, because it is a holding facility for asylum seekers, in turn, situates and puts these discourses into interaction with each other, making it a vital site of study.

Previous scholarship on the interaction of deportation regimes within immigration detention centers highlights the “spectacle” (Pugliese 2008, p. 206) of the site as an exception to the nation-state’s systems of incarceration, despite it being a part of their respective legislations. Despite the emphasis of asylum seekers and illegalized migrants in detention being “not criminals”, as also shown in the DJI video, detention centers still operate as prisons do (Pugliese 2008, 208). Migration anthropologists Cleton and Chauvin (2020) and Barak Kalir (2019) have observed the enactment of deportation regimes in the Netherlands through their ethnographic research with employees of the DT&V (Repatriation and Departure Service). Cleton and Chauvin found that the “insufficient” definitions and measures of expulsion by the Netherlands’ asylum and deportation procedures had resulted in DT&V caseworkers intervening to deploy “soft power” techniques to make illegalized migrants leave the country ‘voluntarily’ (2020 pp. 298-230). Stepping in as an alternative to the “right hand of the state”, these caseworkers’ affective engagement with their jobs provide insight into the wider working of Dutch migration management and deportation enforcement. Barak Kalir also sees the treatment of migrants in the Netherlands as characterized by a “duality of compassion and repression” (2019, p. 68), where caseworkers execute controversial deportation policies that cause much harm to illegalized migrants “without apparently encountering ethical setbacks” (2019, p. 71). Kalir observes that caseworkers’ feelings about their jobs, in particular the internalization of the feelings of “righteousness” and doing what is “legal” contributes to the way they operate within deportation regimes in the Netherlands (2019, p. 74). Although the moral underpinnings of deportation case workers falls outside the scope of

my research, I found it useful to think through Kalir, Cleton and Chauvin's approach to immigration detention and deportation regimes, as the people who enact these policies not only do the work of displaying state intent, but also particular positions of engagement to these policies and regimes.

Simultaneously taking inspiration from Kalir as well as failing to find any participant involved in the state's side of the deportation regime, I managed to undertake an unofficial interview with Peter (pseudonym), an asylum officer who works at the IND office at the Judicial Complex Schiphol and is responsible for the granting and rejection of asylum applications made at Schiphol airport. I got into contact with Peter via a Dutch friend who put my request to get in touch with someone who works at or related to Schiphol detention center in a WhatsApp group of people from their alma mater. From there, my friend's ex-classmate said that she worked for the IND after graduation and knew someone who worked at Schiphol, forwarding my request to their respective WhatsApp group for IND employees. Peter volunteered his contact details and after a brief phone call explaining who I was and the project I was trying to undertake, was more than enthusiastic about the prospect of talking about his job with me. I made sure to, at several points throughout our interview, remind him that he can choose to not answer any questions he felt uncomfortable with and that he could withdraw his consent to be interviewed as well as the use of the interview contents. After a brief chuckle he said, "Do with it what you will, it's fine. Just don't use my name." We scheduled a meeting on one of his days off in a cafe close to Utrecht Central Station, where I currently live. I sat in front of him apprehensive and a little scared, for being in front of any representative of the country's law enforcement put me on edge. He was however, eager and very nonchalant throughout our conversation which required very little interjection or prompting from me. Two hours and four coffees later, he got up, shook my hand, thanked me for the opportunity to reflect on the job with an "outsider", and walked out of the cafe. He has not yet responded to any requests for a follow-up interview.

It is through Peter that I found out that *all* asylum applicants who are stopped at Schiphol are detained at Schiphol's detention center while their cases are being processed. I read this interview with Peter as a place where the themes of white innocence (Wekker 2016) emerge as white ignorance (Essed and Hoving 2014) that can be seen at the asylum procedure at Schiphol, where

many of the observations made by Kalir, Ceton and Chauvin are mirrored, signaling the entrenchment of the asylum procedure in immigration detention and the deportation regime. What I mean by this can be explained best by Gloria Wekker, who sees a kind of “epistemology of ignorance” (2016, p.17) that is a feature of white supremacist states, where they can claim to not understand the racist systems they benefit from. Not-understanding, which in turn is connected to “practices of knowing and not-knowing” (Wekker 2016, p. 18) is defended and protected under the realm of innocence; the “soft, harmless, childlike qualities” (Wekker 2016, p. 18) that Dutch people, according to Wekker’s observations, wholeheartedly ascribe themselves to. What does this do? It allows the absence of racial discourse, of knowledge, of understanding to become a feature of how states see themselves. The blatant disavowal of race, for example in the discourse of *Immigration detention in the Netherlands*, is contradictory to the imagery of the racialized brown detainee. The “anxious Dutch claim of innocence” (Essed and Hoving 2014, p. 24), which manifests as a denial of racial bias and structurally racist practices puts the practices of migration management at Schiphol within the realm of “smug ignorance” (Essed and Hoving 2014, p. 24) which is an aggressive rejection of being informed of the racist underpinnings of institutional practices. Analyzing the asylum procedure, particularly its entanglement with deportation in the Netherlands, illustrates the interplay of innocence, ignorance and smug ignorance that can be observed at Schiphol that acts almost as a cover-up for the racist and exclusionary practices at the Dutch border.

### **Peter and the Innocent Ignorance of the IND and DJI**

[Peter]: “We [IND asylum officers] tell them [asylum seekers], that when they apply for asylum , they *will* be put in the detention center. We [the IND] ask them [the asylum seeker] if there are any obligations they [the asylum seeker] needs to fulfill before being put in the detention center? Or why we [the IND] can’t put them in detention? Asylum seekers need to come with really strong reasons as to why they can’t be put in the detention center because there was once a 75-year-old man from Sudan and we still had to put him in the detention center. It's ridiculous, I had to bring him in a wheelchair.”

A big part of the Dutch ‘we’ side of migration related detention is linked to the IND, whose “only” job, according to Peter, is related to the granting and revoking of residence permits. These residence permits, to name a few, include those needed by non-European Union international

students, migrant workers, refugees and asylum seekers in order to legally reside in the Netherlands. Sipping on his coffee, he proceeds to tell me that the IND has full control over the asylum procedure at Schiphol as well as in the country in general, which includes the time people spend in detention. In my conversation with him, there is a strong emphasis on the presence of documents to corroborate any “story” the asylum seeker presents. Time spent in Schiphol’s detention center is then a part of the verification and information assessment process, where the ‘validity’ of asylum claims are evaluated. The detention of asylum seekers during this process seems to be an obvious reality, almost “banal” (Peutz and De Genova 2010, p. 7) - but it is in this banality that migration scholars see the emergence of nation-state apparatuses and deportation regimes. Legality as a result of documentation and any delay in the procedure being a result of the migrants’ inability to produce these documents was mirrored in the DJI video as well, something that I discuss in Chapter 3 in the section *Merely Following Orders - Logic, Law and Documentation*, where an absence of documentation is portrayed as logical grounds for Dutch border enforcement to carry through with detention and deportation of illegalized migrants. This logic only adds to the innocent Dutch self-image as the centering of the law can provide a cover for national policies of exclusion. The adherence to the law becomes innocent, where any accusations of racist exclusion can be evaded, and responsibility avoided:

[Peter]: “[...] then it's documents: Do [asylum seekers] have any documents? That kind of thing, and in the meanwhile they will also see a lawyer. So every asylum seeker gets an attorney. They will help them prepare for their interview, which will be about reasons why they left their country, and people will be given a chance to, in their own words, tell us why they left and if they can support that with documents.”

Peter’s sketch of the IND’s involvement in the legality of detention is much more than what the DJI video suggested, especially when it is the IND who represents the Netherlands in court whenever an asylum case is taken before the judge. However, having asylum cases go in front of a judge are “rare”, in fact, judges at JCS do not even assess most of the asylum cases - they assess the IND to see if they’ve missed something during the procedure or if an asylum seeker contests the decision the IND has made about their case. The involvement of lawyers, judges, laws and documentation creates quite a strong vanguard of defense of the Netherlands’ border against individual asylum applicants who are already detained, but that does not seem to be anything out

of the ordinary for Peter. The goal, however, of detention is to enforce the “rule” that if the asylum seeker is not granted residence status, they will have to leave the Netherlands.

[Peter]: “If an asylum seeker is not granted residence status they can appeal their case. They can go to court [located inside Justice Complex Schiphol] and be in front of a judge. But the only thing the judge does basically is look at what we [asylum officer assigned the case] did. The judge doesn't look at the facts of the case or assess the case by itself but assesses if we [the IND asylum officers] have assessed the case according to rules/regulations/laws. Basically the judge sees if somebody [in the IND] fucked up. But if the asylum seeker loses their second appeal, the procedure is over and they [asylum seeker] should leave the country by themselves, or they will be forcibly removed. That's basically the rule.”

What I find interesting here is that despite the emphasis the DJI has about the legality of detention and their presentation of the Netherlands as enacting an ethically just and law-abiding stance, there is very little involvement of the courts themselves. So much of the decision making involved in asylum procedure and detention is dependent on decisions made by civil servants of the Netherlands, in particular the IND, which is largely unregulated externally:

[Peter]: “So the thing is basically that we as asylum officers have the *unique position to make a decision*. If the legal department says they don't want this person to be granted asylum, I [asylum officer] can say, “Fuck you. *I'm* going to grant this person asylum.” It's fine. *This is up to me* [asylum officer], *not up to them* [legal department]. They [legal department] have no authority over my [asylum officers'] decisions. I don't know how it is in other offices, they might do it a bit differently, but in our [Schiphol] office, there are *internal checks and balances*.” (emphasis added).

If asylum officers, like Peter, have *that* much say over asylum and detention procedures at Schiphol, to the point that they can overrule intervention from other departments, it means that workers' individual biases are the only thing that determines whether asylum status is granted, or the asylum applicant remains in detention. The discretionary nature of the asylum procedure, as explained by Peter, from someone from the state's perspective contradicts the legality discourse entirely.

Something that became increasingly clear in both the DJI's representation of immigration detention and IND's viewpoint regarding the asylum process at Schiphol was this implicit yet



collective stance of: as long as migrants follow 'the rules', they are treated not only kindly, but compassionately by migration officials. According to this representation, the Netherlands are willing to lend a listening ear and even more than the bare necessities during illegalized migrants' and asylum seekers' time in detention. However, this compassion does not mean the Dutch state will be granting residency status to all those asking for it. The idea that the Dutch state can simultaneously be compassionate yet objective and firm is something that both Kalir (2019) and Cleton and Chauvin (2020) have observed to be necessary beliefs held by those involved in migration management in order to continue carrying out detention and deportation procedures on illegalized migrants, especially when it is something that *can* and *is* so heavily influenced by individual workers. Peter said that the IND even has the power to expedite and speed up asylum procedures if the situation calls for it, for example when discussing a group of asylum seekers from Afghanistan who had fled to the Netherlands after the 2021 Taliban takeover of Kabul, Peter recalled that:

“[...]we [the IND] process them [Afghan asylum seekers] *pretty quick*, kind of the same procedure [as other asylum seekers] *but faster*. We [the IND] did lots of interviews a day and made many decisions [regarding residency status] simultaneously so they [Afghan asylum seekers] could get their lives started quickly.” (emphasis added).

As if the political implications of the IND's role in deciding which global conflicts require immediate or expedited attention were not enough, Peter takes on an air of benevolence, viewing the IND's employees involved in the asylum and detention process at Schiphol to be structured in favor of the detainees, and not the institutions they work for. Perhaps for Peter he could separate individual workers from the will of the state, but the repercussions of the IND's deep entanglement in global discourses of power seemed lost on him.

As much as its presence emerged in my conversation with Peter and in the DJI video, race was not explicitly something that was talked about despite it heavily underpinning the way asylum and deportation were talked about. Peter would often say “I can't really go into nationality.” when describing a particular case or day at work. However, despite his insistence that he would not talk about nationality, he ended up doing so anyway. He would mention case interviews he did with people ‘coming in’ from Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Syria and in the same stream of conversation

make a statement such as: “Ah yes, people from *that* part of the world can’t really handle their dairy well.” Again, it was clearly lost on that drawing conclusions about people based on their nationality or the particular geographical locations they came from, was in fact racist. I interpret this use of nationality as a way of making conclusions about race to echo Wekker’s (2016) observations about the way Dutch-ness uses ethnicity as a stand-in for race. Often during our interview he would use *my* nationality as a way of illustrating scenarios that would give me a better way of visualizing how the IND would interview migrants and asylum seekers in detention. For instance, he would often say: “So, if someone from *your* country would apply for asylum, the scenario probably would play out like...” and would proceed to describe a possible scenario. I wondered if he would have done the same regardless of who he was talking to, or if it was because I was not-white nor European.

When I asked him about the possibility of nationality or race determining the length of detention or the probability of being granted asylum status, Peter said that he did not see *any* relationship between race, ethnicity and nationality in the IND’s detention and asylum procedure at Schiphol.

[Peter]: “It’s not the [particular] country that makes an application [for asylum] favorable, but there has to be proof [of what the applicant says] or the applicant has to present something to us [the IND] that is easily provable. This can be by *visual markers* or by having *certain knowledge* you have to have if you’re from that area or *certain behaviors*; things that are *easily provable*. Being a conservative Republican, for example, is fine and should not affect your application. As long as there are no signs that the applicant was a part of the [country of origin’s] administration itself that did any form of war crimes or other kind of torture. But this is a separate department, of course, that looks into these kinds of things. So the only thing we [the IND] do is gather information about the applicant that is provable.”

Either Peter did not see the contradictions in what he was telling me, or the idea of racial partiality and discrimination is so divorced from his conception of the role the IND and the Netherlands has in categorizing and filtering racialized bodies from Dutch territory, that it exists in a state of willful ignorance - both of which echo a kind of white innocence (Wekker 2016). Peter, when talking about the way the IND operates at Schiphol, does not see any connection in the way the IND collects data, categorizes and makes conclusions about the nationalities of asylum seekers at the

border. His description of the process of asylum vehemently denies race as a determining factor in migration management by using nationality as a descriptive category instead.

In this section, through my conversation with Peter, I have tried to highlight a consistency in contradictions when comparing official discourse about legality, impartiality and objectivity, to what actually happens at Schiphol. Immigration detention at Schiphol detention center is a built-in part of the asylum-seeking process at Schiphol airport, something that is cloaked under layers of border justification: asylum seekers must be detained because they do not possess the necessary documentation to reside in Dutch territory and therefore as a means of preserving the integrity of the law, the Dutch state must detain these migrants. The actual involvement of the law in the asylum procedure itself, however, seems to be suspended and is determined by the asylum officer in charge of the case. So much so, that the asylum officer can even override a decision made by the legal department – all of which is not even regulated by an external third party. The supposed objectivity of this whole process is heavily questionable at best, but is not perceived or presented as such. In the hands of IND caseworkers at Schiphol, asylum seekers are compared against pre-conceived datasets and country profiles for “visual”, “knowledge-based” and “behavioral” in/consistencies to the regions these asylum seekers are from. This matching up of asylum seekers against information as one of the main determinants to receive asylum status is not seen to be related to race or nationality, despite the assessment process involving exactly that. This contradiction illustrates the ignorance of the Dutch asylum process at Schiphol with regards to race and its relationship to nationality. By being executed under the guise of objectivity and legality discourse, this ignorance simultaneously maintains itself as innocent, because according to this logic, one cannot take responsibility for what they do not know.

### **Schiphol as Border**

The arrest and detention of asylum seekers at Schiphol airport and the entrenchment of Schiphol's detention center in Dutch border management were made increasingly evident the more I talked with Peter. According to Peter, Schiphol airport is, in effect, the *only* regulateable border that the Netherlands has:

[Peter]: “Because of Schengen, we [the Netherlands] don't have a physical border with our neighboring countries, *except at the airport*. There's a physical border at the airport because you have to cross some form of border control before you can enter the Netherlands. *This is formally the only border we still have.*” (emphasis added)

Peter's declaration raised alarm in my head, as I knew for a fact that Eindhoven airport not only had a border control but flights departing from and arriving to the Netherlands from outside the European Union and Schengen zone. However, if Peter's statement is taken at face value, without going too much into Schengen and EU border terminology, since there is free movement of *EU* residents within the EU, cross-border movement across land or sea borders for residency documents is not as regulatable as air travel. In other words, because there is a designated border control system present at airports, they become one of the only places where residency status can be monitored. This means that, if someone were to cross into Dutch territory by car from a neighboring EU country for example, like Germany, the likelihood of being checked for immigration status and residency documents is far more irregular and sporadic.

At airports like Schiphol, border control is an in-built part of the way the space functions. This makes the location of Schiphol airport not only a border *site*, but also as a place that acts as *the* Dutch border. The implication of such means that Schiphol airport and its detention center hold far more significance in the Dutch national migration management apparatus than may be let on. The reliance on Schiphol to act as the migration regulation arm of the Dutch border is amplified because of the presence of its detention center, which acts as the holding site for those who violate its border rules. It is the presence of the asylum seeker that brings to the forefront the nature of this border for non-Dutch or non-EU permit holders. If an application for asylum in the Netherlands results in a rejection, this also means a “two-year travel ban to enter the European Union, Schengen and Switzerland”. This makes it so that although Dutch border policy may not be generalized into a broader EU one, they do still influence and are connected with each other. The status of asylum seekers before their cases are processed are that of individualized to the people themselves and not the physical sites of the border:

[Peter]: “[Asylum seekers at Schiphol] *physically* cross the border but *legally* they *do not cross the border*. We [the IND] put them [asylum seekers] in detention because otherwise they [asylum seekers] would run away. That's not usually what happens but *that's the idea*

*behind putting them [asylum seekers] in detention.* If they [asylum seekers] are denied asylum status, then because technically they've never crossed the border, we [the IND] can just send them [asylum seekers] back where they came from. This can be done really easily because we *don't have to comply with international laws* about returning refugees." (emphasis added)

Almost as if filling me in on the fine print of Dutch border policy, Peter states that because Schiphol airport in particular, acts as the Dutch border, asylum seekers who never leave the space of the airport or the detention center are not legally considered to have entered Dutch territory. The implication of this is that asylum seekers then do not classify as refugees, which have a different set of legal rules and protections that apply to them. Therefore, asylum seekers at Schiphol are not only treated like criminals who could potentially run away but are also actively denied being classified as a protected category of people, because the IND finds it bureaucratically easier to deport them. Asylum seekers at Schiphol occupy the *physical* position of being at the full force of EU and Dutch law, in the *physical* site of the detention center, without *legally* having ever crossed the Dutch or EU border. Therefore, the functioning of immigration detention at Schiphol is done so by close-reading the loopholes and technicalities of categorization in international humanitarian law. What makes the blatant side-stepping of the legality discourse in this interaction even more unsettling is that the liminal space of the airport is seen as advantageous for this kind of border treatment:

[Peter]: "So, it's quite simple. Asylum seekers (points to the napkin in front of him) are in detention. There's the plane (points to the spoon on top of the napkin). It's always easier to deport someone that's *in* detention than someone who is *not* in detention. This is because the person being deported needs to willingly agree to leave.[...] We [the IND] are not like ICE [United States Immigration and Customs Enforcement]. I mean, I'm *not* fucking immigration police." (emphasis in original)

At Schiphol, there is no process of asylum without detention because it is convenient. Peter insists that he, and the institutions he works for are distinct from those of the United States. Stanley, Spade and Queer (In)Justice's remind us that the exclusion of the undesired at borders in the United States of America through incarceration has "deep roots in colonialism and chattel slavery right through the present" (Stanley, Spade, and Queer (In)Justice 2012, p.118). Gloria Wekker's (2016, p. 2) assertion that the Dutch cultural archive refuses to acknowledge its logic and morals to be embedded in its colonial and imperial histories, aligns more with theirs than Peter's.

Deportation regimes in the Netherlands, or in particular at Schiphol involve the segregation of asylum seekers into the detention center, turning them into detainees who have never entered the territory of where they are being held in the first place. Schiphol airport and its detention center are “space[s] par excellence” (Cresswell 2006, p. 220) and reveal “the techniques and rationalities involved in both governing the self and governing others” (Cupers 2008, p.178 cited in Martin and Mitchelson 2009, p. 455). When practices of incarceration, especially in the context of migration, are directed at the detention of non-criminals like asylum seekers it is dangerous to overlook the role of imperial and colonial histories in the maintenance of Dutch and EU/Schengen border(s). The detention of asylum seekers and their forceful placement into the deportation regime, amplifies their deportability and thus marks the space of the detention center as necropolitical, reiterating Wekker’s argument that popular and organizational phenomena - like Schiphol - in the Dutch context echo imperial continuities (2016, p. 20). Asylum seekers being placed into the deportation regime reifies what Peutz and De Genova argue to be the “production and reconfiguration of political subjectivities” where the categories of ““natural” and “naturalized” citizens, all manner of “immigrant” and “foreign” denizens, and, of course, the deportees themselves.” (2010, p.2) emerge and are negotiated. Here, deportation and detention of asylum seekers cuts through the idea of the Netherlands being “ethically just” (Wekker 2016) and instead “manifests and engenders dominant notions of sovereignty, citizenship, public health, national identity, cultural homogeneity, racial purity, and class privilege.” (Peutz and de Genova 2010 p. 2), the persistence of which are present in contemporary articulations of national and transnational structures of power. What we see at Schiphol is when a border becomes the detention center and the detention center acts as the border.

The relationship between deportation, migration and national sovereignty has been something that I have brought into focus, especially as they emerge through the asylum process at Schiphol airport because it seems to exist as a state of exception. In our interview, Peter said that the detaining and processing time of asylum seekers at Schiphol was different than that of “other places” in the Netherlands, that the IND was always trying to gather data and figure out how to deal with the influx of migrants and asylum seekers during, what he calls, the ‘border procedure’. The procedure at Schiphol is shorter, just as I was informed in my personal communication with the coordinator

of the *Refugee Hotline*. I found it pertinent to include asylum of great importance when analyzing Schiphol detention center as it appears to be an inextricable part of the site itself. Despite the clear attempts to do so, migrant populations that are in detention are difficult to categorize (Sampson and Mitchell 2013, p. 99), but at Schiphol the *one* categorization of people to be consistently detained there are in fact asylum seekers. According to Peter, the way the IND revises or even reflects on its modes of operation is usually when something goes wrong. The site of the current JCS for example, is a result of the 2005 Schipholbrand fire, which I discuss in Chapter 1:

[Peter]: “So, the history of the current detention center goes way back. You [me, the researcher] should look it up online. I don't know the exact date but I think in 2007 there was a fire in the detention center for asylum seekers because the building wasn't proper for emergencies. And I think, like a lot of people died. So we [the IND] were like, oh, fuck maybe we should provide some serious accommodation and thought to this thing. As is usual, the reaction happens only afterwards of the event.” (error of date in original)

The casual referencing of this fire and the offhand treatment of the detainees that died in it left me feeling uneasy. The person sitting in front of me was fully aware of the power he, as an individual, held over the lives of so many, but because of what he saw as ‘right’ or ‘fair’ or what ‘made sense’, he seemed to be able to separate himself from the institution he worked for. I thought of how difficult it was to get any information as a researcher about the site of Schiphol’s detention center and what discourses informed and encouraged its existence. I wondered if the weight of this site and the importance it has to the asylum, detention and deportation regimes in the Netherlands was something that Dutch citizens were concerned or even aware of. It also reminded me of the way asylum seekers and detainees haunt all aspects of Schiphol airport and its detention center. The offhanded-ness of the manner the fire was discussed added to the diminished position the event had in Peter’s mind. The fire’s emergence in our conversation reiterated the missing-ness of Schiphol’s violences that deeply entrench it in the deportation regime. Subjugated and marginal knowledges (Smith and Gordon 1999, p. xviii) remind us what official and dominant forms of knowledge tends to diminish or forget. According to Peter, the Dutch public is mostly in the dark about what exactly happens during the asylum procedure at Schiphol, let alone the existence of the detention center and he preferred it that way:

[Peter]: “They [the Dutch publics] don’t think about it [detention centers]. They have no fucking clue what we’re [the IND] doing as well. Which I think is for the best because I think if it’s the other way because then there’s the political pressure. Especially because the work we [the IND] do is about foreigners.”

Current border procedure depends on not only a lack of clarity and access to information, but also the willingness to continue doing “the job” (Kalir 2019) without internalizing the implications the job entails. Throughout my interview with Peter, he seemed critical of certain aspects of the asylum procedure, but still saw that it made sense in the end and felt he did his job well. He thought that making a career out of working in asylum and deportation was out of the question - he didn’t want to become “bitter” like some of his colleagues. The bitterness he saw as a personal consequence of working in the system of asylum and deportation did not extend to the people on the receiving end, however.

[Peter]: “Working for the government in the Netherlands lets you work somewhere else. As long as you do your job well you have the space to do what you like. I think I’m gonna stay in asylum and refugee fields.”

Through Peter I was able to engage with the workings of Schiphol detention center from the perspective of someone who enforced Dutch immigration policy and had the power to radically alter the lives of people he came into contact with. The things he told me, the contradictions and paradoxes that came up in our conversations seemed too unbelievable to be true, at some moments even absurd. Despite my initial hesitance about conducting interviews with former detainees, I knew I had no other choice than to try and find some people who would talk to me about their experience being detained at Schiphol. I was afraid of any negative impact I might have on former detainees by asking them to recount their experiences in detention, but my interaction with Peter left me with many inconsistencies, some even factual, made it difficult to halt my inquiry where it was. It would have been an affront to my politics and beliefs to not try my hardest to include the voices of people who had been subjected to the Dutch deportation regime and how they felt about being there.

### **Navigating Schiphol Detention Center in the Context of Asylum**



Feminist sociologist and activist Francesca Esposito recounted her experience of conducting ethnographic research in migration-related detention centers in Italy and stresses the urgent need to carry out research on these sites (2017, p. 58). The “dysfunctional and noxious nature” (Esposito 2017, p. 60) of detention centers brings to attention just how convoluted the tensions of power and privilege in the interaction of national sovereignty and migration can be. Esposito stresses the importance of conducting ethnography in sites of detention to move away from the reliance of post-detention interviews, however my attempts to gain access to the site itself failed. After many weeks of emails, calls and reaching out to feminist networks for help, I was able to interview a three women who were detained at Schiphol in 2018. All three of them were, at the time, in their mid-thirties traveling with their children, who were arrested at Schiphol airport shortly after landing. Each one detailed their experience as asylum seekers with Dutch border patrol and talked about their varying relationships to the site itself and the IND workers.

Maya, Aliya and Ruby (names anonymized and chosen by interviewees) are three acquaintances-turned-friends who came into contact with each other after being placed in the same Center for Asylum Seekers (Asielzoekerscentrum or AZC)<sup>19</sup> (Asylum Information Database, 2022) while they were waiting to be assigned housing by the Dutch government. Since they were all from the same country of origin and spoke the same language during a time of much unfamiliarity and uncertainty as not all of them were knowledgeable of the asylum process nor spoke English or Dutch at the time, they leaned on each other for support. Just like many other instances in this research process, I was unable to get into contact with many interview participants because of my unfamiliarity with Dutch as a language but also because the organizations I reached out to over email or social media message never got back to me. It wasn’t until I reached out to my peers and colleagues in the graduate Gender Studies program that I was given Maya’s contact information. Without much hope, I reached out to Maya who then put me in contact with Aliya and Ruby. All three of them had been granted asylum status to stay in the Netherlands at the time of interviewing.

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<sup>19</sup> An asielzoekerscentrum (azc) is either for refugee's whose asylum is already in procedure or refugee's who are having an extended procedure. In an azc the refugees cook their own food and they share their kitchen with 5-8 other people. “Refugee Camps.” n.d. Refugees in the Netherlands. <https://refugeesnetherlands.weebly.com/refugee-camps.html>. For more information about AZC see: Asylum Information Database. n.d. “Short Overview of the Reception System.” Asylum Information Database | European Council on Refugees and Exiles (blog). Accessed August 1, 2022. <https://asylumineurope.org/reports/country/netherlands/reception-conditions/short-overview-of-the-reception-system/>.

Maya and I spoke briefly on the phone for a few minutes where I explained my project, the difficulties I was having, how my research had changed and my interest in hearing about her experience at Schiphol's detention center. She told me about herself, how she had arrived to the Netherlands from Iran around 8 years ago. Because she had a visa, her experience at Schiphol bypassed the detention center entirely. We talked a little bit more about the asylum process at Schiphol in general, how difficult it was for me to find data around it and the lackluster response my attempts to inquire about it were getting. She was quick to urge me to continue, citing so many of her friends and acquaintances who have gone through the border procedure at Schiphol and how their stories were ignored. She offered to ask around in her networks for people who would want to talk to me and to act as translator if needed. In less than a week Maya reached out to me again, stating she had found two friends who were more than willing to talk to me, provided that they remained anonymous. A group call was set up the next day which lasted about 45 minutes, with all three of them talking to me together. They stated that they would prefer to talk to me in the company of their acquaintances, as they would feel more at ease that way and I was more than happy to facilitate that. Maya also acted as a live translator for Ruby who only spoke Farsi and Dutch.

Aliya traveled to the Netherlands by air from a refugee camp in Greece through a smuggler, intending to go to Germany but was arrested along with her 18-year-old son at Schiphol on the grounds of traveling with fake documents. She and her son had left Iran and had since traveled through Turkey, Macedonia, Croatia and Greece. She and her son stayed in refugee camps and shelters provided by the smugglers her husband in Iran had paid to get them to Europe. Fearing for her family's safety, she did not want to disclose to me on record why her family was compelled to do so, and to respect her wishes I chose to not probe her further. Throughout this journey, the Netherlands was the first instance where she and her son were arrested and detained in a detention center. To her, being arrested in the Netherlands was "a good experience, especially when it happened by chance". Familiar with being interrogated at borders, Aliya was prepared for the line of questioning she received at Dutch border patrol, which involved justifying the reason for entering the territory of the Netherlands and if she was willing to explain why she traveled using false documents.

[Aliya]: “The whole time I was just crying. But the officers there told me to relax and that I was safe because the Netherlands is a good country. I was given food and water and even in the detention center it was really nice. We had a mirror and a TV - all my son did was watch movies!”

Aliya was not separated from her son, something that she said made her feel a lot calmer, and they stayed in Schiphol’s detention center for one night before being transferred to another facility. She said that the IND interview process was difficult, but she was satisfied with the officers doing what they thought was fair in their job.

[Aliya]: “The officer who took my interview was nice. Good clothing. And very good smell. Very polite. All the people there were. But they wanted to be sure about my reasoning for being here. And they said “Do you accept that you are illegal here with fake documents?” They wanted to know if maybe this woman is crazy or not, so I said: “Yes I know!”. They [the asylum officers] know that their job is scary. They [the asylum officers] can scare people but they’re also trying to understand that there are things about a person that makes them do things.”

She added that she knows she is one of the rare ones. There are so many other people she knows that have a difficult time with the asylum procedure, but after having gone through police and border procedures in multiple countries, Schiphol airport’s was the most efficient one she had gone through. For her, the reassurances offered by the detention and border officers was enough to diminish her own experience of being scared and while in detention. Aliya’s narration of her experience with Schiphol detention center echoed many of the self-representative themes in the DJI video: the inevitability of arrest due to documentation, the strict benevolence of detention officers, the centering of her child’s recreational activities. Detention on the basis of immigration status made sense to her, it was expected. Her familiarity with the border process also gave her a frame of reference to compare her experience, Schiphol and the Netherlands was the best by comparison. Immigration detention was assumed to be a “necessity of a set of practices that have always been and will always be” (Stanley, Spade, and Queer (In)Justice 2012, p. 122). Aliya and her son were detained at Schiphol detention center for one night before they were transferred to an AZC facility where they awaited their documentation and accommodation assignment.

Ruby, my last interviewee, was a first-time asylum seeker and her experience could not be more different from Aliya’s.

Ruby, her son (18) and daughter (20) arrived at Schiphol airport but were immediately arrested before they even reached border control. They were approached by a security guard who asked if he could assist them, Ruby's son declined but the guard insisted that it was "better" if they came with him. The interaction with the guard went as follows:

[Ruby, translated by Maya]: "The guard said "I'm just here to help but it's better to come with me because we have suspicions about your documents." And when we gave them our documents they said they were fake. And then they said to us that we have two options: either we will arrest you or you can ask us for asylum. I was so afraid because I didn't know anything about asylum seeker procedures. The police told me "Your passport is fake. So do you know that the punishment for a fake passport is being jailed for six months?" "

For fear of being arrested and further interrogated, Ruby said she would like to apply for asylum. The tension of the situation and her fear caused her to cry, something that the officers ignored. No comfort was offered to her or her children. They moved her and her children to the detention center, in the same transport car as an incarcerated prisoner who was also being detained at Schiphol detention center. She was then put into a room to get her fingerprints taken and have a full body examination.

[Ruby]: The police officer that was a man told me to take off all my clothes. I didn't know if I should do it in front of him. I didn't want to do it in front of him so I waited for a female officer to come. The male officer did not like this and I got more scared. I did what I was told when the female officer finally came. The female officer checked all of my body, even between my legs. I had my period at the time and she also checked my bloody pad. Yeah, even my bloody pad. I started crying more because that made me feel...very bad actually. I felt like they were degrading me. And I thought at that time that "I was trying for an asylum procedure, so why are they behaving like I'm a criminal person?"

Emphasizing the treatment of detainees in immigration detention as that which is different from criminals was one of the main aspects presented by the DJI when representing themselves in the video. it is also what distinguishes the definition of detention centers from prisons. Ruby's testimony not only contradicts that belief but shatters the idea that people can be incarcerated without feeling criminalized by not formally charging them before being detained.

[Ruby]: "When we reached the prison they [detention officers] said that we will be here for one day and to only take clothes from one day from our suitcases. I took clothes and a pad because I was on my period. The officer took the pad and put it back in the suitcase. I was confused so I tried to reach for it again but the officer became angry and took it from

my hand and again threw it in my suitcase. All of these moments, in every second of this experience, even though it's almost five years now since it happened, remembering it is so frustrating.”

There is a prevalent theme of gender in Ruby’s account, where her menstruating self seemed to disrupt the procedural norms in the detention center. She and her daughter were detained together but were separated from her son. The feeling she had when the officers told her made her feel physically ill, but there was nothing she could do. This was different from Aliya who got to stay with her son. Her and her daughter’s segregation from her son demonstrates procedural inconsistency and a “failure to address the violent imposition of racialized gender norms that structure all the forms of confinement.” (Stanley, Spade, and Queer (In)Justice 2012, p.120) Ruby’s account of gender segregation reiterates queer abolitionists’ that spaces of incarceration are organized by hierarchical systems of violence that are enabled by enforcers of those spaces. Ruby and her family were detained at Schiphol detention center for 16 days, where the only people they could talk to were the translators the IND would bring in during their procedural interviews. Ruby said she didn’t like the translators they had, that the translators would sometimes respond on her behalf to the lawyers or IND personnel even when she said she didn’t want to answer. The picture of detainee camaraderie that the DJI video portrayed did not align with her lived experience at all. Ruby’s family’s procedure at Schiphol ended after 16 days and she was transferred to an AZC where her case was reassessed in a few months and they were granted asylum status.

[Ruby]: “Being at Schiphol prison was the worst feeling of my whole life.”

Being at Schiphol’s detention center marked the beginning of the lives of these asylum seekers in the Netherlands. The only people I could talk to were people who had their cases approved and were thus residing in the country and not those who had been rejected and deported. However, their deportability (the susceptibility of these asylum seekers to be deported) during their time at Schiphol airport and its detention center still places them in the deportation regime. Schiphol acts as not just a site of deportation, but through the detention center we can see that it in turn becomes *the* Dutch border. This subjects those in detention to be inhabitants of an unclear, opaque space, one where they are experimental guinea pigs to the ever-changing and unclear policy the Netherlands has on the treatment of asylum seekers. The treatment and processing of asylum

seekers at Schiphol makes it a border site, where there is constant drawing and re-drawing of boundaries between a Dutch “us” and a foreign “them”, a European “us” and a non-European “them”. The variation in treatment of the ex-detainees I interviewed gives enough indication to make the argument that there is a severe lack of inquiry into this site and the various discourses of power at play there.

In this chapter I have delineated the connection between asylum, deportation and detention regimes. Using critical border studies and migration scholarship I have tried to locate Schiphol’s detention center as part of deportability, which then in turn is a part of a global deportation regime. Detention and the threat of deportation emerges as an in-built part of migration management infrastructure that is enforced by the Dutch state at Schiphol airport. I locate the process of asylum at Schiphol using my interview with an IND asylum officer through the work of Kalir, Pugliese and Cleton and Chauvin, all of whom have studied European and Dutch border practices through deportation case workers. Through this communication, when compared to the DJI video about immigration detention in the Netherlands, I see a contradiction in the way the discourses of upholding legality, compassion and logic are presented versus the ground reality of the practices at Schiphol itself that can be seen in the asylum procedure. The obscurity of Schiphol’s role in the DJI video contradicts the centrality of the site in the asylum process, especially when *all* asylum seekers at Schiphol are detainees at the detention center. I discuss Wekker’s argument on white innocence to see how this transparency/opacity in communication moves into the territory of white ignorance, where the Dutch self-representation of moral and cultural superiority reinforces discriminatory treatment of migrants on the basis of racial or ethnic difference, despite its disavowal of doing so. By maintaining this contradiction in what information about the immigration detention process and Schiphol’s involvement in it, the Dutch get to maintain their self-image and representation of innocence despite being ignorant about the centrality of race in migration-related border procedures. The borders of the Netherlands, due to its position in the European Union and Schengen zone, although arbitrary and shifting, are still violent. This conundrum of opacity and transparency raises the question of who exactly then is the information regarding immigration detention for, and what does it mean to cater transparency in content, like the DJI video, to center the Dutch public while remaining opaque and elusive to the deportable migrants themselves? I analyze interviews conducted with former detainees at Schiphol to

illustrate the ambiguity and inconsistency in experiences with the site as a way to suggest that the nature of immigration detention practices relies on opacity. I discuss the parallels and discrepancies in their accounts of incarceration, highlighting the way silences, omissions and hauntings of the detention center emerge. Practices and processes of border enforcement are rooted in self-portrayal and self-representative discourses, and when confronted with illegalized migrants their colonial and exclusionary logics still show up as 'haunted presences' within discourses of immigration detention.

## Conclusion

**“What is a country but a life sentence?”**

**— Ocean Vuong, *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous***

Studying contemporary institutions of migration, border enforcement and power that so many people are deeply affected by (including myself) has proven to be one of the most difficult tasks of my -albeit short- academic journey. I have been traveling in and out of airports since having a viable heartbeat in the womb and will probably have the fear of them for many years to come. The constant threat of deportability and the methods employed by nation-states to protect their borders from the influx of the ‘wrong’ kind of migrants is long lasting. This project started off as an inquiry into immigration detention and its connection to migrant desirability, taking inspiration from the extensive work of queer, feminist, critical race and abolitionist scholars about the role of incarceration in social exclusion especially for people of color. It has changed immensely into the form it is now, mediated by the constraints of language, location but most significantly due to the nature of the site of study.

The summer that I write this dissertation has already been marked by the response of Europe to the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the opening of European borders, homes and hearts to light skinned, blue eyed refugees where Brown and Black migrants are denied movement, refuge and the same level of empathy by White European populations. It is the same summer that Schiphol airport cancels hundreds of flights a day as a result of staff terminations during the COVID-19 pandemic that were never replaced after the reinstatement of international air travel. The ramifications this has had on travelers and the airport itself has been widely reported on various news outlets, but the implications this has had on the process of asylum and deportation remains noticeably beyond the scope of interest. Public and media perceptions of Schiphol as one of the most disorganized and disorderly airports in Europe starkly contrasts Dutch self-representations of efficiency, a renewed interest in the airport an opportune moment to talk about its immigration detention practices. Migration and deportation scholarship in Europe can benefit greatly from looking at deportation centers where histories and current realities of coloniality, racialization,



othering and nationalism emerge and are entangled within the protection and enforcement of border practices.

Studying Schiphol airport's detention center through narratives of Dutch self-representation has involved constant reiteration of reflexivity, one where I needed to make visible the ways I situate myself as a researcher, the process of research itself as well as that which is being researched. The methods of this research are a part of its findings. Trying to make clear the position of Schiphol airport's detention center has meant periodically jumping between "material place and virtual space" (Morrow, Hawkins and Kern 2015, p. 532) i.e. an inaccessible physical site that I try to make sense of through visual sources and discourse. The inconsistencies I have found in the content surrounding the detention center became more apparent - almost heightened - the more I approached the site as a positioned (Harding 1986 and Haraway 1988 in Morrow, Hawkins and Kern p. 533) researcher. At the intersection of postcolonial and techno-feminist theory, Raili Marling calls the disjuncture between visibility and that which is not a conundrum (2021, p. 95), which I see emerge in this project as a transparency/opacity conundrum. In this conundrum, certain visibilities tend to delocalize and shift focus from structures of power whereas certain opacities become sites of information and meaning. The transparencies/opacities in Dutch self-representation in the DJI video and at Schiphol airport displays selectivity, something that Marling sees to have the potential to further understand and decode contemporary expressions of nationalism (2021, p. 95). This thesis explores what it meant to work with the failures and constraints of communication. It raises questions of the very nature of Dutch communication about migration: transparent to whom and opaque to whom? What are the implications of communication to a seemingly uninterested national public? I demonstrate how my use of particular and contextually situated online sources give an insight on the themes that emerge, or are omitted, in these visual self-representations and what can they tell us about the role of self-representation in broader conversations of migration management and deportation.

Performances, or in this case representations, of freedom and neoliberalism still operate under the regimes of surveillance which is often racially detheorised (Browne 2015, p. 8), something that we can see by the hypervisibility of racialized bodies in the DJI video but is absent in language. Browne sees opacity to be dark matter, that which is not optically available, cannot be observed and cannot be recreated under laboratory conditions (2015, p. 9) and is thus effectively invisible.

But invisible to whom? Browne asks if opacity is invisible, “how is it sensed, experienced and lived? Is it really invisible or is it rather unseen and unperceived by many?” (2015, p. 9). By centering the absence of race and Blackness in surveillance studies, Browne highlights the very condition of racialized being within disciplinary systems, or “the nonnameable matter that matters” (2015, p. 9). I think along similar lines when looking at the narratives of migrant others that are hidden under the narrativization of Dutch self-representation.

How do practices and processes of detention and incarceration benefit from this transparency/opacity conundrum? I discuss the realm of contradiction in which immigration detention procedures exist, which are further demonstrated by the very different experiences by former detainees about the very same site of detention, around the same time. If what Martin and Mitchelson argue to be true, that “there is no single geography of detention, but an emerging and continually changing assemblage of spatial tactics.” (2009, p. 467), then there is a deliberate gap in information – the brunt of which is borne by deportable migrants. The spectacle of an adherence to legality via politically correct discourse fails to take into account that immigrant detention is rooted in racialized violence of othering. How legal is it to have a migratory process such as asylum be inextricable from detention, practices of which are defined by their legal ambiguity (Martin and Mitchelson 2009, p.467), obscurity and opacity?

The asylum process, and thus the asylum seeker is absented from Dutch communication about immigration detention despite being the primary detainee at Schiphol detention center. Looking at airports as more than places of movement but also as border sites will change them from being sites of neutrality but as a tool of the state and borders to filter, categorize and restrict bodies. Airports are just as much sites of restriction as they are movement, and even more so, carry within them more ghosts than they would care to let on, and Schiphol detention center demonstrates the depth of what haunts just beyond the horizon.

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