

The U.K. and ‘Razor-Wire Humanitarianism’: The Refugee Crisis and the Aesthetic of Violence

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Introduction

When the ‘refugee crisis’ in Calais became an issue of renewed concern in the summer of discontent in 2015, the United Kingdom’s reticent stance towards the crisis was captured through its measured approach. A notable riposte from the then Home Secretary, Theresa May,¹ was to send in yet more ‘security fencing’ to fortify the borders in Calais to assuage the disaffection from both truckers and the public. Dubbing this the U.K.’s ‘razor wire humanitarianism,’ this article examines how the material artifact of the razor wire is implicated in the aesthetic of violence towards the refugee and migrant bodies. Designed as a biotechnology to cause injury and trauma (or ignite the pain of recall as a deterrent) and to equally enact a material boundary against bare life (collapsing distinctions between animal and human), this article utilizes razor wire as a lens to document the United Kingdom’s treatment of the ‘precarious refugee body.’ Its sustained consignment to death and accidents invokes the border as a spectacular of necropolitics of the ‘living dead.’ The argument follows that these incursions with razor wire become performative sites for dehumanizing the ‘migrant’ body. However, in the process, it equally recasts this precarious body as a ‘fleshed body,’ imbued through its corporeality and resistance against the nexus of neoliberal politics of the razor wire designed for securitization and commercial flows of ‘legitimate’ bodies and goods. In the process, the razor wire becomes an active theatre for the spectacularization of pain, wounding, and human struggles in the border politics of exclusion in Fortress Europe.

Europe’s ‘refugee crisis,’ envisioned through the sprouting ‘jungles’ in Calais to the bodies and corpses shipwrecked on the Mediterranean islands, produced the refugee as a tragic and contentious figure in our contemporary moral consciousness. Fleeing from civil wars and persecution, leaving behind homelands and sacrificing their most precious possessions (i.e., their progeny) in their passage to seek more secure geographical terrains, the refugee is an inconvenient moral figure projecting a mirror onto the conscience of a beleaguered West. The West is pushed into global scrutiny through this ‘refugee crisis,’ enacting it as a battleground between morality and the neoliberal ideology of outsourcing solutions to this humanitarian crisis to other states.

The ‘refugee crisis’ in Europe as an ideological encounter between humanitarianism and the visceral politics of economic depletion is constantly played out through the rhetoric of morality and equally through a disavowal of responsibility towards these precarious bodies, while seemingly humanitarian in its token stances. The terms ‘refugee’ and ‘migrant’ became conflated in these discourses, casting a degree of suspicion on who is the ‘real’ refugee on the

one hand, while installing migration within an ambit of deviance and criminality on the other. The ‘unruly’ movement of migrants and asylum seekers have become a key source of anxiety as governments attempt to manage population movements in the circulatory and unpredictable context of globalization (Hodge 2015: 124). As such, the refugee and the immoral economic counterpart, the migrant, have become inconvenient entities in the politics of the nation-state, relentlessly testing the limits of morality and hospitality of the Enlightened West and unsettling it by shining a light onto the project of Western civilization.

There have been a plethora of studies on the refugee crisis in Europe, and this paper sustains these imperatives by appropriating a different lens of focusing on a material boundary (i.e. the border space) and its aesthetic in showcasing the sovereign power of the state and the (il)logical production of neo-liberal subjectivities and identities through its border control. As such, the material architectures which incarcerate the body or hold it captive or restrain it outside of a physical boundary are important, for they have an interface with the corporeal body which reveals its assumptions about the vulnerabilities of the human in conditions of precarity, whereby some lives are rendered more insecure, unequal, or destitute than others (Butler 2004).

Hence the material architecture which incarcerates or alienates a deviant body, whether this is the camp, the watching tower, the gas chamber, the wall, the quarantine island or zones of juridical indeterminacy, govern and discipline the body through an aesthetic of violence which can be performative and visual, imposing the cartography of power relations in these enactments. In imbricating the razor wire and the corporeal body into an aesthetic, the paper draws on Rancière’s notion of “primal aesthetics” to draft maps of the trajectories between the visible and the sayable, relationships between modes of being, modes of saying, and modes of making and doing; where these draft maps illuminate how unspecified groups of people “adhere to a condition, react to situations, recognize their images” (Rancière 2006: 39). For Rancière, the space of the border as a social imaginary is to conceive space politically where it is a locus for identity and the examination of practices.

The discursive formations about refugees and the material practices of dealing with them in today’s highly unstable global political environment (i.e., post-Brexit and in the Trump era) show that our mechanisms to control and dispel the Other have become cruder and blunter. The ‘border wall’ - the taller and more imposing boundary that will separate Mexico and the U.S. (the one which will be supposedly financed and built by the Global South or the lesser Other in the geopolitics of power to dispel its very own) reveal that the material architectures perform as symbolic, rhetorical and agentive devices while reconfiguring space through the disruptions in its interface with the migrant/refugee body.

Porous borders and fluid terrains representing economic and social solidarity amongst European nations (prior to Brexit) was presented as an ideal. Nevertheless, in reality, waves of expansion of the E.U. always produced anxious tremors within its body politic. The E.U. as part of the European imagination catered to a European sensibility of being mature enough to accommodate a diverse, cosmopolitan community. This ideal was naturally tested at different points in time. In the U.K., the opening up of the borders to Poland and Romania, for example, produced renewed internal anxieties of the country being invaded by Eastern Europeans who were going to take advantage of their welfare system and deplete the local populations morally and culturally (Light & Young 2009; Ibrahim & Howarth 2016). With a refugee crisis emerging in Europe and the sprouting of refugee camps or ‘jungles’ in Calais, one of the mechanisms to stop the influx of refugees to the country was enacted symbolically and materially through the fortification of the borders with razor wire. The continued fortification of the border and its sustained incursions produces a long-running relationship with the biotechnology of the razor wire and the vulnerable corporeal body. This material fortification conjoined with a reticent and half-hearted ‘humanitarian’ discourse of seeming to act in the best interest of the displaced further adds to the complex social imaginary of the razor wire as dispelling the unwanted.

This paper firstly examines the notion of ‘razor wire humanitarianism’ in the context of the biggest refugee crisis in the world. The history of barbed wire and razor wire is then explored

through a genealogy of its existence and its co-location with the flesh. The border is discussed as a space of 'the spectacular' in producing the theatre of bare life. The paper then goes on to consider the relationship between razor wire and the migrant/refugee body in the border spaces of Europe both in the co-production of corporeal vulnerabilities, formation of identities and subjectivities, and equally the resistance to this subjugation mooted through the body and flesh of the alien body.

The Humanitarian Crisis and 'Razor-Wire' Diplomacy

The developments in Calais need to be located within a wider context in which in 2014 the world was positioned as facing its biggest refugee and migration crisis since World War II (UNHCR 2015). This was due to the movement of millions of people (with children constituting almost half of this population) as a result of conflict or persecution and being stranded for years on the edge of society as the long-term internally displaced or refugees. Forced migration reached 65.3 million people worldwide in 2015, representing an increase of 10 percent from the previous year, with the United Nations predicting an upward trend in the coming years (UNHCR 2016). In 2015, an escalation in political conflict and religious persecution from Syria, Eritrea, and Somalia to Iraq and Afghanistan had led to over a million people (a four-fold increase from the previous year) crossing into Europe in search of sanctuary (UNHCR 2016). With the demise of the empire, decolonization and the formation of the European Union (E.U.) and the referendum to leave this union, migration and the provision of the political sanctuary remain an area of intense scrutiny in the U.K. and E.U. issues of immigration remain tightly welded to the politics of welfare, employment, British identity and sovereignty, and often these anxieties are framed as a means to regain control over its border space (Bosworth & Guild 2008; Darian-Smith 1999).

The provision of asylum, while a historical and romantic ideal, has been contracting over time with new policy enactments to curtail migration and asylum seekers since the Aliens Act in 1905 (Ibrahim & Howarth 2018; Bashford & McAdam 2014). In spite of Britain signing the 1951 Geneva Convention relating to the Status of Refugees in 1954, almost four decades would pass before the bill was brought to parliament in 2000 (Schuster & Solomos 2001). This reveals the malleability with which the U.K. approaches migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers and the raft of stringent legislations since the 1990s to tightly regulate the borders. While development aid has enjoyed a more progressive reputation than emergency relief, the different waves of refugees entering Europe have been a testing ground for the British historical ideal of providing sanctuary. This so-called 'refugee crisis' in Calais and the Mediterranean became a theatre for this contracted humanitarianism.

Both Labour and Conservative governments have, over the years, equally engaged in appeasing a public highly critical of liberal immigration schemes. As such, restrictive immigration policy enactments, along with increased securitization of borders, biometric checks, and stringent visa rules have become tools to restrict the migrant and the refugee. These enactments over time also reflect a racialization of immigration policies, particularly who is admitted and who is not. 'Humanitarianism' has been viewed as a sort of moral theatre, and the state's ability to play a leading role has become tested and contested over the years while retaining the romantic ideal of the U.K. as a sanctuary for the persecuted. The demise of the empire, the ensuing events since World War II in absorbing the displaced, phases of immigration from the commonwealth and its colonies to fill Britain's industrial heartlands and government services, has meant that the internal political context has intimately shaped policy enactments in terms of immigration, particularly in the management and governance of labour. In view of this, the management of refugee populations at Calais and the Mediterranean is a delicate balancing act of retaining public support while assuaging the global stage of its moral obligations.

In September 2009, the demolition of refugee camps or the 'jungle' in Calais became a major news event for the British media as French authorities sought to regain spatial control over Calais

(see Sparks 2010). Despite the first demolition, new camps sprung up overnight to replace those destroyed. In 2015 the Calais crisis came back into media scrutiny due to bigger events in the Mediterranean, where unprecedented numbers of refugees were risking their lives in overcrowded and rickety boats to enter the E.U. Death tolls from shipwrecks in the Mediterranean began to rise as refugees fled conflict and persecution in North Africa. During the summer of discontent in 2015, French ferry workers went on strike and blocked freight access to the port between June and September, causing major disruptions to truckers and holidaymakers. The tragic image of the Syrian child Alan Kurdi on September 2, 2015, dead on the beach, ignited further interest in the Calais crisis. The E.U. had become a key destination for many from North Africa and the Middle East; however, the increased militarization of the Mediterranean and the Calais borders had also made it the 'most dangerous destination' for irregular migration in the world due to high mortality rates (IOM 2014). According to the estimates of the International Organization for Migration (IOM), more than 1 million migrants had reached Europe in 2015, many of whom did so by crossing the Mediterranean, and some 3,692 migrants died in their attempts to reach Europe, outstripping the number of deaths in 2014 by more than 400 (IOM 2014). Those that successfully negotiated the treacherous crossing made their way across Europe. By early 2016 an estimated 4000 were living in the squalid Jungle in Calais, and in February the southern part of the camp was demolished. By August, there were an estimated 9000 inhabitants. By late October the French authorities demolished the rest of the camp, having first evacuated thousands to detention centers or to heated container shelters on the edge of the camp (Allen 2016). However, within weeks newspapers were reporting that at least six 'secret camps' had sprouted up as hundreds of evicted refugees, including lone children with family in Britain absconded from reception centers scattered across France and returned to Calais in the hope of crossing the Channel (Bulman 2016).

As the E.U. faced one of its biggest humanitarian challenges, its response was fragmented and ad hoc, with some governments welcoming Syrian refugees but not those from Eritrea, Somalia, and Afghanistan. Others, for instance, the British and Hungarian governments, had prioritized the securing of their borders over the protection of the rights of migrants and refugees. The privileging of security in policy responses is a retreat from discourses of according protection and rights to refugees which emerged after World War II in international agreements on how civilians should be treated in war, particularly their right to seek sanctuary, claim asylum and avoid penalties for illegal entry in search of these. While the U.K. has identified Syrian refugees as 'real' refugees and had agreed to take in a symbolic figure of 20,000, the U.K. has required these refugees to be vetted by the U.N. and the Home Office in the U.N. camps around Syria as opposed to Europe. The double screening of refugees in the camps of Lebanon, Jordan, and Turkey equally denotes the U.K.'s tougher stance to put out 'bogus asylum seekers' or those with potential links to terrorist groups. While the U.K. has pursued a hard line in the refugee crisis of advocating relief from a distance and in refusing to accept its quota of refugees, the government sought to protect its public image on the global stage by invoking its historic image of providing refuge to those fleeing persecution. Citing difficulties with vetting and differentiating the 'genuine' refugee from the illegal migrant and the potential terrorist amongst those already in the E.U., there has been a tendency to treat all under the 'suspect' category. In view of this, the U.K. has retained juxtaposed controls in Calais where it exercises 'full control' over who enters the U.K. (Cameron 2015).

The off-shoring of bordering practices to neighboring countries such as Libya is a central feature of the E.U.'s migration management (Vaughan-Williams 2010). Frontex, the E.U.'s external border management agency, has missions that extend far beyond the Mediterranean Sea into West Africa, and these increasingly resemble military operations (Picum 2010). The outsourcing of border practices not only represents a de facto transfer of governance from the E.U. to the states in North Africa and to the east, it also denotes an abrogation from responsibility for international protection of "irregular" migrants under international law (Bialasiewicz 2012). The absolving of responsibility by the E.U. and the systemic abuse of human rights have been

raised by NGOs and the United Nations (Vaughan-Williams 2010).

In terms of security of the Port of Calais and the Channel Tunnel, the U.K. has contributed £63m towards securing the Port and the Tunnel in 2015, including extra fencing and infrastructure, security guards, search dogs and detection technology. As of December 2016, the estimated costs to Britain of increased security were around £85 million (Press Association 2016). The expansion of the fencing remains part of the U.K.'s border fortification strategies. In effect, the U.K. government has extended the razor wire fences within the port of Calais. There has been a steady expansion in fencing and the creation of secure waiting areas installed by the British, the French and by the company that runs Eurotunnel. Augmentation of the fence is also seen to be providing the Port of Calais with a buffer zone or secure waiting area for 230 UK-bound lorries to 'wait safely' within the Port 'when queues occur' (May 2015b). Significantly, the U.K. erected a 'NATO fence,' a four-metre high concrete structure that runs along the main motorway to the Port of Calais completed in December 2016 at an estimated cost of £2.3 million.

Many studies observe that contemporary politics has become "saturated by security" with specific relevance to issues of forced migration, asylum seeker mobility, and detention (Neocleous, 2008:2; Fassin, 2012). Governments "shape, sculpt, mobilize and work through the choices, desires, aspirations, needs and wants" of individuals and groups. By doing so, they link issues of governing and politics to "the space of bodies, lives, selves and persons" (Dean 2010:20). This has provided fertile ground for thinking about the subjectivities foisted on the displaced and vulnerable populations such as refugees and migrants. The criminalization of migrants and asylum seekers and the ascribing of illegitimacy onto their bodies cultivate and maintain certain subjectivities in the name of securitization, and to justify clandestine practices and acts of degradation (Hodge 2015: 124).

The term 'razor wire humanitarianism' is employed to denote the composite stance of the U.K. government, where border fortification plays a symbolic role in convincing a hostile public in the U.K. of being tough towards the illegitimate Other while professing a moral role on the global stage. The combination of token humanitarianism, tough immigration to control the borders, along with the outsourcing of border practices, retains the border as a theatre for impressing its sovereign power while catering to the circulatory needs of capitalism. The acceptance of refugees from their countries of origin rather than within the E.U. ignites the border as a space of constant expiation and violence while reinforcing the material and symbolic value of the border fortified through razor wire.

Barbed and Razor Wire as Biotechnologies

Barbed wire and razor wire are types of steel wire used in forming barriers and fences, and have been used throughout modern history. These technologies are implicated in the enactment of the boundaries of property, prisons, and borders transcending and transgressing species, places, and times (Netz 2004:39). By targeting the flesh as a mechanism of control, it collapses the distinction between man and animal, reframing them as equally susceptible to pain and suffering. Barbed wire, as a biotechnology to inflict pain and socially condition human and animal behavior, reveals the "essential inhumanity of the industrial world" and "modern technology's destructive power" (Razac 2002:49). As tools in colonization and pacification of peoples in conquering new lands and territories, these stand for resistance against infiltration by the Other and containment of the Other. Barbed wire is affordable and easy to erect, in comparison to razor wire which is usually used to restrain cattle. Razor wire, on the other hand, is used for high-security fences.

Barbed wire has come to signify a particular architecture of violence and control while it is co-located with the piercing of the flesh, suffering, and recall to prompt withdrawal. Developed initially as an agricultural tool in the American West, barbed wire is intimately rooted in the "idea of relationship between flesh and iron" by socializing and manipulating animals through violence (Netz 2004:38). In examining the genealogy of the barbed wire, Netz (2004) firmly

entrenches violence, pain, and withdrawals as a means to prevent transgression and movement. By cutting through the boundary of our skins, it impacts the nerves, sending a message to the brain about pain, prompting a withdrawal. In an exhibition in San Antonio in 1876, dozens of fierce-looking longhorn bulls were packed into a plaza surrounded by barbed wire fences. These animals were deliberately frightened and provoked to charge at the fence but restrained reflexively from doing so due to their recall of pain inflicted by the sharp metal tearing their flesh. These wounded animals 'learned' from repeated attempts to instinctively withdraw and be restrained in that boundary. The spectacle as a symbolic act of submission and compliance revealed how the untamed could learn to respect the definition of a boundary and its limits while affirming the violent aesthetic of the barbed wire as a cheap, flexible and effective tool of surveillance and containment in controlling animals without human intervention (Netz 2004: 30–31). With particular relevance to the American West, this act of taming had a salience where cattle brought by the Spanish had become 'semi-feral,' and the barbed wires 'served to re-tame, by shock, an entire breed' (Netz 2004:38).

Barbed wire played a notable role in the colonization of the American West by providing control based on violence on a vast scale against animals and indigenous Americans alike (see Hayter 1939). The expansion of the railroad, as well as barbed wire enclosures, became critical to "the frontier advances and the retreat of American Indians" in the Western colonization of America as these modern industrial tools effectively "ended the American Indians existence as nations and their resistance to the white man" (Razac 2002:14). American Indians 'cursed' the barbed wire as "The Devil's Rope" as it closed off their traditional hunting grounds, hampered night raids on cattle, and "assisted in their pacification" (Krell 2002:38) through the brutal violence it wreaked on their bodies and their possessions. Not only was barbed wire a technology of colonization, but also it emerged with the gun, steamboat, and railway as critical tools in the emergence of capitalism. Netz (2004) argues that the critical 'discovery' that facilitated capitalism was that private ownership encouraged intensive investment and higher profits. The enclosure of fields first in Britain and then in America became the 'hallmark of capitalism' (Netz 2004:20). Barbed wire was a 'transformative' technology as it provided the symbolism of a fence to keep animals or people or out; it used force through the infliction of pain as an educative strategy to tame animals and people, and control their movement. Netz (2004:50) argues that the barbed wire and the urge to bring space under control symbolizes the age of capitalism. He sees the "true economic significance" of barbed wire in the capitalist concentrations of land, cattle, and industries.

The mass production of barbed wire and its effectiveness in controlling movement also meant it was ideally suited to warfare. The British army adapted barbed wire for military use to restrict the movement of Boer guerrilla units over vast expanses (Weiss 2011). Zionist settlers moving into territory formerly occupied by Palestinians relied on barbed wire to fence off these areas (Netz 2004:71). In the trenches of World War I, barbed wire became known as the "artificial bramble" (Razac 2002:40). Light and supple, it was immune to artillery fire and functioned as a formidable obstacle even when broken, making it economical yet effective (Rawling 2014). Deemed dangerous and terrifying by ordinary soldiers, it became entrenched within the mythology of the war, circulating as a recurrent and dominant trope in literary works of the war as an 'aesthetic' of the battlefield. Schmidt's *With Rommel in the Desert* visualizes torn bodies hanging on the barbed wire, left to die and rot, "calling attention to its ability to pierce and to fix, to hold the body in stasis: a memento mori in wire" (Krell 2002:48). This speaks about barbed wire's ultimate "capacity to turn a corpse into a spectacle ... ripping clothes before the body is riddled by bullets" (Krell 2002:54).

The Nazi camps of World War II were surrounded with a double fence of electrified barbed wire thirteen feet high under constant surveillance from watchtowers which elongated their aesthetic of violence (Razac 2002). The centrality of the barbed wire fence in demarcating the camp meant that it was usually the first structure erected even before the construction of the camp. It not only marked the boundaries of the camp but was crucial in organizing space and

hierarchies within the camp. Gas chambers and crematoriums had separate barbed wire fences within the camps. Not only did it separate the camp from 'normal society,' it produced the bounded space as infinite (signifying both the empty time and space of captivity) as inmates never saw where the fence ended. It was equally useful in marking off spaces with special status while making arbitrary classifications visible (i.e., women from men, and certain nationalities were isolated, especially Soviet prisoners of war). In the Buchenwald camp, a cage made up of barbed wire dubbed the 'rose garden' constituted a space where the body would find its limits as prisoners could be left to die from hunger or exposed to severe temperatures (Razac 2002:60).

Olga Lengyel (1947:118), in her account of her experiences as a doctor in the camp, highlights the role of barbed wire in suicide and recounts how "each morning the workers found deformed bodies on the high-tension wires. This was how many chose to put an end to their torment". This form of suicide, popularly known as 'embracing the wire' in Auschwitz-Birkenau, symbolized both containment and liberation from captivity. As such, the barbed wire became a "graphic symbol of incarceration and political violence" and an "almost universal symbol of the camps and more generally of fascist and totalitarian violence" (Razac 2002:63-65). After the liberation of Auschwitz, Primo Levi asserted, 'liberty; the breach in the barbed wire gave us a concrete image of it' (cited in Silverstein 2015:86).

Razor wire remains a visceral material artifact, and its interrogation through artistic interventions today appropriates another means to query its brutality in enacting migration and refugee regimes against its spectacular imaginary of them as detritus entities. The European borders as impenetrable installations and as part of Fortress Europe prompted artist Dani Ploeger to cut off a piece of the razor wire Hungary had raised along its southern border with Serbia. A highly dangerous act, not least due to the criminal nature of the offense in Hungarian law, but equally in view of these being fortified with heat and movement sensors and capable of delivering an electric shock. Ploeger's artistic inventions seek to highlight the use of 'smart' technologies used to obscure their immediate violence and as such "their framing as supposedly clean and precise technologies is symptomatic of a broader cultural practice that uses narratives of technologization to justify means of violence".² Exhibiting that piece of fence at the Bruthaus Gallery in Belgium, it sought to invoke the moral depravity of delegating our "responsibility towards asylum-seekers to these tech-enhanced structures."³

The Border Spectacular and the 'Living Dead'

Borders function not only in order to exclude some and include others but primarily to effect a specific stabilized circulation of desired social and economic effects: profit, property, racial division, etc. (Nail 2012:242). The border, in assuming central importance in the functioning of the neoliberal state, brings economic order through the accumulation of domestic markets in goods and labor (Stratton 2009). In enabling the selected influx of bodies as labor while exiating the illegitimate Other, the border sits within a disjuncture of these circulatory flows. On the one hand, it embodies a post-Westphalian transmutation where territorial forms of sovereignty are eroding, but on the other, it is increasingly enacted through securitization and anti-immigration initiatives that produce new racialized groups to fear (Hodge 2015:12-125). Borders are about the "performance of sovereignty" (Jones 2009) and about the "biopolitics of submission," where everyone is reduced to bare life as they submit to the authority of the state (Salter 2008). The binary logic of inside/outside associated with geopolitical imagination produces a continuum of violence, particularly in the case of the E.U. with its sustained spatial displacements and temporal deferrals (Hodge 2015:124).

As such, the violence of the border is now more than ever directed against a highly malleable and unspecified enemy: migratory life in general (Nail 2012:242). Within this 'governmentality' of ordering bodies and creating new categories through political governance of the state, public enactments of torture disappear and are unveiled in the fringes of state power (Foucault 2003).

The management, representation, and the actual infliction of death have long been considered the cornerstone of state sovereignty (Magaña 2011). Foucault's (2003) biopower then encapsulates both the regulatory power of the state and equally its nodes of disciplinary power. For Foucault (2003:241), sovereign power rests not just in taking life or letting live, but in "making live" and "letting die."

The border imbibing its neo-liberal agenda and sovereign power becomes a creative instrument for ordering bodies by stripping them to 'bare life' (Agamben 1998) or impressing the corporeal vulnerability of human life (Butler 2004), and in exhibiting 'mere life' (Benjamin 2004) where it is "vulnerable to injury by his fellow men." Where Agamben (1998) homogenizes "bare life" in the spaces of exception, others point out that the production of subjectivity is much more fractured and unstable (Butler 2004; Isin & Rygiel 2007). Borders reposition the human, not into a binary of human or non-human but through a "clarification of what form of life or living constitutes belonging and what constitutes non-belonging" (Rajaram & Grundy-Warr 2007:xii). Isin and Rygiel (2007:182 - 183), by focusing on the abject body propound that people are neither treated as subjects (of discipline) nor objects (of elimination) but are considered "inexistent beings" by rendering them invisible and inaudible. Judith Butler critiques the notion of 'bare life' for its uniform conception of this life form and asserts that "the construction of the human is a differential operation that produces the more and the less 'human,' the inhuman, the humanly unthinkable. These excluded sites come to bound the 'human' as its constitutive outside, and to haunt those boundaries as the persistent possibility of their disruption and re-articulation" (Butler 1993:8).

For Achille Mbembe (2003:186), certain sites perfect lethal or oppressive biopolitical or necropolitical technologies exercised on marginalised bodies, hence placing emphasis on the management of death as a form of biopower. Mbembe (2003) constructs bare life as not a single production of biopower but through a combination of biopolitics, necropolitics, and necropower. These then account for the various ways in which, in our contemporary world, weapons are deployed in the interest of maximum destruction of persons and the creation of death-worlds; new and unique forms of social existence in which vast populations are subjected to conditions of life conferring upon them the status of 'living dead' (Mbembe 2003:40). The 'living dead' in the Nazi concentration camps is something which Agamben (1999) portrays through the crouched figure of the 'Muselmann' where this figure is beyond trauma, morality, human dignity, or religion. These camp inmates "were reduced to 'living corpses,' 'nameless hulks'; beings who were presumably human but seemed to lack any dignity, spontaneity, or humanity" (Bernstein 2002). The Muselmann is an indefinite being and a liminal figure between human and non-human, representing a "limit experience" where our normative "ethical, political, medical, and biological concepts and categories break down" (Bernstein 2002).

Giorgio Agamben's (1998:2005) 'state of exception' is integrated within the architectures of violence such as the camps, incarceration sites (e.g., Guantanamo Bay), military installations and border zones. The border spaces and sites of incarceration require a material architecture and aesthetic which reproduce and reorder space. The border space is made for performance where the worthlessness of the alien body can be reasserted and re-inscribed through the presence of a material architecture and its materiality. As such, violence warrants a performative theatre in which the body can be made or produced as 'bare life' and paraded through its liminality and vulnerabilities. This visual theatre is part of the biopolitics of the border, where life is re-coded and re-ordered through its own sensibilities, and where laws can be both suspended and applied without impunity.

The razor wire is part of this architecture of surveillance and violence on the corporeal body in border spaces. These demarcate protected zones where bodies can be retained or kept out of the boundary or governed through a different set of rules. The watching tower envisaged by Jeremy Bentham within his Victorian utilitarianism perspective as part of his vision of social reform of the prison system was conceived by Foucault as a material architecture of violence. Foucault's scrutiny of Bentham's Panopticon as part of a surveillance machinery conjoined it to

wider processes of modern governance. Symbolically, the notion of an unbroken gaze produced a mechanism for disciplining the body, inscribing the watching tower as an important symbolic architecture of sociological inquiry. Here the material tower provided a means to re-configure the relationship with the gaze, the body, and social conditioning as well as disciplining of the body and the senses through the aesthetics of internal (i.e. the corporeal body and its senses) and external (i.e., environment) control.

While the watching tower within the theoretical frameworks of the Panopticon has received expansive attention, barbed wire or razor wire provides a locus in reconfiguring border spaces and their relationship with the corporeal body. Stepping away from looking at death as an agentive resource, Rocío Magaña (2011) proposes the idea that in death the body bears the possibility to re-signify social, political, and spatial relations. Magaña (2011), in assessing the border patrol in the Arizona–Sonora border region, narrates the border as a disruptive space outmanned and outgunned by the various cartels that operate across its territory, where the state does not hold a sovereign monopoly on life, death or violence. While not all deaths are equal, they remain at the center of the state's border activity performing to a triangulation of, among transgressed territoriality, dead bodies, and state politics. The inability to completely control the border means corpses are mobilized to perform the authority of the state and social cohesion. Hence the border is bound with a necropolitics, whereby the corpses become the sites on which social, political, and spatial battles are fought. The body becomes a symbolic stage on which the desirable or acceptable can be conveyed, making the dead body socio-politically productive. Magaña (2011) articulates this as a form of political 'afterlife' where the production of authority and citizen protection pivots on the effective management and recasting of politically charged dead bodies. Such appropriation enables the transformation of uncertainty brought about by border violence and neglect and turns the deaths they produce into a political resource. This, as such, transforms Agamben's (1998) biopolitics of 'bare life' into thanatopolitics where death and the damaged body mobilizes political life. Agamben's (1998) 'bare life' invites critique on its limitations in extrapolating the emotive from something deemed 'exceptional.' With his focus on the judicial primacy of the sovereign, he neglects the affective in the production of life (Salter & Mutlu 2011).

Barbed wire and razor wire as border installations acquire a relationship with the migrant/refugee body and impose an aesthetic of violence in disciplining and dispelling them. Instead of the politics of 'afterlife' of Magaña's (2011) Mexican border, the wires forge a sustained relationship with the 'living dead,' where their incursions against this biotechnology codes them through deviance and criminality and as entities who need to be protected against their own acts of desperation. Razor wire, as a technology designed to target the flesh and draw on its trauma and suffering, is part of the architecture of violence. It provides a crucial visibility and material theatre in denigrating illegal bodies and parading the border as a nexus between neoliberal politics and sovereign violence against the Other. Today razor wire has become a symbol of refugee struggle and encodes this through the spectacular of this biotechnology. The 'spectacular' claims a co-location with the unspeakable where its aesthetic can coalesce into the political realm and equally transcend it (Rancière 2006). This constant negotiation of the 'bare life' and 'after life' define the material and symbolic politics of the razor wire. The sustained non-resolution of the refugee crisis creates the flesh of the refugee body as a vehicle for the foreboding politics of the border and equally as a quest for renewed resistance and resilience of the alien body. As such the fenced razor wire installations provide a crucial visibility and material theatre in the politics of the living dead and camps which multiply even as they are shut down. The deaths and damaged bodies on the margins of the Calais camp and fortified fences speak about a necropolitics where the living dead cannot be conditioned through the biotechnology of the razor wire or the pain these inflict, their damaged bodies remain an inconvenience that needs to be remedied with more 'smart' technologies embedded onto the razor wire while the humanitarian crisis is outsourced and dealt with at a distance by the state.

The Razor Wire in Europe

The refugee or the migrant body is viewed through how it is always given over to others, to norms, to social and political organizations that have developed historically in order to maximize precariousness for some and minimized precariousness for others. Hence they “organize visual experience” and generate “specific ontologies of the subject” (Butler 2009: 2–3). The constitution and reiteration of the subject are produced and shift according to the life norms in which subjects are recognized and are made recognizable. As such, the refugee/migrant body is depicted through the biotechnology of the razor wire where their bodies are pledged to the violence of the border and equally imagined through the overarching frames of securitization or through their intrusions as the ‘Other’ recode them through the materiality of the border. The material architecture of the border denies it corporeality, or their fragile and vulnerable experience as embodied while producing the border as a space of disruption and the authorities’ renewed attempts to impose order. But within this articulation, the embodiment and corporeality as well as the performativity and vulnerability of these displaced bodies are endlessly enacted as a theatre of human suffering, remaking them as humans against Fortress Europe. Razor wire was “the symbol of the refugee crisis” (Asche 2015) particularly with the Syrian crisis providing a recurring visual and material prop as refugees, both adults and children, walk along rail tracks against barbed wire on the 175 kilometers-long wall at the Hungarian-Serbian border. A track of human ordeal invoked through the fear of police detection and the constant incursions of the precarious human body against the wire fence where their ‘humanness’ is performed through cuts and injuries (U.N. News Centre 2015), being electrocuted or in taking risks in dangling children over it (Reynolds et al. 2015). The corporeality of these precarious bodies is ironically re-articulated through the violence of the razor wire, despite inscribing death and injury as part of their predicament in the quest to end their statelessness.

The razor wire as a material architecture with a capacity for violence is constantly infused through securitization discourses in political references as ‘security fences’ or instruments to fortify and control the border as well as to protect the legitimate movement of bodies and goods. Its aesthetic and material prominence in such a schema within the neoliberal is reiterated through initiatives to reinforce the fence periodically from incursions (Stevens 2015). These incursions are co-located through the refugee body as a dangerous entity attempting to board moving trains or disrupt train platforms (May 2015c), leading to the framing of the refugees as threats and risks to the vitality of the economy, its security, as well as to its populations. The fence then acquires an intrinsic virtue of preventing illegitimate activities and irresponsible loss of life and to ensure that the public is not subjected to long delays by illegal bodies and stowaways (May 2015a), and providing a frontline against illegal migrants in Calais in the process (May 2011).

The aesthetic of the violence of the razor wire constructed through military metaphors in guarding Fortress Europe coheres in descriptions to it as the ‘Great Wall of Calais,’ referring to the four-meter high concrete structure present along the main motorway to the Calais port completed in December 2016 (Press Association 2016) or the “new iron curtain” (Asche 2015). The visual turn during summer 2015 captured more graphically than before the brutality of securitization, migrant-police engagements and the desperation of the migrants to sneak aboard passing vehicles (See Ibrahim & Howarth 2016). These confrontations with the alien bodies were corroborated by media reports of heavily outnumbered police being forced to use water cannons, baton charges, and tear gas to repel migrants seeking to board passing vehicles and the reinforcement of perimeter fencing with razor wire (Chrisafis 2015). The brutal rituals of crossing the fence became an intrinsic element of this human theatre of migration. Getting to the other side of the fence as a form of daily struggle ingrained the razor wire into the psyche and the affective states of the inhabitants of Calais. Life on the other side is imagined and impeded through the razor wire encapsulating the biotechnology as a fence that fosters both depressive states in the camp and renewed agency to overcome this barrier in the dark of the night when detection of transgressive bodies might be more difficult by authorities.

The renewed fortifications of the razor wire fence against the constant demolitions of the camps in Calais and the recurrent sprouting up of new jungles from 2009 to 2015 constantly reproduce the site of the 'jungle' as amenable to obliteration and the migrant body as given over to constant dispersal, eradication, and obliteration against the steel structure of the fence. In the process, the migrant floating body and its impermanence ironically forms a binding material and symbolic relationship with the very fence it has to surmount. The jungle as an ephemeral holding site against the hard fence, that very object the migrant body has to cross to shed its 'stateless' existence immerses the migrant body into a long battle with the fence; to cross the border either as a stowaway on the trucks bound for the U.K. or in negotiating the treacherous fence waiting to cut and wound them. Through such a predicament, the inhabitants of the Calais camp form a long-running relationship with the razor wire, where they rest through the day and conserve their energies to cross it at night (Charlton 2015), forging a psychology of resistance through the material boundary of the razor wire. Their incursions with the wire, including their cuts and bruises or, in a worst-case scenario, gangrene, reaffirm the corporeality of the displaced and equally their agency against the biotechnology of the razor wire and its aesthetics of containment and violence. The depictions of violence in Calais are both embodied and spatially arranged through the politics of the border. Violence appropriates a duality: there is violence inflicted on refugees' bodies by their incarceration in the camps or detention centers and there is the violence of the sovereign state in the liminal state of exception in Calais. This duality means that the displaced equally exercise power over their own bodies through the risk they take to cross the border. In tandem, the sovereign power wields bio-political power on these contaminants who weaken the security of their borders.

Joseph Pugliese (2002) argues that the spatio-temporal logic of the camp induces 'refugees to fall back on the one resource left to them in the midst of the violence of indefinite incarceration: their bodies'. If the augmentation and fortification initiatives of the border fence construct the 'migrants' with a feral quality and animality, where they constantly pose a danger to security and the flow of goods, the embodied experiences of refugees are realized through NGOs and charities aiding these vulnerable populations in Calais who view the razor wire as 'despicable' and causing life-threatening injuries, infection and gangrene (Asche 2015). The animal and feral metaphors used in official discourses are countered through the 'fleshed body' of the displaced by NGO encounters (Ibrahim & Howarth 2016c). Wounds and gashes from negotiating the fences, chunks of flesh being gouged by metal spikes, broken limbs from falling off trains and lorries, to acute infections from the metal wires (Daynes 2015; Davies & Isakjee 2015) ironically restore the humanity of these wounded bodies and their quest to regain agency against their seemingly futile predicament and invisibility in their attempts to claim asylum.

While these encounters reiterate these bodies as "vulnerable to injury and suffering" (Butler 2011:577) through their daily struggles to get to the other side, they renew the embodied nature of their struggle. Butler (2012:11) proposes that the precarity of the 'ungrievable' as bio-politically regulated and, as such, actively produced, maintained, and reiterated in this neoliberal assemblage and politics of migration in Europe. The symbolic and material theatre of the security fence is a space where the alien "bodies appear to other bodies", where they enact the politics of the living dead – not grievable or recognizable as human. Their tangible materiality is also a canvas for sustained articulations of human suffering and enactment of agency against the containment of bare life in Fortress Europe (Lundborg & Vaughan-Williams 2011). Their corporeal bodies enmeshed with the brutality of razor wire (defying the recall of pain as a reaction to the metal fence) reassert them as fleshed entities renewing the theatre of struggle through their bodies. In the process, as Magaña (2011) observes, they disrupt the spatial arrangement of power at the border, thrusting these transgressive bodies as the symbolic and ideological site of struggle against a hard-line Europe.

Conclusion

The 'refugee crisis' in Calais and the increased efforts to secure the border against the transgressions of the 'unwanted' illuminates razor wire as a material and symbolic artifact intimately bound with capitalism, neoliberal ideology, securitization, immigration policies and techniques of exclusion and containment. Razor wire captured the vulnerable as wounded against the brutal politics of the border in which bodies appear and become visible to authorities – hence both the fence and these bodies have to be constantly managed. The razor wire fence needs to be fortified over time to enable the legitimate entry of goods and bodies while thrusting out the detritus. The razor wire fence as a symbol emerging through political discourse and media imagery acquired prominence in this humanitarian crisis. In being deconstructed as a material artifact against the border politics of Fortress Europe, razor wire performs to a theatre of human struggle of bare life against the sovereign state. The genealogy of razor wire through the biopolitics of the unwanted refugee body reveals an ongoing relationship between pain, trauma, exclusion, and the production of bare life at the border. The constitution of the living dead through their corporeal vulnerability in the spatial logic of the security fence recodes the migrant/refugee body as agentic through its incursions against the neoliberal nation-state, rendering it through its non-human qualities while disrupting its spatial arrangement of power at the border. The biopolitics of the fence in collapsing the distinction between animal and human, reframes the refugee/migrant bodies as criminal and deviant entities who are never completely tamed by the fence as living corpses, as they recur through time as desperate bodies presenting a danger to themselves and those they invade. As such, the securitization of the fence becomes a project that is both futile yet necessary to perform the migrant/refugee body - and a theatre to enact them as ungrievable and dispensable entities not amenable to containment. Against this, the human is fleshed through their daily resistance and suffering, recomposing them both through the visceral politics of immigration in Fortress Europe and the resilience of the human spirit conjoining these disparate strands intimately with the razor wire and its hunger for the human flesh. This razor wire humanitarianism imagined through the security fence infers disrupted spatial relations in which the resilient wounded body unsettles the security of the boundary, its management of the 'migrant/refugee' and its imagined humanitarianism.

Endnotes

1. Theresa May was the Prime Minister in the UK from July 2016 till July 2019
2. See 'Cutting through the 'smart' walls and fences of Fortress Europe', <https://we-make-money-not-art.com/cutting-through-the-smart-walls-and-fences-of-fortress-europe/>
3. Ibid.

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