

Raia Apostolova
Capitalism and Migration:
Freeing and Hunting
Labor Power
Across the European Union



**Prof. Marin Drinov Publishing House
of Bulgarian Academy of Sciences**

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BULGARIAN ACADEMY OF SCIENCES

Institute of Philosophy and Sociology

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For my mom, Krassi

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Introduction:

Migratory Categories and the Reproduction of Labor Power

I began the research that would eventually become this book more than a decade ago, when I first visited a reception center for asylum seekers in Sofia, Bulgaria, in 2011.* Four years later, in 2015, while I was deeply immersed in my doctoral research at various localities in and outside Bulgaria, the so-called “refugee crisis” struck Europe (Kallius et al., 2016; Kasperek & Speer, 2015). At the time, over a million people sought refuge in Europe, with more than 3,500 drowning while crossing the Mediterranean – nearly 1,500 of them in April alone. Others attempted to enter Europe from Turkey through Bulgaria and then Serbia in order to join organized transportation towards Aus-

* The book is based on my Ph.D. dissertation, defended at the Central European University in Budapest in 2017. Titled *Moving Labor Power and Historical Forms of Migration: The Internationalist Socialist Worker, the Social Benefit Tourist and the Economic Migrant*, it included an analysis of socialist forms of migration. However, I have excluded this part from the present book in order to focus more closely on capitalist forms of the movement of labor power. Certain reflections in the book have been previously published (although in different versions) as journal articles and book chapters. See Apostolova (2015; 2016; 2018a; 2018b; 2023b). I am thankful to Alexandra Kowalski, Prem Kumar Rajaram, Olena Fedjuk, and Paul Stewart, and Stanislav Dodov, Kalina Drenska, Neda Genova, Petar Bankov, Konstantin Georgiev, and Ivan Bakalov at *dVersia* magazine, for their generosity in permitting me to republish parts of what I had originally written for them. Each of these contributions is duly acknowledged at the beginning of the chapters where they are featured.

tria and Germany. While a “formalized corridor” which allowed migrants to cross the Balkans without relying on smugglers was established between Northern Greece and Central Europe in the summer of 2015 and then extended to Germany in early September (Beznec et al., 2016), crossing Bulgaria turned out to be a bigger challenge. There, migrants continued to be violently pushed back by Bulgarian border guards even when other European countries decided to open their borders in response to the unfolding humanitarian crisis along the Balkan Route.

Not much has changed in Bulgaria since I first started work on this book in 2011. Bulgarian and EU agencies, such as Frontex, actively prevent the entry of migrants into Bulgaria because the Common European Asylum System (CEAS) operates under the assumption that so-called “economic migrants” exploit the routes used by “genuine refugees” to cheat the asylum system and gain access to EU labor markets. The logic that distinguishes “economic migrants” from refugees has been so deeply ingrained in European asylum structures since the 1990s that it has become impossible to think of these two seemingly different categories independently. They condition each other to such an extent that the “genuine refugee/economic migrant” binary has evolved into a distinct governmental category of its own. Migrants’ fear of being (mis)designated an “economic migrant” plays a determining role in their border-crossing and asylum-seeking strategies. When in 2015 I visited Dimitrovgrad, a small town on the Serbian side of the Bulgarian-Serbian border, a group of young Afghans confirmed that people avoid

crossing through Bulgaria as “they force-fingerprint you.”* “If they catch you, you will be held captive in detention.” As we will see later, the brutality of the Bulgarian border and the prolonged detention at the external borders of the European Union complicate, slow down, and tame the movement of migrants further into European labor markets and wealthier welfare states.

The courtyard of the local police department in Dimitrovgrad had been turned into a makeshift reception camp. The Red Cross, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and volunteers had set up tents to take care of the newcomers. They were handing out hot tea, new shoes and clothes, and directing people towards organized transportation. When I tried to enter the yard of the department by climbing over a rickety wooden fence, I was stopped by a police officer who explained in Serbian that a permit was required to access the area. He escorted me to the main building and left me waiting outside next to a group of migrants who were lining up to be registered with the police department and to be issued a document allowing them to travel through the “formalized corridor” within Serbia for three days. This procedure had been developed specifically to deal with the so-called “refugee crisis” unfolding at the time. Possession of this document spared them from being des-

* This is a reference to the EU Dublin Regulation. State authorities take the fingerprints of people “illegally” crossing the border of the first EU country they enter in order to return them there if and when they cross into another European country (Brekke & Brochmann, 2015; Rajaram, 2016; Kasperek, 2016). For a wonderful account on resistance strategies implemented against fingerprinting, see Tazzioli (2018).

ignated “illegal.” Ever since the end of the “refugee crisis,” migrants have again been wandering through the forests of the Balkans, pushed back and hunted down by border patrols whose European mission is to prevent them from entering the European Union.

There is another form of transborder migration that starts from the external borders of the European Union, with the aim of reaching its core. This migration is the exact opposite of what migrants using the asylum routes endure. It is free. There are no border checks, no visa requirements, no border dogs, fingerprints, Red Cross. This form of migration is undertaken by pauperized postsocialist Eastern European migrants. Following the two waves of accession of the “Eastern Bloc” to the EU in 2004 and 2007, the citizens of countries such as Bulgaria, Romania, and Poland became eligible to travel virtually unrestricted within the Union and “would [supposedly] be *free of the restrictions of immigration legislation and categories* – as have been West Europeans for many years” (Favell, 2018, p. 263; emphasis added).^{*} These pauperized workers typically find employment at vegetable and fruit farms, on construction sites, and in the homes of middle-class Western Europeans (Deneva, 2021; Ulceluse & Bender, 2022). During my doctoral research, citizens from two of these

* When Covid-19 struck the world, for a short period of time media outlets paid more attention to the socio-economic conditions endured by these groups of traveling poor. These workers were defined as “essential” and, for a brief period of time, the pandemic illuminated the structural inequalities, the dire work and social reproduction conditions endured by them (Deneva, 2021). At the time of writing (December 2023), they are once again invisibilized and treated as not more “essential” than before Covid-19.

Eastern European countries – Bulgaria and Romania – were regularly referred to as “social benefit tourists” by European media outlets, European state and supranational institutions, and politicians such as David Cameron and Angela Merkel.

In November 2013, a group of Bulgarians in Berlin put up a banner reading “We want housing and work” in front of the Mitte District City Hall. The group, which later became known as the *Eisfabrik*, consisted of some thirty Bulgarian migrants who had been evicted from a squatted factory a few weeks before their protest. Using water from a nearby river, sleeping in well-built wooden huts or tents pitched throughout the factory, they had made the building their home. Occasionally, skinheads harassed the squatters, but fights rarely took place; everyone went about their daily business. Although the workers tried to keep the place low-key, newcomers from Bulgaria would often join them – either to find temporary accommodation while looking for a place of their own or to take a rest before continuing their journey in the EU.

The *Eisfabrik* group lived like this until one day a techno party took place at the factory. While the workers were sleeping, crowds of ravers streamed into the place, playing loud music and tossing empty bottles around. The Bulgarians tried to talk them into leaving. Eventually, a fight broke out. “We were tired, we wanted to sleep, all of us work hard,” one of them explained when I visited them in Berlin a few weeks after the incident. The police intervened and soon enough an eviction notice was posted on the entrance of the factory. The Bulgarians did not resist the eviction itself. A series of occupations, however,

followed: the workers and a few Berlin activists who supported them occupied the offices of main political parties (*Die Linke* and *Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands*), of the largest trade union, *Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund* (DGB), and finally, the office of the then-District Mayor of Berlin-Mitte, Christian Hanke. While waiting for the solution to their housing problem promised by the local authorities, the *Eisfabrik* group started sleeping rough on the streets, at times put up at hotels by the social services, and at others at homeless shelters, but mostly sleeping at a self-organized camping site. Eventually, they gave up like many others. Unable to secure shelter, the workers left Berlin. Some went back home, others continued looking for work in other European countries, while a few of them moved to Frankfurt, where they found employment at a construction site.

This book explores the ways in which two seemingly different migratory categories – the “social benefit tourists” and the “refugee/economic migrant” binary – are delineated and formed in the interaction between conditions of production, the ways in which labor power is revitalized, and the coding of their migration by different ideologemes. The aim is not to examine them as categories that belong solely to the field of migration, but to reveal their relation to differentiated modes of reproduction of labor power. One of the assumptions here is that migration apparatuses – the knowledge structures that code and are coded by different migratory categories, administrative procedures that differentially apprehend types of movement, physical localities such as refugee camps, borders, and homeless shelters, among others – emerge as a way

to capture and disperse particular forms of movement of labor power with differentiated access to labor markets, housing arrangements, and welfare. My aim is to perform a historical reading of the political conjunctures and processes that have made movement imperative for one's social reproduction. To find out how these processes have formed a class that has no other means of reproduction but by moving internationally, and how migration apparatuses are being formed and moulded as a response to these movements. When we position these formations in the temporal gap that exists between migration and labor apparatuses, that is, the moments between one's crossing a border and the commodification of their labor power, we can explore the conflictual, tense relationship between migration and capitalism.

The new migratory category of the "social benefit tourist" gained widespread currency in 2013. Designed by politicians such as David Cameron and Angela Merkel, it reflected the turn that Europe had taken towards austerity, especially in the aftermath of the global financial crisis of 2008. Initially intended as a slur against Bulgarians and Romanians, the concept of "social benefit tourism" was devised as a way to discipline mobile EU workers into working without expectations from the welfare state. Over time, this formulation made its way into infra-legal structures within the Union. Bulgarian pauperized workers in Germany, for instance, work without contracts, relying on subcontractors and labor fixers to find jobs. They often do not receive wages, sleep rough on the streets, and find themselves caught in a perpetual state of nomadism. The apparatus built around "social benefit

tourism” – police controls of “irregular” EU workers, strict municipal control of homeless people’s right to shelters, rigorous checks of the eligibility for social benefits, and policing of address registrations – reinforced a specific collective image of the pauperized. The forged category thus compiled within itself characteristics such as supposed laziness, economic idleness, theft, but mostly abuse of social welfare. When we look closer, however, we see that this same apparatus in fact produced these negative representations, reinforcing images associated with thievery.

Contrary to the “social benefit tourists,” refugees and “economic migrants” are forced to jump over border fences; they are detained in immigration prisons and viciously pushed back from the EU’s geographic, social, and economic peripheries. When applied to the persona of the refugee, the terms “bogus” and “fraudulent” have acquired a Bourdieusian sense of doxa. Implicit in their meaning is the unquestioned assumption that most of the refugees entering Europe are in fact deceitful economic migrants. The introduction of the notion of a “bogus” asylum seeker can be traced back to the changing migration patterns in the 1980s and the restructuring of the Western European and Scandinavian asylum systems (Moreno-Lax, 2015). This restructuring involved the recategorization of migratory definitions through the introduction of the concept of a “safe country.” In the 1990s, this concept transformed the status of the “Eastern Bloc,” whose escapees were considered refugees prior to the collapse of the Berlin Wall, from a territory depicted as the site of totalitarian political persecution into a safe place on its way to building liberal

democracies and capitalist economic forms. The legislative effect was a reclassification of Eastern Europeans from asylum seekers to economic migrants. Those who were once classified as subjects of political persecution became the subjects of economic hardships. The 1990s thus entangled the class struggles taking place in Eastern Europe at the time with a legal recategorization within the Western European asylum systems.

The notion of the “economic migrant” drives political projects in the EU to this day. Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán relied on it to erect a border fence and protect Hungary’s “illiberal democracy” against fake refugees, seemingly in opposition to European values (Cantat, 2016). The “economic migrant” has acquired a political meaning that transcends the innovations in border regimes and migratory apparatuses. After all, the border fence between Serbia and Hungary was built by soldiers, among others, and its construction relied on workfare programs compelling unemployed into ill-secured working conditions (Kallius, 2017).

The fabricated fear around the economic migrant was reinforced by an economic model which, as sociologist Loïc Wacquant (2009) points out, turns welfare into forced workfare. Further, the 2015 deal between Turkey and the EU (Heck & Hess, 2017), signed with the purpose of stopping economic migration to the Union in exchange for six billion euros and accelerated visa liberalization for Turkish citizens, has raised questions regarding Europe’s commitment to human rights and democratic principles. The European Commission, for its part, has harnessed the notion of the “economic migrant” to fortify the borders

of the continent and filter the latter from the “genuine refugees.” These developments are part of the deep structures of meaning that distinguish deserving refugees from undeserving economic migrants. The filtering of the “economic” from the “political” has been mostly outsourced to the Union’s external borders.

Bulgaria is one such border, where vigilante groups of hunters of “bogus refugees” and border police work in unison to prevent the arrival of “economic migrants” (Dodov, 2016). Bulgaria was the first country of the so-called Balkan Route to erect a fence along its border with the sole purpose of stopping the “invasion” of “economic migrants” into the EU. Despite these efforts, border crossers still make their way into Bulgarian territory. They are usually detained in the so-called Special Homes for Temporary Accommodation of Foreigners (detention centers for foreigners) and eventually transferred to reception centers for asylum seekers. There, they await a court decision on whether they can remain in the country as holders of humanitarian status (subsidiary protection) or refugee status – that is, they await to be de-categorized as economic migrants.

Migratory categories driving research in the social sciences were rarely questioned or historicized prior to the “refugee crisis” of 2015. The brutality by which the differentiation between “genuine” and “fraudulent” refugees was imposed by international agencies, state border institutions, and media outlets in 2015 produced conditions facilitating their unmasking and critical comprehension. One of the aims of this book is to demonstrate how the utilization of migratory categories tends to mystify capitalist relations of social reproduction by denying their

constitutive role in cross-border movements. This mystification is done by both concealing the complex ways in which processes of social reproduction are embedded in pre-migration processes and by disregarding the importance of legal categories in the hierarchized access to means of survival.

There is a paradox in the refugee/economic migrant divide that attests to processes of mystification. On the one hand, the category “genuine refugee” obscures the connection between labor power and the revitalization of life by assuming that refugees do not travel for economic reasons; the fact that they carry labor power (that is, they too must sell their labor power in order to survive in the destination country) is erased from this category. This may be one of the reasons behind the inclination to view refugee populations through humanitarian lenses (Fassin, 2011; Ticktin, 2011a) rather than in terms of labor.

On the other hand, the category “economic migrant” over-privileges the “economy” by assuming that a cross-border movement takes place solely because of economic interests. The “economy” thus acquires an autonomous role in the global dissemination of labor power and mystifies social reproduction as a complex and multilayered “relationship between the state, the markets, community and the family” (Kofman & Raghuram, 2015, p. 182). If we look at the category “social benefit tourist,” we will see that it obscures the violence inherent in the withdrawal of the welfare state, as it assumes that violence only appears within the intentions of those crossing borders. “Social benefit tourists,” we are told, travel in order to steal from and abuse a welfare state. Treating mi-

gratory categories as starting points rather than results of historical, political, and ideological workings produces such types of “categorical fetishism” (Apostolova, 2015).

Relying on the notion of “categorical fetishism,” Heaven Crawley and Dimitris Skleparis (2017, p. 50) argue that if we allow the uncritical usage of legal and policy categories to “dominate academic research – perhaps in an effort to engage policy interest and, in turn, enhance the ‘impact’ of our work – then the politics that lie at the heart of the policy-making process will also come to shape and inform academic thinking, concealing rather than revealing the dynamic processes with which migration is increasingly associated.” In a similar vein, Annick Pijnenburg and Conny Rijken (2021) criticize the international legal norms that differentiate between refugees and migrants, focusing on the overarching notion of “people on the move” in order to arrive at a better understanding of what socio-economic legal frameworks need to include in their comprehension of movement. Apostolos Andrikopoulos (2023) questions the legitimacy of approaches that comprehend migration processes in terms of legal categories – for the author, they represent the narrow view of the state, and are thus unable to capture the development of relations opposed to state violence. Working in the British context, Maya Goodfellow (2023) is another author who critically apprehends the usage of migratory categories in scientific research. She explores the label “economic migrant” to argue that the predominant focus on asylum seekers and refugees in migration studies has precluded scholars from understanding how the political meaning of “economic migrant” relates to processes of class formation and race.

While critical approaches to “labeling” and “categorization” through migration processes have developed tremendously in recent years (Kmak, 2015, 2020; Oelgemöller, 2021), the purpose of this book is different. The focus here is on the “social benefit tourist” and the “genuine refugee/economic migrant” binary.

Although migration governance within the Union cannot be reduced to these two categories, I have chosen them because they have sparked political projects that extend far beyond international movement, affecting social systems and labor relations across the Union. If we look closer at the political developments in the EU over the past decades, we can clearly see that some of the most ruthless rollbacks in previously won social gains have been first “tested” precisely on the populations identified as belonging to these two categories. I explore the differentiated hierarchies created by legal systems, by the speeds and rhythms of movement, by a global uneven development, by race and class, by political theories and the formation of knowledge apparatuses – from the perspective of one particular relation that underpins the history of capitalism, that of labor power as a commodity.

Moving Labor Power

Research in the field of migration trains us to think of each figure of international movement – the refugee, the economic migrant, the *Gastarbeiter*, the posted worker, and the social benefit tourist, among others – as belonging to separate fields of inquiry. Methodologically, these categories are approached by isolating determinants of migration

(e.g., war vs. poverty) and their regulation by specific rules found in differentiated migration apparatuses. These types of approaches build up a typology of migrants and outline fields of possible studies and interventions in international and transnational migration.

And indeed, when we look at these movements, we find irreducible differences between these categories. In the case of the *Gastarbeiter*, a dominant relation is established between state and capital; in the case of the EU posted worker, regulations of freedom of movement, private intermediaries in the labor processes, and the withdrawal of the state are of crucial importance; asylum seekers are governed through the rationales underlying the Common European Asylum System whose effects can be found in the development of pockets of exclusion (e.g., detention centers). We also find differences when we look at the rhythm and speed of these movements: while the movement of refugees is slowed by borders and prisons, the freely traveling Eastern Europeans within the EU move quickly and widely, without the usual obstacles inherent in cross-border migration.

There is, however, a particular thread that allows us to think of them in relation to each other. This thread follows the understanding that the different forms of migration express differentiated movements of labor power. Undoubtedly, the different migration apparatuses do affect the rhythm and speed of movement, and the legislative gaze naturalizes them as if they are of different orders. Yet, when we situate these seemingly different forms of migration as particular actualizations of labor power on the move, we see that the apparatuses that appear to

differentiate between them are built around the issue of controlling the movement of potential workers.

The main assumptions driving this book begin with Karl Marx's concept of labor power as the "aggregate of those mental and physical capabilities existing in a human being, which he exercises whenever he produces a use value of any description" (Marx, 1999, p. 119). While labor power is a transhistorical relation which expresses the ability of people to create material and immaterial goods for their reproduction, the economic form labor power takes – including the form of its international movement – is historically determined. As Marx (1999, p. 120) notes, the class relations under capitalism are "clearly the result of a past historical development, the product of many economic revolutions, of the extinction of a whole series of older forms of social production." Labor power's development as a commodity that is sold and bought at a market establishes the history of capitalist relations. If, as Sandro Mezzadra (2018, p. 57) claims, "Marx's entire theory of exploitation – but, more generally, also the image of the worker as revolutionary subject – is based on this category [labour power] (as well as on the distinction between labour power and labour)," my aim here is to explore how the cross-border movement of impoverished humans as we know it today – characterized by differentiated rhythms, speeds, regimes, hierarchies, violence, freedoms and unfreedoms – figures in the changing patterns of social reproduction.

In *The Punitive Society*, Michel Foucault (2015, p. 187) claims that the relation of the worker's body to production apparatuses

is no longer merely the locus of desire, but is now the source of labor power, which must become productive force. It is precisely at this point of the transformation of physical strength into labor-power and its integration into a system of production, which will make it a productive force[.]

In this lecture series, Foucault (2015) highlights the two sides of the same process: on the one hand, this is the transformation of bodily power into labor power; on the other, it is the operation of transforming labor power into productive power, into labor. To understand how and whether cross-border movement figures in the processes identified by Foucault, I advance the notion of *moving labor power*. Moving labor power indicates the mechanisms by which the capacity of the body to move is captured and freed by apparatuses of power at the intersection of migration, social reproduction, and production. Foucault (2015, pp. 187-189) approaches the bodily forces as capacities constitutive of labor power whose fixing in production processes was a subject of moralizing discourses and institutions of sequestration in the 19th century. In our case, the capacity of the body to move becomes an object of economic supply and demand, and in the process of “becoming,” it is movement that acquires a determining role in the organization of production and social reproduction. Movement is a strategy of resistance (e.g., by escaping the despair of social misery or war), but also a way to extract and fix more labor power into spaces of production with differentiated access to social reproduction. The differentiated access to means of social reproduction, as we will see, often depends on the legal and

infra-legal categories in which a moving body is classified. In this sense, we observe the specificity of social relations that are produced and productive of a given subject, as such subjects move as labor power and therefore as potential labor. Labor power is doubly mobilized: by the necessity to depart from a space characterized by deprivation, but also by contingencies such as the spatial concentration of wealth.

Physical movement cannot be abstracted from social processes and relations, from the social and economic conditions that coerce someone into transborder movement. In other words, socio-economic, hegemonic, and political conditions turn movement into an imperative of social reproduction. Being at the edge of the European Union – that is, in a borderland where a vast number of people seek to flee social deprivation and where a similarly vast number of people attempt to gain access to a seemingly prosperous world – we can easily see how the body's capacity for movement is acted upon in a way that transforms it into labor power on the move with a differentiated access to means for the revitalization of the life cycle. The differentiated access to means of survival is also what makes movement a means of social reproduction. Typically, people who are about to undertake cross-border movement have lost access to livelihoods, to health care, to wages, or to political representation, that is, to social reproduction in general. At that point in their lives, the reproduction of their life cycle (but also that of their families and loved ones) is only possible if they move to a new place where access to the means that support such reproduction can be restored.

Moving labor power draws a geography of labor power whose analysis attempts to capture the character of the

apparatuses that apprehend and shape movement at the intersection of social reproduction (e.g., social welfare schemes), production (e.g., self-employment as a form of migrant labor), and migration (e.g., the prisons for foreigners or freedom of movement). Once people cross a border, their labor power retains its character of a potential (Mezzadra, 2018, p. 57), which, as I elaborate in the next section, gives rise to struggles over the forms of exploitation and commodification it would eventually endure (e.g., in what sectors, legal or illegalized labor, paid or unpaid labor). When we look closer at the intersection where the apparatuses of migration, social reproduction, and production interact as one, forming the setting within which these struggles unfold, we can see that certain forms of commodification are more possible than others.

One of the aims of the notion of moving labor power is to go beyond research that focuses on a single migratory category derived from legal frameworks, such as the refugee, the asylum seeker, the green-card holder, or the posted worker. What the notion of moving labor power does instead is to take these categories and contrast them with each other in order to denaturalize them, to think about them as historical relations and processes instead of as essences, or autonomous, independent cases. In this book, migratory categories are treated not as a starting point, but as a result. In this sense, each migratory category is treated as a process informed by hegemonic assumptions that generate concrete forms of moving labor power. Such forms could be different levels of access to labor markets, establishing multilayered relations to social security, to the state's ideological and repressive apparatuses, operational-

izing movements according to concrete political forms of racialization and differentiated inclusion.

My approach towards international movement from the perspective of labor power is driven by the necessity to question the ways in which a plethora of studies differentiate between *labor migration* and *forced migration*. The literature that addresses such issues tends to draw strict dividing lines within the field, focusing on questions exclusively related to “refugee-ness,” or to “labor migration,” or to quandaries of “border regimes,” or “postcolonial” or “postsocialist” migration. However, it extremely rarely pays sufficient attention to their intersections.

Methodologically, it has become harder to answer questions such as: Where precisely do we locate the boundary between the refugee and the labor migrant? What about the boundary between freedom of movement and border regimes? Is it possible to seek junctions where questions of migration can delve deeper into the changing conditions of social reproduction and, at the same time, to contextualize the forged migratory categories within their specificity and historicity? The methodological task of introducing the category of moving labor power is to break through such imposed boundaries. As a process, moving labor power is situated in the temporal gap between labor power as a potential and labor as actuality. It is precisely within this gap that migration, social reproduction, and labor apparatuses converge in a way that produces a specific type of exploitable class which increasingly relies on transnational movement for its reproduction; for this class, transnational movement turns into a condition of social reproduction.

Fixing and Freeing Labor Power on the Move

Although there are various ways to approach the issues raised above, my approach is closest to that of political philosopher Sandro Mezzadra. In his account,

the very constitution of ‘free’ wage labour, which definitely characterizes specific histories of capitalism, is to be understood as the result of a struggle where mobility and its control are always at stake ... Far from being reducible to the presumed ‘norm’ of a contractual exchange giving way to ‘free’ wage labour the commoditization of labour power can take multiple shapes. Practices, control, limitations, and the regulation of mobility form a strategic field for the development of these processes, struggles, and conflicts. (Mezzadra, 2016, p. 33)

To reveal the interrelatedness within the nexus of movement, production, and social reproduction, it is necessary to momentarily delve into the strategic field identified by Mezzadra. The notion of moving labor power seeks to establish the ways in which the potential workers, the migration apparatuses that are organized around their control, the various state institutions, and organizational forms of production struggle over the forms of social reproduction. In these struggles, both the capturing and freeing of labor power are at stake. In conditions of “depletion through social reproduction” (Rai et al., 2014), this strategic field is determined by the dialectics between the fixing and the

freeing of labor power. With Foucault (2015), we can see that capital, but also the state apparatuses formed around it, have the tendency to fixate on fixing, that is, on the attempt to mollify, to tame the constant movement of the potential proletariat. Anything that “smacks of irregularity, of mobility in space,” argues Foucault (2015, p. 188), must be domesticated and attached to productive apparatuses.

Foucault looks at how the class struggles aimed at proletarianization of the poor, the vagabonds, the drunkards, sought to use their labor power precisely by fixing them in production apparatuses through various mechanisms. Such mechanisms were set up around the idea of “promiscuity.” With Foucault, we see how promiscuity became not only an object of punishment but also a practice around which the subjectivation of the workers revolves: they must be tamed, they must not move excessively; and if they do move, it must be possible to influence and direct their movement. Yet, returning to the dual process outlined by Foucault – namely, how bodily power is transformed into labor power and thence into productive power – the question arises: What happens with the reproduction of these bodily powers under the conditions of permanent nomadism imposed by a historical form of capitalism that *rewards* the constant wandering of the pauperized? The taming that Foucault speaks of seems to go through a dual dynamic developed by capitalist relations – namely, to permanently fix but also spatially free labor power. The European Union is largely committed to precisely such economic logic, which presupposes incessant mobility. The EU and its models and processes of migration – particularly in the global postsocialist condition – have

disrupted the classical sociological tools that are used to explain physical spaces through the prism of sedentariness (Kabakchieva, 2010).

Whereas Foucault foregrounds an understanding of labor power according to which there is something that exists prior to it (bodily power) and on which various mechanisms of fixing must operate, Karl Marx's notion of the elasticity of labor power seems to be better suited to engage with the process opposite to fixing – the freeing of labor power from the apparatuses of production so that it re-acquires the character of a potentiality.*

The dialectic between fixing and freeing of labor power resides precisely in the elasticity of labor power that Marx writes about. The philosopher develops this understanding of labor power in the context of the elements necessary for the accumulation of capital and the exploitation of labor power. Elasticity concerns the duration of exploitation (e.g., extra strain on the labor force, extra work done through night shifts); the ability of the labor force to expand capital accumulation without the additional involvement of fixed capital (e.g., in mining where only nature and humans are at work). Labor power, together with land, are the elements that help capital to acquire an expansive power beyond its own magnitude (Marx, 1950, p. 492). In other words, labor power is part

* Karl Marx's (1999) presentation in *Capital*, Vol. 1, of the place of Ireland in capital accumulation schemes wonderfully describes this freeing. The notion of the "reserve army of labor" and the transatlantic trade in bodies additionally point to such processes. Of course, Marx engages also with an analysis of the fixing of labor power to production processes: for example, in his description of the "bloody legislation against the expropriated" in the 16th and 17th centuries.

of the “elastic potencies” (Marx, 1950, p. 496) of capital that enable it to expand regardless of the value and mass of its means of production.

Although the notion of “elastic potencies of capital” (Marx, 1950, p. 496) refers to the intensity of the exploitation of labor power, I would like to include here the extensiveness of this exploitation.* In other words, I would like to include in the analysis of this exploitation a geographical feature of labor power that is derived from this elasticity, namely that the labor force is not only exploited intensively but is also extracted extensively, geographically, spatially. Marx tells us that before becoming “active labor-power,” the worker was such “only *in potentia* [Latin: potentially]” (1950, p. 146).

In a similar vein, the Italian philosopher Paolo Virno (2015) scrutinizes the interrupted temporalities in capitalist modes of accumulation through Marx’s notion of labor power. He stresses that one of the novelties of capitalism stems from the way it treats the actual/potential dichotomy (Virno, 2015, pp. 163-164). According to Virno, this categorical pair takes on an economic meaning that can be found in the way that total production is associated with actual or potential skills. He defines labor power as “pure potentiality” (Virno, 2015, p. 162). Virno (2015, p. 145) identifies the paradox between potentiality and actuality as the root of all history, and as a discrepancy that “attains extraordinary empirical, pragmatic and economic signifi-

* The notion of “elastic potencies” is taken from the Bulgarian translation (Marx, 1950) of *Capital*, Vol. 1. This notion is not present in the English translation, yet it appears in the German original (*elastische Potenzen*).

cance” in capitalist modes of production. For Virno, this is the *temporal paradox* of capitalism.

The specific skills contained in labor power, or, as Virno calls them, those “persistent not-now’s,” make it possible to situate movement within the interplay between labor as potentiality and labor as actuality (the moment of commoditization described by Mezzadra). As the French philosopher Pierre Macherey (2015) points out, productive power (in the singular) is “dynamic,” a movement, a “continuous process through which what exists at first as ‘potentiality’ is destined ... to realize itself ‘in action.’” Macherey posits that within the wage system, there is an inscribed process in which the capitalist pays for what “already is” (labor power) and reserves the right to use what “is not yet” (labor capacity). Viewed from the perspective of the notion of moving labor power, movement serves as the bridge linking the potentiality contained in labor power and its actuality – labor (productive force).

Movement thus becomes both the potency and actuality of capitalism. In other words, capitalist relations create the conditions under which, for someone to actualize their bodily power into labor power and labor power into labor (and therefore for the capitalist to make a profit), they must move. Today we are increasingly seeing how the cross-border movement of labor power is becoming a condition both for its own reproduction and for capital accumulation. Movement is therefore, on the one hand, a bodily capacity that can be actualized, turning it into labor power, and, on the other, a social space in which class antagonisms unfold. The latter can generally be thought of as centered around the conversion of bodily power into labor,

but also the other way round, from labor back into bodily power. These antagonisms are delineated in the context of the dual operation of fixing and freeing labor power within the framework of capitalist accumulation.

The concept of moving labor power allows us to step back from the immediacy of the work process and to take a bird's eye view of the movement between potentiality and actuality. In other words, this concept enables us not just to focus on the workplace, or on the immediate processes in the concrete production process, or, indeed, on the relationship between domestic labor and the workplace (as many feminist theorists of social reproduction do), but also to consider movement in terms of its transnational dimension (Ferguson & McNally, 2015). For example, if we go back to the “noisy sphere” (Marx, 1999, p. 123) of circulation and the market, we can trace how the state and capital negotiate these movements, which often involve a mass of people who do not belong to the sovereign, “civic body.” Is it possible to think of so-called “migrant struggles” – a concept deeply embedded in contemporary critical sociological and anthropological literature – from the perspective of potential labor? If so, what does this type of reading tell us about processes of social reproduction and production in an accelerated and hectic labor movement? And about the deceleration of the speed of labor movement?

This book traces various aspects of the tension between fixing and freeing of labor power, between potential and actual. The chapters that delve into the lives of Romanian and Bulgarian impoverished citizens working and living in metropolises such as Berlin and Munich will show how

freedom of movement – as a form of moving labor power – has developed in a way so as to temporarily fix labor power in actual labor, only to disperse it again in potential. This specific development is accompanied by an increasing reliance on subcontractors and labor fixers to secure employment and means of bodily reproduction such as shelters and food. Consequently, the struggles between capital and labor are replaced by struggles between labor and subcontractors, complicating those for a dignified life. Due to irregular wage payment, workers often disperse, freed by freedom of movement, to sell their labor power elsewhere. In Bulgaria, the asylum system captures and confines labor power in pockets of exclusion for long periods of time. The struggles of migrants kept in detention centers at the edge of the EU are only seemingly organized solely in opposition to border regimes. When we look closer, we see that these struggles actually aim at faster relocation from detention to reception centers, which will ultimately free those confined to escape towards labor markets deeper within the EU, essentially transforming them into labor power in motion, in potentia.

As with any other conceptual structure, I assume international migration to be a system of theoretical-ideological presuppositions that operates through the governance of its main categories, which are specific to their own time. In addition to the social changes that have produced the EU as a “free” space of austerity, I look at changes and shifts in the vocabularies used by different actors that inform and are being informed by migration apparatuses and the categories these apparatuses cultivate. I treat the application of these terms as weapons in ideological

debates (Skinner, 2002) that affect the construction and racialization of the different categories under conditions that call for physical movement to be harnessed as a means of social reproduction.

Navigating Through the Book, and a Note on Methodology

This book works through four main case studies of moving labor power.

Chapter 1 is about the crafting of “social benefit tourism” and its relation to freedom of movement. In 2013, when Germany and the UK were preparing to open their labor markets to citizens of Bulgaria and Romania – a prerequisite established by EU law – the migratory category of the “social benefit tourist” reemerged as an expression of the moral panic that accompanied the reconfiguration of welfare systems throughout the Union. The figure of the “social benefit tourist” – defined as someone who migrates to a state other than their own with the sole purpose of draining the welfare system – necessitated the creation of migration apparatuses that would be able to control and prevent the movement of the alleged scroungers. Public anxiety was produced: How was the migration of such populations to be controlled since they were entitled to the EU’s most celebrated right, that of freedom of movement? The chapter engages with different political craftpersons to demonstrate the ways in which freedom of movement was reconceptualized from an indispensable right of EU citizens to a mechanism of potential abuse of the welfare state.

I explore the conditions of labor and social reproduction of pauperized Bulgarian citizens residing in Germany, and trace the intensification of municipal repression and labor exploitation against the background of the above-mentioned reconceptualization.

Chapter 2 examines two dimensions of exercising one's freedom of movement that often go unnoticed: the role of states' repressive apparatus in controlling those who move freely, and the dispersive power of freedom of movement whose effect often precludes the development of organized struggles against overexploitation and repression. This chapter consists of two case studies: of a series of police checks against Bulgarian day laborers carried out in Munich during 2013 and 2014, and of the resistance attempted by Romanian laborers against subcontractors in Berlin in 2014. Ultimately, both cases speak about the struggles of postsocialist laborers, their friends, and supporters against overexploitation, state and municipal repression within the context of capitalist forms of migration. As we will see, these struggles developed around the demand to return exploitation to normal levels. They unfolded against the backdrop of Germany's actively engaged political movements advocating for the right to freedom of movement, and more specifically, for refugees' right to enter European spaces. The chapter, however, questions the liberating potential of freedom of movement, scrutinizing it from the perspective of a class whose life revitalization depends on that very same form of movement.

Chapter 3 brings us to the divide between "genuine refugees" and "economic migrants." I collapse these two categories into one and explore it as a coding mechanism

within the Common European Asylum System, which produces conditions of captivity and tames the movement of moving labor power into European labor markets. The divide is examined as a result of how the notion of violence is understood in classical liberalism, which differentiates between the “economic” and the “political.” Through a historical reading of the political and economic roots of this divide and its manifestation at one of the EU’s most heavily guarded borders – Bulgaria – this chapter grapples with one particular paradox of asylum systems. Whereas the notion of a “genuine refugee” seeks to obscure the relation of moving labor power – implying that refugees cannot be moving for economic reasons – the notion of the “economic migrant” seeks to overprivilege this relation, suggesting that “economic migrants” travel solely for economic reasons. Such paradoxes create conditions that compel states and border technicians to consistently try to capture the “economic migrants” and separate them from the “genuine refugees,” on the one hand. On the other hand, the notion of the “economic migrant” has been translated into the struggles of those crossing borders, who try to convince border technicians that they are not “economic migrants.”

Chapter 4 looks at the real effects of liberalism’s differentiation between the political and the economic, focusing on the procedures involved in state-led hunts for economic migrants. I investigate hunts that took place during attempted border crossings between Turkey and Bulgaria, as well as within one of the detention centers for “illegal aliens,” the Special Home for Temporary Accommodation of Foreigners in the town of Lyubimets near the Bulgari-

an-Turkish border. These hunts are ultimately about the filtering of “economic migrants” from “true refugees”; the “bogus” from the “genuine.” This long-established relationship of domination and hierarchy plays a crucial role in the resistance tactics employed by detainees, who seek to disassemble the logics that separate the economic from the political in order to be considered for asylum status. Self-harm and destruction of state property are some of the forms of struggle detainees resort to. Concurrently, entrepreneurs have found ways to commodify these struggles and turn them into profit. I demonstrate how an architectural company meticulously explores detainees’ resistance tactics in order to turn them into a source of profit for the company while simultaneously creating conditions for a “return-on-investment” for the state.

Methodologically, I approach these cases through a social-history lens that demonstrates the ideological assumptions and political theories crafting the category of the “social benefit tourist” and the “genuine refugee/economic migrant” divide. However, these political theories are not devoid of their social effects – on the contrary, I explore the ways in which they shape and are shaped by processes of migration when the latter has become the very means by which people strive to survive and to socially reproduce. This allows me to identify assumptions peculiar to each case, situating my analysis at the intersection between social history of political thought and social theory (Wood, 2011). Positioning myself at the intersection between theory and history, then, allows me to identify the knowledge constitution of the categories as they are presented to us at a particular historical moment.

I was able to examine the lives of those differentially categorized by migration apparatuses and to disentangle the categories outside of their apparent consistency through participant observation at various sites: in support groups for refugees and impoverished laborers; in the vicinity of reception centers for asylum seekers; in parks where illegalized people sleep and seek work; at self-organized homeless camps; on the road and on buses en route to various European cities; at labor markets for irregularized day laborers; at protests and rallies; at meetings for political mobilization. The theoretical and ideological predispositions under discussion here demonstrate how different forms of movements of labor power are shaped, and shed light on the production of the social relationships between those who travel and those who attempt to control their movement, as well as on the responses to political domination, the struggles and resistances that emerge and, in turn, feed back into the mechanisms of domination and control.

Various actors were studied in the above observations and conversations: from “great minds” who shape political theories of migration, to professionals who practice and shape the political life of these theories such as then-British Prime Minister David Cameron and then-Bulgarian Minister of Interior Tsvetan Tsvetanov, to border guards, municipal administrators, and architects who implement the ideologemes founded upon certain enduring political theoretical assumptions. The most important voice in this book, however, is that of the dominated themselves, who weaponize their own knowledge to resist the burdens of social reproduction imposed by capitalist forms of migration. In their struggles, we see

not only battles against life conditions but also attempts to dismantle and resist the ideologies that place them in a relation of domination. To understand these struggles, I approach them through the lens of labor power – that is, by untangling the production-reproduction-migration nexus, and looking at existing labor conditions, uneven access to housing and shelter, healthcare, retirement, human dignity. Throughout my research journey, I was pressed by my interlocutors to recognize that despite the state- and supranationally-crafted categories migrants fall into, they are still obliged to sell their capacities to labor. Although the term “labor power” was never uttered in our conversations and struggles, my interlocutors’ insistence that their lives cannot be reduced to borders, or their absence, has been a persistent part of my research and political experience.

To this day, academic discussions have focused either on the category of the refugee or on that of the labor migrant, but very rarely on their relation (cf. Kmak, 2015). This, in my view, is also an effect of the political-theoretical and ideological frameworks that comprehend particular movements. When we juxtapose these categories, we can identify anomalies and commonalities between them. This furthers our understanding of how the international movement of labor power takes place at the intersection between liberal political theories and in relation to capitalist forms of production and social reproduction. However, these narratives and philosophies are only a small part of these movements. They mostly crystallize when one encounters them directly at the moments of movement and their concrete unfolding.

It is hard to pinpoint exactly when I began to collect the data presented here. If I were to establish a chronological order for its institutionalized form, it would be in October 2013 – that is, the beginning of my doctoral research. It was then that I embarked on a journey to Munich, Germany, to research the daily lives of pauperized workers from Bulgaria there. However, by that time, I had already been long involved in political and social movements dealing with “migration.” This involvement itself brings about certain types of knowledge, but also structured assumptions prior to entering the field. This is why some of the data is from 2012. No research starts from scratch.

I spent six months between October 2013 and April 2014 in Munich, Germany. The timing of my fieldwork could not have been better. October was exactly three months before Germany had to open its labor markets to workers arriving from Bulgaria. Police violence, exclusion from shelters, discriminatory policies – all of these were employed by the German state and municipalities to do away with Bulgarian and Romanian impoverished citizens. During these six months, it became clear that researching the free movement of labor in the EU cannot be done at one site only. Forced by the ways in which labor power is doubly mobilized – for it is mobilized both by the ways capital operates spatially and by the necessity to reproduce oneself – my fieldwork in Germany took me eventually to Berlin and on a few bus trips between European cities. There, I had the chance to extend my understanding of what it means to be an EU pauperized moving labor power. I went back to Munich between October and December 2015 to trace the developments a year after the opening of

the labor markets and to conduct interviews that inform some of my conclusions.

A large portion of my fieldwork on the asylum system in Bulgaria was carried out between April 2014 and September 2014. This was the time when the Bulgarian government found a way to significantly decrease the number of border crossers from Turkey. In fact, what took place in Bulgaria was a microcosm of what would take place a year later throughout the EU: border fences, pushbacks, crowded camps, violence, emerging volunteer networks, returns to Turkey, framing of border crossers as economic migrants. I witnessed firsthand the aftershock effects of the “crisis” when integration programs in Bulgaria were halted and homelessness was produced on a large scale. These “aftershocks” have had great implications for the ways that labor power arriving via the asylum route travels further into European spaces. That is when it became evident just how unstable the access to means of social reproduction is in Bulgaria in general.

When I first started my research, the initial paradox I sought to address was the following: liberal philosophy defines free bodies, free subjects through their freedom to move (Kotef, 2015). However, what we observe is that liberal democracies use all possible means to prevent the movement of certain subjects. For me, back then, the key to this puzzle was to be found in the differentiation between refugees and economic migrants on an international scale, informing state policies in the field of migration. One of my questions upon starting some of my explorations in 2012 was: *What makes possible the persistence of this contradiction?* My initial approach was to contrast the

effects of a paradigm of “freedom of movement” on workers from Bulgaria with the migratory movements forced upon asylum seekers. Initially, I assigned each group to the respective categories of “economic” and “political” migrants (perhaps liberalism par excellence, though such an argument would be teleological?). Although some of these assumptions persisted, it became increasingly clear to me that the category of “social benefit tourist,” used to describe the subjects of freedom of movement, belongs to a new era in liberal democracies conditioned by austerity developments and rolling-back of welfare regimes as a source of social security.

Whereas freedom of movement is an ideal still upheld by liberal theorists and politicians, the turn that Europe took – namely, towards austerity – had to accommodate and create a new category of migration that was evading the imposed austerity combined with increasing levels of overexploitation. “Social benefit tourism,” real or not, belongs to a new definition of movement: its hidden potential to abuse the crumbling welfare systems. Some may object that asylum seekers themselves have often been framed as “welfare scroungers.” As we shall see in the following chapters, however, these two seemingly similar narratives are of a different order; their development accommodates different perspectives on the world we live in, and their constitution lies in different historical temporalities driven by specific understandings of what human cross-border movement entails. I quickly realized then that I had to focus on the political/economic divide within the asylum system and to extricate my analysis of the freely moving labor power from this dichotomy. This was done in order

to fully flesh out the stakes peculiar to the emergence of “social benefit tourism” as both a relation to capital and as a state strategy for controlling free movement.

If nothing more, I hope that this book will contribute to formulating a better understanding of the struggles that we are witnessing on various scales. After all, my decision to engage with the topics at hand stems from controversies, political debates, and conceptual tensions I engaged with prior and during the conducted research.

1

Under the Skin of Freedom of Movement

On February 3, 2015, the Bulgarian National Library in Sofia opened an exhibition organized by the Konrad Adenauer Foundation, which is associated with the center-right Christian Democratic Union of Germany.* Titled “The Iron Curtain,” this exhibition was part of a series of commemorative events held across the country under the motto “25 Years Free Bulgaria.” These events were conducted under the patronage of Bulgaria’s President at the time, Rossen Plevneliev, and Sofia Platform. Sofia Platform is a non-profit organization launched in 2011. Its membership includes key figures in Bulgarian politics associated with Bulgarian center-right political parties, European structures, and foundations.

As visitors entered the National Library on the day of Sofia Platform’s exhibition, they were forced to walk a trail of communist shaming. After passing through the library’s security gate and entering the main hall, one’s attention was immediately drawn to the large, almost billboard-like posters hung symmetrically on the walls. German shepherd dogs, barbed-wire fences, prisoners, and the stern faces of border *militsiya* stared at visitors from these posters. Right beneath the posters and within glass showcases, stories of border murders, anathematized accounts of

* Some of the reflections in this and the next chapter have been published in Apostolova (2018a).

brave border guards, revelations about communist border infrastructures, and border newspapers invited visitors to take a close look at the “cruel and inhumane” operations of the socialist fortress Bulgaria.

The exhibition aimed at “making sense of the recent communist past” by linking it to issues of movement and evoking images of hierarchical divisions within the institutionalization of the communist border. “25 Years Free Bulgaria” highlighted incomplete statistics of border-related deaths that occurred between 1945 and 1990, depicting state socialism’s border as if it were stuck in a static temporality. Although Rossen Plevneliev himself was absent, the ceremony commenced with a speech he had prepared. In it, the President described the evils of the border’s past in two directions: firstly, as separating the country from the “free world,” and secondly, as a social obstacle for those attempting to cross into or out of that same world. These, according to the President, were the true “confirmation of the inhumane nature of the totalitarian regime.” Both a representative of the Konrad Adenauer Foundation and a Bulgarian patriot who took the floor after the President’s speech was read out, emphasized the “illiberal” nature of the borders of the past, stressing that these borders were oriented not solely towards the regime’s external enemies but more so towards its own ones – towards those attempting to escape the Iron Curtain. “Those who died trying to reach the free world are not traitors of the homeland... they have contributed to the liberation of the homeland... They traveled to participate in the common liberation movements of the enslaved European nations.” Enslavement, homeland, and liberation are all common tropes when it

comes to communism. In the above line of thought, we see an overlap, an attempt to synchronize movement as a political expression (“liberation of the homeland”) and movement in its physical dimensions. These two elements became compatible.

Postsocialist subjects are interpellated into accepting that restrictions on outward movement from the national territory constitute a violation of their rights and freedoms par excellence. Anti-communist discourses and the ills of immobilization overlap to produce subjects who assume two interconnected truths. Firstly, that communism is a reality that presupposes severe restrictions on citizens’ outward mobility, and secondly, that to live in a free world means to have unrestricted mobility.

Liberty and the restriction of movement exist in opposition, we are told. We are also told that freedom of movement neutralizes immobility. It gives us the means to move unrestrictedly, granting us the freedom to choose where to stay and where to go; where to work and where to rest. Immobility limits these choices; it binds us to the crude particularities of an unfree space. Mobility eliminates the possibility of being constrained by these particularities, seemingly opening up a world with an infinite array of possibilities – some better, others worse. Our historical present is preoccupied with human immobilization. Today, we often invoke human misery when we see images of bodies washed up on the Mediterranean shores, or the restrictions imposed on bodies in the occupied Palestinian territories, or indeed in asylum and detention centers, where immobility lives not only through its physicality but also through the imprison-

ment of the body in a cycle of repetition and everyday monotony. Immobility is truly shocking.

How are we to view immobility from the perspective of mobility, however? Human immobilization has informed much of the social sciences regarding regimes of deportability (De Genova, 2002), “gradation” of statuses (Goldring et al., 2009), its role in constituting new ways of “being political” (Isin, 2002), enactment of citizenship by non-citizens (Andrijasevic & Anderson, 2009; Isin & Saward, 2013), and indeed its role in sustaining binaries such as legality/illegality (Squire, 2011). The purpose of this chapter is to shift our attention towards the prerequisites underlying a subject’s unrestricted mobility – the EU citizen, the legal migrant, and the un-deportable – and to explore violence from this perspective. I also shift attention away from the emphasis on struggles of migrating bodies as expressing and being oriented towards citizenship (Nyers, 2015).

Engaging in a critical discussion on freedom of movement can help us move beyond a framework that readily accepts an overlap between migrants’ struggles and their pursuit of citizenship (Barbero, 2012) – more specifically, it can help us sustain a discussion on the reproduction of labor power outside the realm of citizenship. After all, the pauperized workers from Bulgaria in Germany and elsewhere throughout the EU – some of the main collaborators in this study – do have EU citizenship rights, and hence, social protection and labor rights, at least on paper. An analysis of the apparent disconnect, of the gap between the presence and absence of the right to move will hopefully provide a new perspective in our understanding

of freedom of movement as a distinct historical form of migration that has superseded the welfare state as a means of subsistence; a process that has developed within the framework of the proliferation of free markets as the only possible alternative for our bright futures.

Freedom of Movement and Its False Utopian Pretense

In the introductory remarks to a debate held at the International Union of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences World Congress in 2013, the authors assert, “But ‘free movement of people’ goes well beyond questions of labour migration, and opens for questions about issues as diverse as luxury tourism and its ecological consequences, the administration of welfare with or without welfare states and the future of citizenship” (Abram et al., 2017, p. 124). They make this remark while emphasizing that the debates regarding free movement in 2015 were even more pressing than in 2013.

Such rhetorical devices draw attention to the so-called “long summer of migration” (Kasperek & Speer, 2015) when thousands of refugees defied “Fortress Europe.” Freedom of movement is invoked only when its absence is discussed. It seems that when exploring freedom of movement, we inevitably situate it within a moral framework that judges whether we are for or against it. When we encode freedom of movement within such moralizing discourses, its analysis is inevitably limited to attempted immobilization processes and procedures on the part of states and supra-

national structures, but it tells us nothing about the lives lived under the conditions of free movement.

In the above-mentioned debate, the question was posed as follows: Is free movement a utopian idea? The motion under discussion in that debate, “The free movement of people around the world would be utopian,” was opposed by Shahram Khosravi and Nicolas De Genova (the free movement of people around the world would not be utopian) and defended by Bela Feldman-Bianco and Noel Salazar (the free movement of people around the world would be utopian) (Abram et al., 2017). Formulated in this way, the motion provoked a discussion not only about free movement but also about utopia. Khosravi (in Abram et al., 2017, p. 130) constructs free movement as a “utopia gone wrong” for the people we see struggling to cross a border (the illegalized, asylum seekers, internally displaced). Only a “small category of humanity ... enjoy unrestricted mobility rights,” he goes on to point out (in Abram et al., 2017, p. 130). The proposition to view freedom of movement as a right (or utopia?) that is already achieved by some, coupled with the implicit assumption that this same right is “enjoyable,” cancels not only what freedom of movement entails under capitalist forms of organization but a whole lot of relations out of it. As I will try to demonstrate, the contemporary form of this right is a relation that accelerates the speed of labor power’s ability to be sold and bought across national borders. To paraphrase Costas Douzinas, (2000; 2007) – who speaks about the destiny of human rights in a globalized postsocialist condition – freedom of movement has become an ideology after the end of ideologies, that is, we can think

of it and attempt to define it only via its supposed opposite, never in itself and as a definite relation.

Nicholas De Genova (in Abram et al., 2017, p. 143) takes a different approach towards utopia. Drawing on Friedrich Engels, the anthropologist concludes that utopias may be insufficient, but they are necessary. In this way, De Genova rejects the idea of free movement as a potential good (as utopias are potentially good, but hard to achieve) and insists, perhaps too closely to the classical liberalism of Thomas Hobbes, that to be human is to be able to move freely. By reversing the narrative, the author contends that what is utopian about the free-to-move/not-free-to-move configuration is, in his words, “the absurd fantasy of territorially defined so-called ‘national’ states” imposing and policing borders that restrict the most fundamental human trait, the freedom to move: “What is Utopian is the statist delusion of border policing ensuring a comprehensible control over geopolitical space; our freedom, however, is not Utopian at all” (De Genova in Abram et al., 2017, p. 145).

I will not contest that an objection to such a view of freedom of movement can come only and solely from accusations of “blowing Utopian pipe dreams,” as De Genova puts it (in Abram et al., 2017, p. 145). Instead, I prefer to approach the questions at hand in an a-transhistorical fashion. This book insists on the historical character of freedom of movement and our ability to concretize its practices that produce inequalities and racializing structures. While De Genova rightly asserts that freedom of movement is an objective reality, I have doubts about it being an a priori aspect of human nature. What I am interested in is tracing freedom of movement as a capitalist rela-

tion from the point of view of those who are mobilized by it as a vital necessity for life revitalization. De Genova's call upon critical social scientists to theorize the struggles of the illegalized vis-à-vis struggles for freedom of movement stops short of fully addressing what the historical form of movement we are witnessing within the EU – namely, freedom of movement – has meant for millions who are free to move. This is my endeavor here: to scrutinize the very concrete forms of what it means to be labor power freed to move via the notion of freedom of movement at our historical moment.

The Crafting of Social Benefit Tourists

For a group of individuals to be perceived as “migrants” requires the emergence of a migration apparatus that captures a specific form of movement and moulds it according to major political conjunctures, conflicts, ideological tensions, and discursive formations. The migration apparatus, in turn, necessitates the naming of a category so as to consolidate institutions that govern movement in relation to labor markets, states, and supranational formations. The argument presented below concerns these processes.

The people who would eventually fall into the category of the “social benefit tourist” are entitled to freedom of movement and hold EU citizenship rights. In the production of this migratory category, however, we saw how the migration apparatus was eclipsed by the welfare state. As the migration apparatus was withdrawn as an institutional setting from this form of migration – there

are no longer any borders, visa requirements, or barbed-wire fences attempting to prevent movement – the welfare state and the labor market have become the sites where relations and conflicts of moving labor power play out more explicitly. The welfare state and the labor market are the sites where the subjects whose movement has been freed are controlled, gendered, racialized, and declassed most explicitly.

It is hard to determine exactly when the figure of the “welfare abuser” came into being, as it occurs across a wide range of time and space scales. However, scientific research into welfare magnet theories intensified in the aftermath of the welfare policy reforms in Western Europe and the United States following the turn to neoliberalism (Allard & Danziger, 2000; Borjas, 1999; Ehata & Seeleib-Kaiser, 2017; Lehman, 1993). Reappearing from time to time, the figure of the “welfare abuser” notably resurfaced with the two waves of accession of Central and Eastern European states to the EU in 2004 and 2007. In 2003, when the Treaty of Accession involving ten nations was signed, Polish citizens were singled out as potential abusers of Western welfare states. In 2013, the “social benefit tourist” reemerged as a figure of concern among EU politicians because of the impending opening of all EU labor markets to Bulgarian and Romanian nationals following their accession to the Union in 2007. That year such fears intensified, as Europeans were now living in conditions marked by the 2008 global financial crisis, with the looming possibility of Brexit and with influential political voices demanding a reconceptualization of what a welfare state should be. While in 2003 the figure of the

“social benefit tourist” turned out to be ineffective in generating political changes within the Union, its aftershocks in 2013 had large implications for the EU’s redistribution processes through social security schemes and income.

In 2013, the “social benefit tourist” was a category in the (re)making, and its meaning was crafted on the assumption that a person moves from one EU state to another with the sole purpose of claiming “undeserved” social benefits. This category was created as a label for potential crimes against the welfare state. It is not written in law, yet its discursive reemergence has created space for struggles both within and outside the legal systems of the European Union. The European Commission has reacted to its discursive crafting by writing into EU law mechanisms aimed at potentially mitigating the effects of such “benefit tourism.”

The emergence of “benefit tourism” was in fact only possible because of the persistent double exclusion from social citizenship that EU migrants must endure – both in their countries of origin and in the countries of arrival (Deneva, 2023). Moreover, as anthropologist Neda Deneva’s (2023) important inquiry into practices of “benefit fraud” demonstrates, such practices can be interpreted both as a complex survival strategy and a social critique of an economic order that marginalizes and pauperizes a large population of EU citizens. Yet, while in 2013 the production of the category of “benefit tourists” focused on the receiving state as a potential victim, the social conditions and access to means of social reproduction in the countries of origin did not have any weight in the definition of “social benefit tourists.” Back in 2012, Bulgaria, along with Romania, were the EU countries with the lowest social protection expenditure per inhabit-

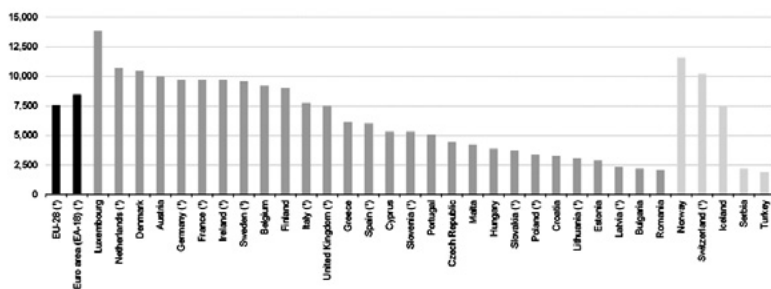


Figure 1. Expenditure on social protection in PPS per inhabitant, 2012

Source: Archive:Social protection statistics - Statistics Explained (europa.eu)

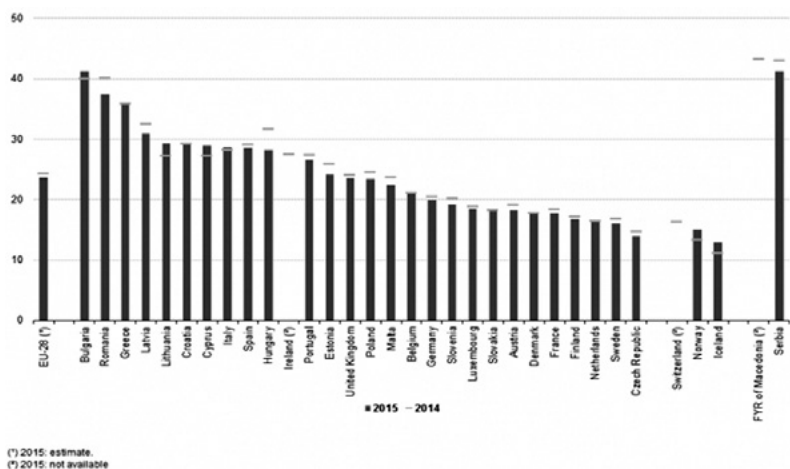


Figure 2. People at risk-of-poverty or social exclusion rate, 2014 and 2015

Source: Archive:Social protection statistics - Statistics Explained (europa.eu)

ant. At the same time, Bulgaria was the EU country with the highest risk of poverty or social exclusion.

The category of the “social benefit tourist” gained prominence in 2013 in the run-up to the complete opening of all European Union labor markets to Bulgarian and Romanian citizens, some twenty-four years after the fall of the Berlin Wall. Its production corresponded to the drastic restructuring of the meaning and functions of the welfare state, one of the main guarantors of labor-power reproduction (see Hansson, 1979). Within this cycle of welfare restructuring, the ability to move quickly and widely increasingly represents a major possibility for the reproduction of labor power. The reemergence of the “social benefit tourist” in 2013 had certain implications for the differentiation between the notions of economic and political violence, as approached in the field of European asylum and solidified in the early 1990s.

The “social benefit tourist” is a post-binary migratory category. If in the economic/political migrant binary, as I will demonstrate, we can see a reconciliation of the two central notions of the political and the economic under liberalism – that of the political being violent and that of the economic being voluntary and violence-free – the “social benefit tourist” exemplifies a new configuration of powers with respect to the notion of violence. If the asylum system defines violence, and therefore the right to protection, within the framework of a particular territory (e.g., through the concept of a safe country), in the case of the “social benefit tourist” a different type of definition is at play. Here, violence is inherent in the subject who moves from one territory to another and in the potential

for abuse that this subject represents. Violence is not defined through territorial (non)belonging. It is defined as violence against the welfare state. In other words, the subject assumes the appearance of the violence that is hidden in the withdrawing welfare state. On the one hand, the subject escapes that same state. On the other hand, however, “social benefit tourists” are crafted in a way that suggests they have the potential to harm the welfare state in the country of arrival.

The category of the “social benefit tourist” was widely used by Western media and politicians in 2013 also within the political context that defined Europe’s embrace of austerity. The political strategy of its crafting was to exclude certain groups of people on the move from the possibility to claim state benefits in a member state other than their own. The conflict inherent in this category is one that unfolds in a nexus where those deemed “economically inactive” are punished for that (supposed) inactiveness (Verschueren, 2014). In 2013, the following question emerged: Are persons X, who are from member state Y, allowed to claim state benefits in member state Z, where they work/reside/are unemployed/are economically inactive?

This question was provoked by the opening of the labor markets in Germany and the UK to Bulgarian and Romanian citizens. The proposition that 29 million Bulgarians and Romanians (the total number of the population of the two countries at the time) would flood labor markets and strain social benefit systems was widely used by media outlets across the EU. David Cameron, for example, undertook the challenge to renegotiate the UK’s position in Europe in order to prevent EU migrants from accessing

benefits. This was the first time that Brexit became an actual possibility. In Germany, the battle against benefit tourism was primarily over claiming child benefits. Yet, the country has openly led a battle to cut benefits in other spheres of social reproduction as well. The pre-election debates in the Federal Republic in 2017 were dominated by concerns over social benefits after Chancellor Angela Merkel expressed support for the proposal that EU migrants whose children remain in their member state of origin should not avail themselves of Germany's otherwise generous welfare system. The Western debates surrounding "benefit tourism" also reverberated in Bulgaria.

A common joke circulating in the country at the time depicted emigration as the best escape strategy amid the political, social, and economic crises. The joke went like this:

Question: What are the possible exits from the crisis?

Answer: Terminal 1 and Terminal 2.

In the Bulgarian public sphere, Sofia Airport's Terminal 2 is often referenced as a symbol of potential escape from the social misery that has plagued the country in recent decades. Terminal 2 has come to signify a symbolic structure that may be seen as prophetic: foretelling one's future as a subject compelled to sell their labor power abroad. The cartoon below represents the two protests that swept across Bulgaria in 2013. They were socially and chronologically differentiated as the "winter" and "summer" protests (Ivancheva, 2013; Rone, 2017; Stoyanova, 2018; Tsoneva, 2017; Vajsova, 2013, 2018).



Photo 1. The caricature captures Terminal 2. In the line on the left is a protester from the February events in 2013. On the right is a protester from the June mobilization, which was composed mostly of the self-proclaimed creative class.

Author: Christo Komarnitski; Source: https://t.ly/pl_N_

The winter protests, which erupted in February 2013 over abnormally high electricity bills, were depicted by social media users as the struggles of the “toothless” and “tasteless” poor, who were protesting against rising prices, job losses, and a decline in social security. The summer protests, sparked by the appointment of controversial media mogul Delyan Peevski as director of the State Agency for National Security in June 2013, quickly turned into struggles against the oligarchic and mafioso structures in the country. Claimed by representatives of the middle and upper classes, the protests demanded more civilization, more Europe, and real, European-type capitalism.

These protests created a deep chasm along class lines (Tsoneva, 2019). Attempting to resist the racialization of Bulgarians as structured by Western politicians, the self-proclaimed “creative class” – usually associated with people who live in downtown Sofia and are highly mobile transnationally – racialized, in turn, their “poor” co-nationals and articulated them through the figure of the undeserving migrant. To break the chains of racialization, some representatives of this segment of the population blamed the poor for Bulgaria’s non-European appearance. In an open letter to the European countries, written by participants in the summer protests, we read:

Dear European Countries,

You’ve always complained about us, Bulgarians, not being ready for the European Union. You elect parties in your local parliaments, who make a strong stand against immigration. You don’t want uneducated and poor people to come and abuse your welfare states. You are looking at the tip of the iceberg, but failing to grasp the whole of it.

Not all Bulgarians are thieves and criminals. The majority of immigrants who come to your countries may not be the best people, but they are not the typical Bulgarian. Some of them go to study abroad and work hard, but most (the ones you see) are people who have nothing to lose and immigration is an easy decision for them. The true Bulgarians, the educated working Bulgarians are different. Many stay in Bulgaria and build careers. They start families and try to provide for them. They start new businesses.

They create. But the government gets in their way.
(Ingilizov, 2013)

We see that the political strategy of differentiating “them” from “us” employed the image of the poor immigrants, suggesting that their decision to immigrate does not generate value – in contrast to “typical” and “hard-working” Bulgarians who produce value in host states. Poor immigrants’ freedom of movement is articulated as abuse, and social benefits are presented as the opposite of productivity. These articulations were not random, however. They had been in the making for some time in places outside Bulgaria. The class chasm mentioned above is not exclusive to the participants in the summer 2013 protests.

The protests in Bulgaria coincided with the attempt of central political figures in Europe to hinder the movement of pauperized citizens from Bulgaria. In 2013, for the first time in several years, the right to freedom of movement – one of the main pillars of the EU project – came under serious threat from some of the most powerful figures in the world, such as David Cameron (UK) and Angela Merkel (Germany), and, implicitly, from representatives of the European Commission itself. This threat came about because of the impending opening of all European Union labor markets to Bulgarian and Romanian workers scheduled for January 2014. Simultaneously to the opening of the labor markets, two debates converged, transforming the very notion of what constitutes an internal EU border. On the one hand, there was the discussion about Bulgaria’s im/possibility to join the Schengen Area because of its poor performance in securing the external border of the

Union. On the other, Germany intensified its demands for Bulgaria to enforce stricter control over the outward movement of its citizens. Movement and social benefits, both of EU citizens and third-country nationals, intertwined and drove these discussions.

The debates over migration from Eastern to Western Europe were couched in terms of obligation and abuse: the *obligation* of the poorer member states to keep within their borders both their deprived citizens and third-country nationals who enter European space, and to take measures against those who *abuse* freedom of movement. The German Interior Minister at the time, Hans-Peter Friedrich, asserted,

The right to freedom of movement means that every citizen of the EU can remain in any member state when he or she studies or works there. Any EU citizen who fulfils these conditions is welcome here. But those who only come to receive social welfare, and thus abuse the freedom of movement – they must be effectively prevented from doing so. (Friedrich, 2013)

Friedrich warned the Bulgarian authorities that their inability to prevent the migration of “illegal” migrants towards Germany would result in Bulgaria’s eternal impossibility to become part of the Schengen Area.* In response, on March 7, 2013, Tsvetan Tsvetanov, Bulgaria’s Minister of

* Bulgaria joined Schengen by air and sea in March 2024. Despite its excellency in protecting the Union’s external border through push-backs, it took the country fourteen years to be recognized as a (partial) Schengen member.

Interior at the time, blamed those same “benefit tourists” for being the main reason behind Western Europe’s reluctance to welcome Bulgaria into Schengen. He pledged that the Bulgarian government would take measures against this “social benefit tourism” and that decisive actions would be implemented to prevent it. The significance of the Bulgarian border multiplied overnight. In addition to the country’s role in protecting the EU from *outside* intruders, it now also had to protect the Union from *inside* intruders, from “its own.”

David Cameron had even more to say:

But of course people are most concerned with the actions we are taking now [against benefit tourism]. We are changing the rules so that no one can come to this country and expect to get out-of-work benefits immediately; we will not pay them for the first three months. If after three months an EU national needs benefits – we will no longer pay these indefinitely. They will only be able to claim for a maximum of six months unless they can prove they have a genuine prospect of employment. We are also toughening up the test which migrants who want to claim benefits must undergo. This will include a new minimum earnings threshold. If they don’t pass that test, we will cut off access to benefits such as income support. Newly arrived EU jobseekers will not be able to claim housing benefits. If people are not here to work – if they are begging or sleeping rough – they will be removed. They will then be barred from re-entry for 12 months, unless they can

prove they have a proper reason to be here, such as a job. We are also clamping down on those who employ people below the minimum wage. They will pay the price with a fine of up to £20,000 for every under-paid employee – more than four times the fine today. (Cameron, 2013)

We should not confine our analysis of such hegemonic strategies to this particular moment in time; instead, we should connect them to the long-term racialization and peripheralization of Eastern Europe (Baker, 2018; Boatcă, 2006; Lewicki, 2023) and to larger “racial structures” (Bonilla-Silva, 2022) operating within the European context. In the discourse above, the “social benefit tourist” was both classed and raced. These two processes are not simply counterposed. Recent studies have highlighted how whiteness and the racialization of Eastern Europeans operate to reproduce capitalist hierarchical relations (Krivonos, 2023), and how subaltern peripheries are produced through “racial barriers” limiting the extension of liberal social protections (Kalmar, 2023). From the very beginning, the crafting of the “social benefit tourist” relied on the theoretical assumption that movement of the poor contains the potential for abuse of the welfare state. Further on, we will see how such “racial grammars” (Bonilla-Silva, 2012) normalizing the “social benefit tourist” across geographical and classed spaces, produced very concrete effects in the migration, labor, and social reproduction experiences of pauperized Bulgarian and Romanian citizens.

While the production of “social benefit tourists” was underway, there was a notable increase in the number

of EU court cases concerned with the boundaries of EU citizenship rights, and primarily with their erosion in the context of the relationship between national states and EU migrating citizens. Perhaps the most famous cases were those of Dano (2014) and Alimanovic (2015). Both cases concerned the right to member states' (Germany) benefits under EU law. The judgments rendered by the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) in these two cases were in sharp contrast to previous judgments. Legal scholars argue (Shuibhne, 2015) that in both cases there was an explicit redefinition of EU citizenship – from being defined on the basis of an “individual-centered approach” to becoming “linked to the market economy” of the Union. The CJEU ultimately ruled that economically inactive migrants cannot claim benefits. Behind the code “economic inactivity,” however, we see a hidden process that does not necessarily lead to “unemployment,” but to concealed employment (discussed in the next section).

The above-mentioned judgments are not contradictory to the definition of EU citizenship. Freedom of movement is a relation based on a particular understanding of the labor market, and it therefore constructs its legitimate participants within the quadruple relation between state, race, capital, and movement. What is new in this relation is the emergence of “social benefits” as a political stake in late neoliberalism’s redefinition of welfare as deserved not necessarily by the “needy” but by those whose work is officially registered. As Neda Deneva (2012) demonstrates, the redefinition of welfare within the EU over the past decades has triggered a process where reliance on financial support has shifted from welfare to kinfare insti-

tutions. That, in turn, not only affects the present but also contributes to the future social insecurities EU migrants must endure. The category of the “social benefit tourist” corresponds to a specific historical process, where movement has been “freed” and where social Europe has given way to a Europe of austerity. Freedom of movement has developed as a labor regulation regime embedded within specific redistributive practices involving welfare and wages (Amelina et al., 2019; Riedner, 2018).

Initially resistant to the attempts to control freedom of movement by restricting access to social benefits, the European Commission gradually changed its position on the rights of EU citizens. Marianne Thyssen, a Belgian politician of the Christian Democratic and Flemish Party (CD&V) who served as EU Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs, Skills and Labor Mobility between 2014 and 2019, worked actively to implement some of the proposed measures against “social benefit tourism.” She insisted on a requirement that migrants must prove a minimum of three months of economic activity in a particular EU country to be eligible for benefits in that country (The Journal, 2016). In effect, Thyssen’s proposal eliminated the possibility for migrants to rely on their previous work experience as a basis for claiming benefits.

At the same time, the Migration Observatory (MO) at the University of Oxford commented on the emergence of the “benefit tourist” category in the following way:

The lack of an agreed definition about who counts as a benefits ‘tourist’ makes it very hard to discuss the subject with any real clarity. One definition would be

someone who travels with the primary objective of acquiring benefits, but there are no useful data on motivations of this sort, and it would be difficult to devise an accurate means of collecting such data.

Non-EU migrants do not have recourse to public funds until they have been resident in the UK for 5 years, so benefits alone are not realistic as the primary motivation for non-EU migrants to travel to the UK.

So the easiest way of beginning to identify the potential scale of ‘benefits tourism’ as an issue is to look at the use of benefits by EU migrants. (MO, 2014)

The above is a reflexive exercise in setting the boundaries of what qualifies as a specific population. This exercise does not necessarily have to arrive at a definite outcome. It merely needs to commence in order for us to imagine the existence of the population in question; to conceptually trace the border of that population; what constitutes it; who is to be included within it. It is an exercise in the declaration of the existence of a population.

The Pauperized Are Free to Be Self-Employed

In the immediate aftermath of the fall of the Berlin Wall, traveling from Romania and Bulgaria was very similar to what asylum seekers experience at the borders of Europe today: fraught with risks and reasons for being apprehended. As unemployment and inflation skyrocketed in the 1990s, many Bulgarian citizens set out on a journey to

Greece, Canada or Western Europe to look for employment, engage in illicit trade in excise goods, and seek ways to escape the social misery that was rapidly engulfing their country. During that period, however, Bulgarian citizens did not have the right to travel freely within Europe. Bulgaria and Romania were the only EU candidate countries from the former socialist bloc placed on the Schengen visa blacklist by the Justice and Home Affairs Ministers of the European Community – hence, “Bulgarian citizens needed a mandatory visa for short-term entries into all Schengen countries” (Kovacheva, 2014, p. 175). This requirement was lifted in 2001, when they were granted visa-free entry and three months visa-free residence in Schengen countries.

Unable to move freely within the European Union, Bulgarians resorted to other, creative methods to escape. Ivan, for example, one of the most persistent participants in protest mobilizations in Munich (discussed in the next chapter), recalls flirting with the idea of working for the garbage collection company operating at the Bulgarian-Serbian border in the mid-1990s as a means to leave the country. This idea eventually materialized, and one night, he crossed the border dressed as a garbage collector riding on the back of a garbage truck, “showing them [the Bulgarian authorities] the finger” (personal communication, November 2013).

This type of illegalized crossing into European countries often resulted into more permanent immigration precisely because of the risks of engaging in criminalized travel. However, the situation eased over time. The decision on the accession of Bulgaria and Romania to the EU was taken

in 1999 and ratified in 2000, which, in turn, granted their citizens the right to travel to the EU without a visa for up to ninety days, with exceptions for visits for work or study. Access to social security was part of these restrictions. But as borders are always porous, thousands found their way into the EU for work purposes as well.

The year 2007, when Bulgaria and Romania joined the EU, brought about a peculiar situation for their citizens. While the removal of visa requirements facilitated travel, it did not bring about the final stage of European integration. According to EU law, there is a seven-year grace period for old member states before they are obliged to fully open their labor markets to new members.* For Bulgarian and Romanian laborers working in Germany, this meant that despite their EU citizen status, they still had to apply for a work permit to be regularly employed. Alternatively, they could opt for self-employed status or work irregularly. The combination of regular and irregular migration (Mancheva, 2017) led to the creation of what can be described as *regular labor on hold*. This continuum, where irregularity and self-employment often interacted and therefore one's employment status could easily change, is similar to the main aspects of what De Genova (2005, p. 234) describes as “an active process of inclusion through illegalization” in the US context.

In our case, however, these processes involved loss of regular status, as many workers could become “false self-employed” overnight. This irregularization was the ef-

* In the case of Bulgaria and Romania, Germany and the UK waited until the last possible moment, whereas countries like Greece, Spain, Denmark, Hungary, and Portugal lifted restrictions already in 2009.

fect of a complex set of bureaucratic requirements related to self-employed status, such as having to submit business plans and invoices, which is difficult for someone who does not speak German. As Lisa Riedner, a key figure in grassroots political organizing in Munich, suggested,

In my experience, people we worked with did not like being self-employed and often closed their businesses again soon. Or didn't even open one. One reason is that submitting tax declarations is complicated, you basically need a professional for it. And if you don't do it, the *Finanzamt* will estimate the tax you have to pay, and this will be pretty high. (Personal communication, March 2016)

According to Julia, another activist from Munich, people often forgot to do the paperwork, or even did not know that they had to do it, which eventually placed them in the category of "fake self-employed" (personal communication, March 2013). Yet they were not threatened by deportation, as in the case analyzed by De Genova (2005), and therefore did not go underground – which, strategically speaking, often translates into staying away from a certain labor market.* Conversely, the moving pauperized dealt with "irregularity" within the framework of freedom

* This is relative. Deportation of EU citizens is possible. Perhaps the most telling case is the deportation of thousands of Bulgarian and Romanian Roma from France in 2010 (see Barbulescu, 2012; Nacu, 2012). The so-called voluntary returns, which are a widespread practice regarding Bulgarian citizens in Europe, have also been discussed in terms of actual coercion and are considered by some scholars to be a form of deportation (Webber, 2011).

of movement by moving quickly to another labor market, not necessarily in the same country or city.

The self-employed in Germany are a highly heterogeneous group. As Henning Lohmann and Silvia Lubert (2004) demonstrate, they range from highly skilled professionals to low-skilled manual workers. The authors deal specifically with the so-called “successful self-employed,” focusing on those whose characteristics are largely determined by a middle-class position within a national context. Analyzing the composition of the self-employed in Germany as compared to that in the United States, the authors conclude that:

The notion that the largest part of self-employment in Germany is not precarious is further confirmed by a second quality measure: job stability, which in self-employment is usually higher than in dependent employment. Comparing Germany and the United States, one can observe that this holds true for both countries, but especially for Germany ... Here, 78 percent of the newly self-employed enter into stable jobs, while the share in the United States amounts to only 41 percent. (Lohmann & Lubert, 2004, p. 39)

Self-employment is predominantly studied within the framework of entrepreneurship and human capital in contemporary economics (see, inter alia, Caliendo et al., 2014; Cramer et al., 2002; Sarasvathy, 2004). What is important in this framework is that the coercion stemming from objective reasons that lead individuals to fall into the category of self-employment, as is the case with

pauperized labor power on the move, is overlooked as a possibility.* Conversely, the economists' approach to such an understanding of self-employment is largely psychologized and some "natural" human characteristics are usually cited as determining both entry (successful self-employed) into and exit (unsuccessful self-employed) from self-employment status.

There is another side to this relation that can be traced within Foucault's *homo economicus*. Self-employment operates within a framework where competition is the prevailing governmental logic. The notion of *homo economicus* is useful in this sense, as it depicts a process of subjectification aimed at establishing a "man of enterprise and production" (Foucault, 2008, p. 147). Most of the Bulgarian pauperized self-employed are legally classified as enterprises; individualized enterprises at that. They are firms consisting of a sole proprietor. As Jason Read (2022, p. 317) demonstrates, *homo economicus* fills an important gap, that of the opposition between labor and capital, and thereby eliminates the possibility for struggle between the two: "The terms 'labor' and 'human capital' intersect, overcoming in terminology their longstanding opposition; the former becomes the activity and the latter becomes the effects of the activity, its history." The pauperized Bulgarian self-employed in Germany are both labor power and entrepreneurs without capital, without means of production. Their sole asset is their capacity to work, hence their labor power must be commodified. Legally, however, they are treated as finan-

* Self-employment is often celebrated as clearing the way for the pursuit of one's creative capabilities. In the case of Bulgaria, it has created a dividing line capable of sustaining class racism (Nikolova, 2014).

cial enterprises that are obligated to pay taxes as a firm. Their relationship with social security regimes is ambiguous, subject to ongoing negotiations (Vogel & Dribbusch, 2009).

What self-employment reveals in our case is a class process that maintains capital's relation proper: the self-employed under examination here own only their labor power and must sell it on a market. They do not own any means of production (such as laptops, trucks, or construction tools). They enter the market bare. The extraction of their labor provides them with a wage (at least on paper) and generates a surplus for capitalist entities. Here, production accumulates wealth for a capitalist who does not belong to the enterprise of the self-employed. The enterprise of the self-employed consists solely of labor power. Being self-employed is an effect of people moving as labor power and entering a social and legal framework where they are forced into acquiring such a status because of the intricate connection between migration and labor apparatuses. This connection can be seen, for example, in the seven-year restriction on labor from new member states, and the promotion of self-employment as part of the flexibilization of labor laws in Germany (Eichhorst & Marx, 2011). As Maria Kontos (2010) shows, there was a shift in Germany around the 1980s, during which the country started promoting self-employment among non-privileged groups. This shift was reinforced in 1986 with the introduction of the so-called "bridging allowance scheme," benefitting unemployed, and further solidified by the Red-Green coalition that passed the Act to Promote Self-Employment (*Gesetz zur Förderung der Selbständigkeit*) in 1999 (see Vogel & Dribbusch, 2009, footnote 43).

Suspending Movement Within the Framework of Free Movement: Municipal Violence

Employers and municipalities did not oppose the production of irregularity from above and often contributed to the precarization of self-employed Bulgarian citizens. While I was in Munich, discontinuation of self-employment – which prior to January 2014 meant losing the right to employment and hence reverting to the realm of irregular labor – often occurred because of the complex paperwork involved in maintaining self-employment status. This was complicated further by workers' lack of German language skills and limited access to legal assistance in pursuing their rights.

Day laborers from Bulgarian Turkish and Roma communities residing in Munich grappled with challenges in both the production and social reproduction processes. Employers often withheld wages, making it that much harder for Bulgarians to find shelter, access education for their children, or obtain health care. These adverse conditions often coerced them into leaving one labor market for another. In this configuration, we should think of the complex interplay between labor markets, movement, and social reproduction within a unified framework, where labor power acquires new meanings. The role of municipalities in perpetuating and contributing to the difficult reproduction of these laborers and their family members was linked to the growing impossibility of meeting the increasing demand for space in homeless shelters and addressing other social costs inherited by

the austerity state. In addition, there was constant policing of Bulgarians as to whether they were submitting false address registrations. The Munich municipality and the police collaborated in their oppressive tactics over Bulgarians and Romanians.

Alex, a social worker at Caritas in Munich, explained to me the long-standing oppressive tactics. Introduced in 2007 – the year of Bulgaria’s accession to the EU – they increasingly intensified with the arrival of more and more people from Bulgaria. Although the story here concerns people begging on the streets, we will later see similar measures applied against self-employed individuals and irregularized day laborers.

Back in 2007, the Munich police started controlling the streets of the city and fining people involved in begging. Alex explained that this was made possible through a municipal directive regulating sidewalk use, permitting only walking. Any other activity, such as busking or setting up food stalls, required a permit. Obviously, people involved in begging could not obtain such permits. While explaining all this to me, Alex pulled out a file of documents. The file belonged to Fidanka, an elderly woman who had lived in Munich since 2007. The file contained several pages, all filled with the fines accrued by Fidanka: “July 12, 2007: EUR 20 fine; July 17, 2007: EUR 100 fine...” The fine for a first-time offense of begging was EUR 20, with subsequent fines increasing to EUR 100. The file concluded on July 20, 2009, with a cumulative amount of EUR 7390.50.

As Alex’s job involved confronting municipal authorities over cases such as Fidanka’s, he contacted the City

Hall only to realize that fines would continue to be imposed. "It is a tactic," an official explained to him. "For each fine, one can spend two to three days in jail. Once the fines accumulate, we can imprison them for a month. Then they leave." People were indeed imprisoned for unpaid fines for begging. A notable case involved a 74-year-old Bulgarian woman, Katya, who was imprisoned for a month before returning to Bulgaria. While in Munich, Katya's health prevented her from finding a job, so resorting to begging was the only way she could set aside some money for rent. Numerous women in Munich lived this way, sharing cramped accommodation and trying to support their families with the little money they could earn on the streets. Most of these women had families in the city, including husbands, children, and even grandchildren. Entire families were entangled in the vicious circle of self-employment, irregularized work, and begging. When their children or husbands found a job, it was often short-term. In addition, they did not get paid regularly. When they got caught in such a cycle, these women went out to beg in the streets in order to support the household by contributing some small change for due rents.

The situation was further complicated by the property market in Munich. There was a lack of social housing, the prices were the highest in the whole country, and real estate market speculation was a flourishing business. Furthermore, as there was a concentration of capital in the city, it attracted large populations of pauperized labor power and the demand for living spaces was skyrocketing. These factors contributed to the homelessness and crowded living arrangements of many Bulgarians. "What

is the local government doing about it? After all, this is a persistent problem,” I asked naively. “Nothing. They don’t want to create pull factors,” replied Alex. “For the most part people did not have the right to social welfare [as they were economically inactive according to the law] and they had no means to support themselves. The homeless shelter opened only in winter, and then again, one had to leave it at 9 a.m. each morning.”

Despite the fines and imprisonment, the City of Munich could not get rid of begging Bulgarians or Romanians. In 2013, however, the City changed its tactic. Prior to 2013, the “notice of fine” letters from the municipality had to be sent directly to the addresses of the fined individuals. With the enactment of a new regulation, these official letters could be sent to the address of the municipality.

Prior to 2013, Bulgarians used to receive what is known as *Bescheid*. You can see it here: a EUR 100 fine and a EUR 23.50 fee for the municipality’s administrative processing of the letter. [People] used to receive that at their home addresses. Starting in 2013, they stopped receiving these letters. In other words, individuals were still getting fined, but they were not notified about it. Instead, the municipality began sending the official letters to itself. This was made possible as beggars were forced to sign a special document at the time of their fining, relinquishing their right to receive official mail and designating person X from the municipality as the recipient. People were handed this document with an instruction to sign it, and they would stand there in fear and sign anything given to them. They did not

understand what they were signing. (Alex, personal communication, November 2013)*

The new document authorized municipal officials to receive, on behalf of Bulgarians, every court or administrative decision. A specific paragraph stated: “I grant authorization without the right to withdraw it.” This latter provision was not enforced during my residence in Munich.

Additionally, municipalities felt increased pressure from the federal authorities to deal with migrants arriving from Bulgaria and Romania (personal communication, Gudrun Scheringer, February 2014). Some regulations, overlooked for other EU citizens, were rigorously enforced when it came to Bulgarian and Romanian citizens. For example, when Bernd Kasperek spoke with an independent counselor in October 2014 at the *Bundesfachkongress Interkultur* in Mannheim, Germany, he received the following information:

I asked the counselor about the “extensive counseling offer” provided by the municipality to newly arrived migrants from Bulgaria and Romania. He just laughed and explained that while for any other EU citizen *Anmeldung* [address registration] is just a formality whereby you immediately receive confirmation of registration, for Romanians and Bulgarians there is a written directive in the municipality to use the maximum

* These documents were also provided in Bulgarian. They are called *Palnomoshtno za dostavyane. Razyasnenie na protsesualnite prava pri nalozhen sledstven arest* (Delivery authorization. Your procedural rights while in investigative custody).

allowed processing period. In this process, instead of sending out the registration directly, an invitation to a counseling session is dispatched. People generally feel that attending this counseling session is a prerequisite for completing registrations. During this session, they are subjected to a lengthy questionnaire, and they are asked many questions. Only then do they get their registration. (Bernd Kasperek, personal communication, October 2014)

Lisa Riedner's study (2018) on the processes of municipality-made homelessness in Munich shows how a large proportion of the working homeless in the city is the result of various strategies employed by the municipality to erect barriers against providing shelter to poor EU migrants within the discursive framework of "poverty migration." Riedner demonstrates how the municipality is integral to the migration management regime. Her study identifies the municipality as a factor contributing to the growing interdependence between migration apparatuses and social security agencies, where the latter assume the function of the former.

The category of the "social benefit tourist" is not written into law; however, even as a hegemonic device, it has impacted the lives of many. The "social benefit tourists" are not economic migrants per se, even though they seek to escape "economic hardships." Although the "social benefit tourists" escape "poverty," the underlying assumption that structures their relation to labor markets and the state is the potential abuse of the welfare state. In this regard, freedom of movement is constructed as a factor narrowing

the gap between the potential and the actual claiming of “undeserved” social benefits, as perceived by the host state. There is a redefinition of freedom of movement – from being a right to becoming a condition that allows abuse. The state attempts to control the movement of the so-called “social benefit tourists” by restricting rights to welfare. The category of the “social benefit tourist” retains some of the characteristics of the “economic migrant,” as it is assumed they are not seeking to escape from political violence. Yet, the articulation of “social benefit tourism,” at least in the ways that align with the political instruments and technologies that construct it, portrays such populations not as being driven by economic interest, but as seeking to steal “undeserved” welfare assistance.

When we examine the category of the “social benefit tourist” in relation to the broader economic/political migrant binary, we see that it holds a peculiar place in the historical chain of migratory categories. “Benefit tourists” are the neoliberal subjects par excellence – free to move and denied state assistance. Whereas asylum seekers arrive at the threshold of (European) labor markets as “tricksters” who must prove that they are not economic migrants, from the point of view of the legislative system “benefit tourists” do not have to prove that they are escaping for economic reasons. Their “trickstery” is manifest in their lust for welfare. Moreover, such “tourists” have been granted the right to travel freely within EU spaces, significantly narrowing the temporal gap for capital between the potential to gain from the migration of labor power and its actual exploitation. As we will see, this dynamic differs for asylum seekers, where the gap widens due to the uncertainty regarding the

availability of labor from this particular pool that is introduced by the logic of the differentiation itself (economic/political binary) and by the infrastructures supporting the differentiation (e.g., detention, interviews, fingerprinting, courts, work permits, and integration, among others).*

The articulation of the “social benefit tourist” outlined above created a differentiated social sphere associated with East European migrant labor power, where the entry of the now racialized labor power (the Bulgarian poor) into a welfare social formation (e.g., the federal state of Germany, or the city of Munich) was constructed as a mode of entry that hides the potential for abuse. Consequently, as we will see in the next chapter, once that labor power reached its destination, it had to be policed.

* In the case of Bulgaria, the labor market cannot rely on asylum seekers' labor power as most of them leave for Germany.

2

Policing Freedom of Movement and Dispersing Labor Power

This chapter is organized around the relation between capital, pauperized and raced labor power, and the repressive apparatus of the state (the police). It is driven by the question of what frameworks could be used to think of immobilization in contrast to its supposed antithesis, the freedom of movement. To illustrate some of the potential pitfalls in exploring movement as always already antithetical to immobilization, I explore the praxis of freedom of movement to trace the emergence of a field of knowledge where the movement of people is examined in terms either of its absence or of its presence. I explore this relation from the starting point of moving labor power and trace it as it unfolds in (one of the) final destinations: Germany. I travel along with moving labor power, so to speak, in order to answer the question of what freedom of movement – as a political theory, an ideology, and a social practice – has meant to workers since the battle over it was eventually won some thirty years ago. We can see that moving labor power that travels from the so-called “periphery” to the so-called capitalist “core” follows a peculiar temporal rhythm where taming and acceleration work conjointly. These aspects of moving labor power disrupt the stability of capitalist spaces and give rise to labor with differentiated legal statuses (Mezzadra & Neilson, 2013).

The following story reveals the reasons behind the persistent unemployment among the daily laborers from Pazardzhik, Bulgaria, who usually stood on a street corner in Munich in the months before and after the “official” opening of the German labor market to Bulgarian citizens. I complement this analysis with a discussion on freedom of movement as a mechanism for dispersing labor power, and go on to study the struggles of pauperized laborers who move from one place to another in order to secure their livelihoods.

Policing Freedom of Movement

As I walked down Munich’s Goethestrasse on my way to Civil Courage (*Zivilcourage*), the activist group I closely collaborated with during my fieldwork, a crowd attracted my attention. About twenty people were standing at a street junction and I noticed a police minivan parked on the corner, with its emergency lights turned on. The minivan belonged to the *Finanzkontrolle Schwarzarbeit* (FKS) – the Financial Control of Undeclared Work Unit, which is part of the German Customs Administration. Although I was at the very beginning of my fieldwork, I sensed that the subjects of the police check were day laborers from Bulgaria. I had heard about such control (*kontrol*) before: police checks during which the so-called “street-corner laborers” were required to present documents and subjected to “routine” inquiries regarding the purpose of their presence at the intersection.

The intersection was occasionally transformed into a political hub, as activists from Civil Courage gathered

there to mobilize people for protests or to discuss the latest oppressive measures imposed by the City of Munich against Bulgarian day laborers. This particular street intersection was used predominantly by men from the Bulgarian Turkish communities. They usually went there at around 6.30 – 7.00 a.m. and stayed until early afternoon or dusk, depending on the day. On some days, employers came as if in a convoy, while on other days, there was no work at all. While standing on the corner, the laborers' conversations often veered towards means of sustaining oneself. From the local Job Center's newly hired assistant who was supposedly "friendly" to the social needs of the workers, to the homeless shelter's old bunk beds, one was constantly updated about the best deals in the city that were meant to ease one's life. The laborers rarely spoke about Bulgarian politics, the economic situation at home, or any other matter related to the homeland, except when discussing family issues and newcomers.

Typically, people dispersed or just moved to the other side of the junction shortly after the police drove away. As I approached the crowd on that particular day, I saw a man in his early 30s whom I knew from my previous visits in Munich. I used my acquaintance with him to make my way into the crowd. There were six Bulgarian men surrounded by twelve police officers, only one of whom was a woman. The officers wore green vests and, for the most part, stared silently at some documents, or talked with each other on walkie-talkies. The whole procedure was slow. There was really nothing the police could do but be slow and bothersome. They couldn't actually arrest people solely for standing on a street corner. The only vocal expressions

came from the laborers who were angry about being subjected to yet another police check on the same day. An interpreter who spoke Turkish was present within the police group. I learned later that he had been requested from the FKS a while ago, as communication between the Bulgarian citizens and the police unit was otherwise impossible. The workers were switching between Bulgarian and Turkish, aiming to undermine the interpreter's power – and especially when I turned up, to convey to me how barbaric the “cops” were.

Standing on the street corner was pretty much the only way these men could get a job, typically lasting for a few weeks, and at times, only a few days, mostly in the construction sector. Munich's “gray” labor market, at least when it came to Bulgarian citizens, was spatially divided so as to accommodate groups that came from different parts of Bulgaria and represented different racialized communities. While this particular street corner was reserved for people coming from Pazardzjik, just a few blocks away one encountered people engaged in begging as a means of livelihood, who came from another town, Omurtag, and who were mainly from Roma communities.

Both these groups fell into the category of the “poverty migrant” or the “social benefit tourist,” as discussed in Cameron's and Friedrich's discourse examined in the previous chapter. For newcomers originating from other towns, it was nearly impossible to enter these two spaces. Their boundaries were strictly guarded, as it had become harder to find employment or to stay on the street without being removed and charged with either “begging” or “illegal work.”

During the months between October 2013 and February 2014, the police checks were so intense that they became a pressing concern for Civil Courage, the laborers, and even the Munich press. This concern was triggered by a specific police check in October 2013. Just a few months prior to this police check, in August 2013, the presence of Bulgarians waiting to be hired on the street corner had caused resentment among the local residents. Business owners in the area believed that their shops were being avoided by customers because of the Bulgarians standing on the corner. Fearful for their profits, local business owners around the X/Y street intersection circulated a petition against the street-corner laborers. The petition stated:

Petition of the residents and employees at the intersection of X and Y

We, the residents and employees at the intersection of X and Y, demand that the current and growing problems with the illegal labor market at the intersection be finally recognized as such.

We are ready to support any human and social solution that contributes [to the outcome] that people will not be exploited and abused by criminal smugglers and construction subcontractors.

The intersection and nearby buildings and shops are now regularly besieged by a constantly growing crowd of workers. Paths are obstructed, sidewalks are strewn with litter, groceries are discarded, and the crowd spits and urinates [on the street]. Serious health problems

have appeared in some of the buildings due to pest infestations. Customers are being harassed, leading to their absence, partly due to aggressive incidents. This situation is increasingly making our normal lives and work impossible. We demand that our junction no longer be marred by such sights. The current conditions are no longer tolerable and must not become entrenched. We assert our right to a humane, civilized living and working environment. We call for coordinated, consistent, and sustainable countermeasures – both in the sectors of social and police work.

The petition originated from a desire for recognition that a labor market – after all, the street corner was a labor market where employers and labor power met – was illegal, that it operated outside established norms. But why this sudden panic in Munich? After all, in the case of Munich the labor market preceded the panic. We know from Lisa's account of the history of Civil Courage (see next section) that workers had been congregating at that intersection for at least four years before the petition was issued. The petition obviously addressed a situation that had existed for a long time, but perhaps in a different form from the perspective of its signatories. Are we to trust the expressed concerns over "exploitation" and "criminal smugglers"? If so, why not attack the German government for creating the conditions for such social developments? Why not target the employers who came to hire the street-corner laborers? But more importantly, even if the concerns were genuine – and I don't want to dismiss this possibility – the question for me was, "Why now?"

Discussing the moral panics that surrounded mugging in Britain in the early 1970s, Stuart Hall, Chas Critcher, Tony Jefferson, John Clarke, and Brian Roberts posed the question: “[C]ould it be possible – historically plausible – that a societal reaction to crime could precede the appearance of a pattern of crimes?” (Hall et al., 1978, p. 182). I want to clarify, however, that the “crime” considered in this chapter has nothing to do with harm inflicted on individuals. We see that it was framed in terms of harm to a business community and to the “regular” market. Yet, what interests us here is the question of why “illegal marketing” emerged as a “crime” at this specific historical moment? And it did emerge as a crime, strictly speaking, as police controls not only increased tremendously in that period, but intensified in their violent tactics. I find Hall et al.’s (1978) intervention plausible for the case under examination here. They show that the societal reaction to mugging at that historical moment, entered a mode of panic not because there was an actual increase in the incidence of mugging, but because “a quite distinct new social group [appeared] to be involved” (Hall et al., 1978, p. 183).

Here, as well, we are strictly concerned with the crafting of a new social group: that of the Bulgarian poverty migrants described in the previous chapter. In this sense, and as Hall et al. (1978) demonstrate, the reaction to “crime” is not only a relation between the criminal, the victim, and the police. There is a concrete structure that works from outside this immediately visible relation. During such a process, the crime of the wrongdoers is imbued with political meaning. In other words, if “deviance” is what society reacts to, then there “must be a society whose norms, rules

and laws are transgressed, control institutions whose task it is to enforce the norms and punish the infractor” (Hall et al., 1978, p. 185). There must be an understanding of what is “deviance” vis-à-vis the norm.

In our case this structure, the norms of which have been transgressed by the “illegal” workers, is the market. As I have shown elsewhere (Apostolova, 2017), there was an understanding in the postsocialist restoration of the capitalist organization of labor markets that the market had to retain racial purity in order to be able to perform its functions. Racialized moving labor power has the capacity to contaminate this purity; it becomes a source of potential impurity. We see this not only in the case of capitalist restoration in Bulgaria but also in that of the Bulgarian day laborers in Munich, and we will see this logic unfolding in the European asylum system as well. After all, the Bulgarians were crafted as a “new social group” around 2013, the year the petition discussed above was issued. It is no coincidence that the petition in question ends with an appeal for measures to be taken that include “police and social work.” We saw the fear with which the European press was discussing the issue of abuse on the part of freely traveling welfare scroungers. The petition was a result of the creation of the “social benefit tourist,” the intensification of police control was the result of the petition, and the cause for panic was the “deviance” vis-à-vis the “regular” market. The mere fact that the street-corner laborers came from Bulgaria was enough to subsume them as the impure particles of an impure market.

The petition was also a reaction to a particular type of market space that is part of what Anna Tsing (2009)

describes as “supply chain capitalism,” where outsourcing and subcontracting are shown to be legal entities, disciplined under the totality of a chain, however. As Irene Peano (2017) demonstrates, this type of chain analysis emerged as an analytical tool within “world-system” theory in order to explore whether or not capitalism can be conceived in terms of a world system (Gereffi & Korzeniewicz, 1993; Hopkins & Wallerstein, 1986; Kalb 2000). Yet, Peano (2017, p. 29) continues, “in order to fully comprehend and analyse forms of re/production along commodity chains it is also necessary to situate them within more complex geographies, in which specific forms of governance produce striated spaces that chains traverse and are shaped by.”

One of the strengths of this approach is that it enables us to conceptualize networked production processes, wherein subcontracting – one of the predominant relations within processes of moving labor power – plays a central role in the provision of living labor for industries. As we will see further on in this chapter, many pauperized individuals traveling to Germany relied on such chains and on subcontractors to find jobs for them. Subcontractors often functioned as, or collaborated with, travel fixers who arranged employment, accommodation, and often even food for the moving pauperized. This relation between subcontractors and labor power in motion will be explored in more detail later in this chapter, but what needs to be borne in mind is that the Bulgarian street-corner laborers were a product of relations that allowed outsourcing recruitment to third parties, where it seems as if there is no direct contact between capital and labor.

In this sense, economic coercion seems to be an effect of “unfair” subcontractor practices, and not of an emerging relation between capital and labor.

Still, many traveling laborers, as was the case in Munich, just came to the city and found subcontractors on-site. The street intersection in Munich, discussed above, was one such site. Articulated as it is in the citizens’ petition, the market emerges as a polluted object. It ceases to be a mere street intersection, becoming a specifically embedded socio-spatial junction of illegality, smugglers, contractors, disrupted mobility for those who are not necessarily part of it, abnormality, and filth. As we see, the response to such pollution was a call for socially responsible policing. The aforementioned petition is not telling solely of the type of conflicts and negotiations specific to this neighborhood. It also highlights the type of spaces produced by capital whose accumulation is rooted in a chain of exploitation termed self-employment (see the previous chapter) and where the legitimate apparatus of state violence mediates the relationship between subcontractors, labor, and the “local business community.”

As already shown, a year before the opening of European Union labor markets to Bulgarians and Romanians, a comprehensive campaign was conducted against them on a European scale, redefining freedom of movement. Initially considered a right to be pursued for all Europeans and a key defense against nationalism, it became associated with the perceived potential for abuse of nation-states’ social security systems. Although the campaign targeted the new discursive category of the “benefit tourist,” the day laborers and self-employed who arrived from the Bulgarian

Turkish and Roma communities became subject to state repression, as these categories were used interchangeably. Adding to this absurdity, the petition of local businesses intensified the conflicts in the city.

As a consequence of the petition, Munich saw unprecedented police raids on the day-labor market. Between October and December 2013, daily police checks were conducted, typically in the early morning, intimidating both subcontractors and laborers. Sometimes, such checks were conducted several times a day, with police minivans patrolling the street merely to assert their presence. Nikola, a Bulgarian in his late 60s at the time, who had worked for a Bulgarian lead factory from 1974 to 1987 but couldn't get a pension because of the 1997 reforms in Bulgaria, was one of those frequently checked by the police: "It is humiliating. I am an old man. [The police] search my pockets. They strip us naked sometimes even on the street before the eyes of all. If they want to strip me naked, they should do it at the police department. This is what I call shame."

One of the most vivid examples of a police check took place on October 21, 2013, at around 8 o'clock in the morning, when thirty Bulgarian day laborers were herded into a backyard near the Central Train Station by twenty police officers. As the laborers told me after the police check, they were coerced into signing documents whose contents they couldn't understand, while the officers intimidated them by falsely claiming that they would be fined EUR 1,000 if they were caught working.

However, the most atrocious police tactic was employed just before the release of the laborers. The Bulgarian citizens were forced to put on neon green wristbands,

effectively turning them into branded laborers. In the following days, conspicuously marked Bulgarians could be seen wandering around the neighborhood. “Humiliation”, “fear,” “anger,” and “frustration” were just some of the words they used to describe this act of branding.



Photo 2. The green wristband on one of the laborers.
Photo by the author.

According to a press release issued by the police department, the neon wristbands were intended to indicate individuals who had already been checked, in order to avoid double checks. The laborers, however, feared that the wristbands might contain electronic chips to track their physical movement, and were therefore afraid to remove them. Their anxiety was so intense that it clouded their rational judgment. People found themselves trapped because of the possibility of being physically tracked, preventing them from being taken to work and, hence, from finding employment.

As the anxiety and uncertainty surrounding these events grew, activists began questioning the police actions. Civil Courage issued press releases and contacted the head of the FKS to inquire about the implementation of green wristbands. Herr Luft, the head of Munich's FKS, responded promptly. He reiterated the police's justification that the neon wristbands were solely intended to avoid double checks, and that the police's only purpose had been to inform the day laborers of their "rights and duties." His arguments aimed to persuade Civil Courage that both parties wanted the same outcome: improved labor conditions for the Bulgarian laborers.

The communication between Herr Luft and Civil Courage revealed some of the issues the activist group was addressing in their work with Bulgarian day laborers: unpaid wages, exploitation, racism. But how is resistance organized in the context of hypermobility across spaces? What are some of the mechanisms that racialized and pauperized labor power develops in order to cope with overexploitation?

Organizing Those Who Move

The story of Civil Courage begins with a taxi. Serkan, a Turkish man who worked for Turkish subcontractors in Munich, did not receive his wage. One day he got angry and demanded to be paid. The subcontractors pursued him around the city, threatening to take him to the airport and expel him from Germany. Serkan managed to escape in a taxi. The taxi driver turned out to be a fellow Turk. When Serkan told him why he was on the run, the taxi driver suggested that he contact Oğuz. At the time, Oğuz was running a cultural center in Munich, and he offered Serkan a place to stay there until things worked out for him and he could stabilize his situation. Oğuz also assisted Serkan in finding a lawyer, and together they fought for Serkan's unpaid wages. That was in 2006.

Oğuz and Serkan began visiting construction sites around Munich, finding more and more workers who were not being paid their wages. A year later, Oğuz and Serkan's efforts expanded further. Rumors began to spread around the city, and an email reached the Caravan – a network of activist groups across Germany dedicated to issues of flight and refuge – containing information about the struggles of Turkish workers. Lisa, a key figure in Civil Courage today, was part of the Caravan at the time. She, along with a few other activists, went to meet Oğuz, Serkan, and the other Turkish workers. The first act of support for the Turkish workers by Lisa and her friends was to help them obtain a *Duldung* (temporary suspension of deportation). This was crucial as the workers were residing in Germany on short-term contracts, which, if terminated, would lead to a loss

of their residence permits. The struggle of these Turkish short-term workers eventually grew into an activist initiative, which Oğuz named Civil Courage.

From that point on, the initiative began to grow, prompting some of the activists, including Lisa, to visit Istanbul to research the conditions surrounding the sending of short-term workers to Munich. Right from the outset, Civil Courage had to deal with the Financial Police on a regular basis. Workers' dormitories, formerly used as refugee shelters, where Turkish laborers were staying, were subjected to numerous inspections. Police checks were conducted occasionally in these buildings also because many (homeless) Bulgarian and Turkish families were using them. Lisa told me that, at one point, the number of people caught in the precarity of short-term contracting was so high that FKS started giving Oğuz's phone number to Turkish workers, encouraging them to seek assistance from Civil Courage. "At first, twenty-two individuals came to seek help, then another forty-four turned to us. So, we began going to the Labor Court on a regular basis," confirmed Lisa.

By 2010, all the Turkish short-term contract workers had left. The Initiative was at a crossroads, contemplating whether to continue their efforts in supporting migrant laborers in Munich. Although there were no longer any Turkish short-term workers in the city, it was obvious to the activists that such practices of overexploitation persisted. Civil Courage decided to set up an info point table at the X and Y junction, where the Bulgarians hung out, and to just see what would happen. They made flyers with information about the rights of short-term laborers and

began distributing them to random passers-by. “At some point, I noticed a bunch of people across from our table staring at me, obviously wondering what this table was all about. I remember wondering why these mostly young men were just standing at the junction. What were they doing?” It turned out that they were Bulgarians, later to become known as the workers from the junction. “At that point, things really took off!”

After a few meetings and conversations with the Bulgarian workers, it became evident that they were facing a very similar situation as their Turkish colleagues, the only difference being that three years into Bulgaria’s accession to the EU, they did not face deportation. Humiliating police controls, unpaid wages, homelessness – it was all there. Eventually, that same year, Civil Courage managed to move into a ground floor office near the junction, where they could continue their support work.

I visited the office in early 2013. It was big enough to accommodate many people. Workers went there not only for paperwork, but also to connect with friends, find a place to sleep, and even get some food when available. Large pots of tea were always available to everyone, and discussions about housing and labor conditions went on all the time. In 2011, Civil Courage managed to secure a EUR 5,000 grant from a municipal fund supporting self-help groups in Munich, covering most of the rent. Sharing the space with an artist collective, Civil Courage paid only half of the rent, about EUR 400 to 500 a month. When this grant ran out, they relied on private donations. In 2013, the group had to move out of this place as the owners had other plans for it. Eventually, the group was accommodated by the

Madhouse in Munich, an NGO dedicated to social work with Roma and Sinti youth. The group remained there until I left in 2014.

Before long, news of the police branding incident discussed above spread, and the German Greens and various radio stations picked up the story. But despite the visibility of police violence, the local government employed other subtle tactics as well. The latter included blacklisting addresses to prevent further registration of Bulgarians in Munich, intimidating German citizens who helped with address registration, and disseminating special memos on “how to behave with Bulgarian and Romanian citizens” within social services offices. These were just a few of the daily challenges faced by day laborers, German citizens, and municipal staff. The branding incident discussed above was not the last of its kind. Such practices became commonplace in the months leading up to January 2014, alongside with situations where workers often found themselves in jobs that didn’t pay for their labor, imprisoned because of unpaid public transport fares, and unlikely to find shelter because of policies allowing admission to homeless shelters only when temperatures dropped below 0°C.

Normalizing the Norm

Étienne Balibar’s (2013) work on the normalization of overexploitation is helpful here. The author acknowledges that there is a theoretical difficulty in distinguishing between overexploitation and exploitation. Exploitation is regulated by a “fair” contract and, as such, is not consid-

ered unjust within capitalist economic forms of employment. The theoretical difficulty in this distinction comes from the observation that any extraction of surplus labor leads to *overexploitation* (for example, overtime that is not part of the fair contract). Nonetheless, the philosopher proposes that we call the conditions of capitalist use (of labor)

a normalization of overexploitation. The reverse side of this is a class struggle that tends to impose limits, establishing, as it were, “normal conditions of exploitation,” which for that reason, are deprived of any technical or economic objective criterion, but merely express an unstable relationship of forces between the tendency towards over-exploitation and the counter-tendency or resistance which reduces it. (Balibar, 2013, p. 3; emphasis in original)

The theoretical difficulty of distinguishing between exploitation and overexploitation is compounded by the theoretical difficulty of reaching a consensus on the structure of the norm in capitalist relations. In other words, the forms of labor we witness proliferating today (overtime, nonpayment of wages, short-term labor contracts, difficult subsistence, and the involvement of child labor in the production process, among others), often labeled under the term “precariat” (Lorey, 2015; Standing, 2011; Wacquant, 2014), are in fact not post-Fordist but pre-Fordist (Di Bernardo, 2016). That is, there is a return to overexploitation today, where the “fairness” of the contract is often abused. In this sense, we are witnessing a normal-

ization of the pre-Fordist norm and subsequent efforts aimed at disciplining this normalization.

During my stay in Munich, the political and everyday struggles of the Bulgarian workers and their German friends revolved around issues of unpaid wages, lack of shelters, social benefits, and police violence. In other words, their struggles revolved around attempts to tame the existing modes of these relations and to *return exploitation to normal levels* (at least to its Keynesian version), that is, paid labor which guarantees housing, child benefits, pension, and health insurance, among others.

Civil Courage met every Tuesday and spent hours filling in social benefit forms, trying to contact subcontractors and make them pay due wages, fighting for address registrations, and for spaces in homeless shelters. The group remained relatively small, although the number of people involved in it changed often. During my time there, four German citizens were involved in the aforementioned efforts on a constant basis. The majority of the others were the Bulgarians who stood at the X and Y junction, and who had earned recognition and respect from the community for their extensive experience at the Munich junction. Some of the Munich activists came and left sporadically. There was an undeniable monotony to reading and filling in bureaucratic forms. If life on the streets was dangerous and unpredictable, the space where Civil Courage met was the exact opposite. The communication between the Germans and the Bulgarians was difficult because of the language barrier. Even when some of the Bulgarians spoke some German, it was not enough. The problems faced by the Bulgarians,

however, had persisted for years, and the mere presentation of a particular document from the Job Center was sufficient for everyone to understand the required course of action.

Prem Kumar Rajaram (2015, p. 68) says that capitalism is not a neutral translator, it “translates potential and desire (a potential for dignity, a desire for education), into specific material provisions” Similarly, the modes of (over)exploitation and reproduction experienced by the Bulgarian workers had been adequately translated into the struggles for the normalization of exploitation. There was rarely a need to explicitly articulate what was required. The monotony of capitalism, its “that-has-already-been,” banalized and monotonized the struggles to the point where it wasn’t even necessary to speak the same language. Overexploitation has a language of its own, one that both activists and workers understood.

In the months following the green-wristband police check, the intimidation did not stop. In fact, it continued, as Boris, one of the workers, assured me when we met two years later in October 2015. People were still being tracked to their workplaces, and threatened with EUR 1,000 fines and three years of probation if caught working illegally. For many, 2014 – the year labor markets in Germany opened to Bulgarians and Romanians – changed nothing; some found work in factories near Munich or in other cities, where the pay was low but the security of having a regular job made it worthwhile. Back in 2013, however, the actions of the police and the Munich municipality did not go unquestioned. Several attempts at political organizing took place.

The first attempt came right after the branding incident. On that day, people flowed in and out of Civil Courage's office, and the usual monotonous routine of filling out documents and contacting and threatening subcontractors and employers with legal actions was suddenly disrupted by the workers' anger. Upset and confused, they were displaying their green wristbands and asking how long it would take before they could remove them. The workers were expecting answers no one could really provide. They kept coming and going, wearing their wristbands. As the chaos intensified, a decision was taken to hold an organizational meeting the following Tuesday. At some point, a spontaneous mass removal of wristbands took place in the office. People tossed them in the air or angrily smashed them onto the tables, calling for action. A protest was in order. The workers destroyed their green chains.

The following week, on the anticipated day of the protest, I went to the office full of excitement about what was to come – only to encounter the all-too-familiar monotony. Everyone was seated around the rectangular tables arranged to form a larger square. The German activists were filling out forms and trying to convey information they found in letters people had received from the municipality regarding unpaid fares, residence permits, and social security documents. As the meeting was about to commence upon my arrival, I discovered that I was the only one who spoke Bulgarian, and the Turkish-language interpreters were nowhere to be found. As I inquired around the room, I found only Radoy and two or three other men who had been present at the branding incident. We went out to look for the rest of the group. As we walked out the door,

however, I couldn't help but notice the disappointment on the faces of many of the Bulgarian women who remained in the office. For them, our departure signaled the end of paperwork for the day, as the meeting about the protest would mostly likely take up the rest of our time.

"Many left. They took the buses," Radoy, a single man in his 40s who had come to Munich in the early 2000s and had managed to get a work permit, told me. Despite having a permit, he was a regular at the junction. Having a permit didn't guarantee finding a regular job. Radoy expressed this disappointment while puffing on a cigarette as we walked down the street in search of workers. Despite his frustration, we found at least ten who were interested in participating in discussions about organizing a protest. Returning to Civil Courage's office, we found that another ten potential protestors had turned up. As the meeting was about to begin, some of the women spontaneously protested, insisting that it was now their turn to get help with their paperwork. Amidst the discussion about whether we were to hold an organizational meeting or continue pursuing dishonest subcontractors and dealing with threats of imprisonment, a newcomer walked through the door. Hearing me speak in Bulgarian, he asked, "Do they [pointing his head towards the Germans] do something for gypsies here? Could they find me a job?"

A protest against the violent police raids never took place. Despite Civil Courage's numerous efforts to provide political support to the laborers for organizing around the issue of police raids, a visible resistance against them failed to emerge. Fear, more immediate concerns, and the option of escape were among the reasons why there was

no response to the city's actions. As Mladen, a man in his mid-20s who had arrived in Munich three months before the beginning of the police raids and was a regular at the day labor market, told me: "I am going to Frankfurt now. It is obviously written on my forehead that I am a Bulgarian and Munich has nothing more to offer me. I will look for a job elsewhere, I cannot stand it here anymore." Munich lost quite a lot of Bulgarians in the last two weeks of October 2013. Many left for other cities within Germany, for other European countries, or returned home – depending on where fixers directed them.

Mall of Shame and Its Romanian Workers: "The Bulgarians Told Us Our Resistance Won't Last Long"

The labor power that migrates unrestrictedly is the perfect liberal subject; as Hagar Kotef (2015, p. 4) argues, "throughout the history of liberal thought movement functions as a *pivot of materialization for the liberal body*" (emphasis in original). In addition to this *liberal body*, however, we should not forget the significance of movement for the relationship between the body as potential labor and the possibilities for its reproduction offered by movement; after all, the liberal body is inseparable from its material conditions.

The right to move freely, as inscribed into the notion of freedom of movement within the EU, spreads potential labor territorially and tames political organization. The

normative status of freedom of movement prohibits its suspension by nation-states. However, repression often circumvents normative constraints, infringing upon its object in seemingly indirect ways. With the surge in popularity of right-wing rhetoric targeting Bulgarians and Romanians, coupled with a moral panic that translated “street-corner employment” as a crime, the City of Munich found itself compelled to somehow suspend the legal right to freedom of movement through secondary measures. Its aim was to prevent further movement into the city, on the one hand, while making Munich unattractive by using repressive measures that impacted the social and physical security of laborers, on the other. People had the “choice,” however, to escape such repression by exercising their right to move freely. And many did. Thus, escape has become inseparable from freedom of movement. It appears both as a “choice” to leave the social misery in the country of origin and as a “choice” exercised in the country of arrival. This continuous escape reproduces a specific type of labor power. One that is constantly on the move. Freedom of movement thus oscillates between possibilities of escape and opportunities for exploiters.

The notion of freedom of movement has enabled a spatial-temporal dimension of traveling labor power, where it has become increasingly easy (and necessary) to leave one site for another. In this conjuncture, time and space are compressed, as the departure of (cheap) labor from one site leads to a fast increase in labor power at another site. Europe has become a miniature space for traveling pauperized laborers. Visa requirements, or border checks, the insecurity of traveling and the reliance on smugglers are

no longer there to impede such mobility. On the contrary, the travel fixer (operating as a fixer in both production and social reproduction relations) embodies the entrepreneurial spirit of neoliberalism. The fixer always finds new jobs, new cities, and negotiates labor power with companies and subcontractors.

During my frequent travels by bus to various European cities, I encountered many pauperized laborers. They were traversing the European space depending on the demands of subcontractors. Two laborers I met in November 2015 at Frankfurt's international bus station drew a telling picture of their travels in the last few months – from construction sites in Spain to agricultural fields in the Czech Republic and Italy to strawberry fields in the UK (see Ivancheva, 2007). They never stayed in one place for more than three months. Such “calls to jobs” often end in disappointment as promises are broken, and men and women are forced to leave. Some go to the next European country for the next subcontracted job. Others return to their home countries to spend some time with their families while waiting for yet another call. However, even when a job is secured, it does not necessarily guarantee a livelihood.

Wages are rarely paid. Such is the story of the laborers who came to be known as the Mall of Shame workers. These individuals are eleven Romanians who worked on the construction site of the Mall of Berlin in August 2014. This (in)famous shopping mall was built in the rapidly developing quarter around Leipziger Platz, an area increasingly resembling New York City's Times Square. The massive edifice, spanning several blocks, cost approximately EUR 1 billion, making it the most expensive extravagance in the



Photo 3. Mall of Shame. Source: Mall of Berlin official website (www.mallofberlin.de/en/start/anfahrt/anfahrtmitpkw)

business of shopping mall construction. The Mall markets itself as “the heart of the heart,” portraying Berlin as the most dynamic metropolis in Europe. It sprawls across a total of 210,000 m², housing around 270 shops, a 12,000-m² hotel, nearly 1,000 parking spaces, and offices occupying about 4,000 m². However, my concern here is not with “the heart” but with the arms and legs that move the vital blood, enabling the heart to function.

The story of the Romanian workers was almost identical to the dozens of other stories I heard elsewhere in Germany and during my bus travels. A friend of a friend contacted one of the eleven men, offering them a job. That person also had a friend who was looking for more laborers, particularly from Bulgaria and Romania as they could

travel unrestrictedly. The deal included a contract, a good wage, and a fee of EUR 150 per month for accommodation in a shared apartment. However, upon arrival in Berlin, it turned out that there was no contract, the wage was EUR 5 per hour as compared to the legally mandated minimum hourly wage of EUR 8.25 at the time, and the promised apartment was non-existent. The Romanian workers often found themselves sleeping rough on the streets. Over the next three months, they endured what they described as humiliating treatment from the subcontractors, ranging from alterations to the promised salary and non-provision of accommodation to ultimately receiving no wages at all. The workers left one subcontractor due to unpaid wages, but ended up in the same situation with the second subcontractor. As it turned out, “just before we came, hundreds of Romanians had left the [construction] site without being paid.” Their lack of awareness that wages were not always paid was attributed to the fact that all eleven were working in Germany for the first time. Non-payment of wages had become the norm at the time. Despite the many assurances from their Bulgarian and Turkish colleagues that their “resistance won’t last for more than a month,” the Romanians decided to stage a protest.

On October 2, 2014, fifteen Romanian workers unfurled a banner in front of the office of one of the subcontractors. The banner read, “Metatec Fundus GmbH, slavery is protected by law in Germany.” Thirty-three people were prepared to protest if their wages remained unpaid. The number of people willing to participate in a collective action scared the subcontractors and they began making partial payments every two or three days. The amounts

varied, EUR 200 today and EUR 300 tomorrow, but still fell significantly short of what was owed. “Soon,” the Romanians were told every day, being assured of full payment. After four days, workers started returning to Romania. Tensions escalated between the workers and the subcontractors after the latter ceased even the partial payments. In response, the laborers decided to escalate their protest and gathered in front of the Mall’s main entrance, where hundreds of thousands pass by every day. Within days, a fellow worker established contact between the protestors and the anarcho-syndicalist Free Workers’ Union (FAU).

FAU supported the protest by finding night shelter whenever possible, applying for demonstration permits, and assisting in strategy building. My conversations with the Mall of Shame workers, as well as with various members of FAU, indicated that one of the most challenging aspects of sustaining their struggle was securing the possibility of its continuation. Right from the outset, it became clear that finding the means to sustain and maintain the physical well-being of the body in order to continue to struggle – finding shelter, food, and medical supplies if needed – was a major concern, often making strategic and political discussions secondary in the resistance process. The culmination of the protest of the Mall of Shame workers came on December 6, 2014, when, with the support and networking of FAU, approximately 400 people participated in a three-hour demonstration.

The protestors circled around the Mall throughout the demonstration, demanding that the wages of the cheated workers be paid. As we made our way through the small streets around the Mall, we heard the slogan “Freedom of



Photo 4. Demonstration against the Mall of Shame.

Photo by the author.

movement is everybody's right!" It was as if the Romanians were precluded from that right.

Despite the large turnout and the media and public pressure in favor of the Romanian laborers, most of them went back to Romania unpaid; only two were still in Berlin at the beginning of 2015.

The fixers – the people who establish contacts with subcontractors – often come from the same local communities as the laborers. They could be from the same village, neighborhood, or even extended family. In this sense, the mediator between capital and labor does not necessarily become a subject of antagonism, as seen in the

case of the Mall of Shame. However, even in the absence of such immediate connections, subcontractors and fixers have devised strategies to deal with potential problems arising, for example, from court orders to pay due wages or large-scale protests that could scare away potential labor. For many Bulgarian laborers I have spoken with, their relationship with the fixers (and, by extension, with the subcontractor) was more important than staging an open struggle. This is because fixers are the available contacts one relies upon to revive the cycle of movement (and thus of social reproduction). Such practices have become integral to the chains of exploitation and the movement of labor power further and further across Europe. Subcontractors have found ways to deal with potential lawsuits. They usually declare bankruptcy, move to other cities, and find fresh moving labor power. This is what happened in the case of the Mall of Shame as well, as reported on FAU's website in 2017:

In 2015 and 2016, most of the lawsuits against the subcontractors were successful, but – as was to be expected – the questionable subcontractors declared bankruptcy or went underground. Now in 2017, the Romanian construction workers, with support from FAU Berlin, have proceeded to file lawsuits against the responsible commissioner, Harald Huth's Leipziger Platz GmbH & Co. KG. (FAU, 2017)

Freedom of Movement: Escaping a Habit

It is not solely the imposed absence of movement that may be thought concurrently with violence; it is also the presence of unrestricted movement, as guaranteed by inclusion in liberal democracies and capitalist forms of organization, which goes hand in hand with violence.

To examine the ambivalence of the notion of freedom of movement as conceived in political and economic liberalism, however, we cannot divorce it from assumptions regarding the redistribution/justice nexus. In social movements addressing issues of flight and migration, justice is often automatically associated with freedom of movement. But this is also the case for political theorists dealing with the notion of free movement. Loren Lomasky (2007, pp. 225-229), for example, assigns a semi-redistributive function to the right to free movement. Granting individuals escaping from the social miseries in their home countries the right to enter a wealthy country brings them closer to the opportunities provided by the simultaneous workings of “private property and the rule of law” in wealthy countries. The act of opening borders is, in itself, an act of justice allowing closer physical proximity to a greater resource base. In fact, Lomasky, echoing much of the current debate on immigration, proposes abandoning welfare for immigrants altogether. Instead, he suggests shifting initial support for immigrants to the private sphere, where bona fide employment offers and family members assume the primary support role. Immigration is emancipated from the political to enter the realm of the free market, where the entrepreneurial and self-regulating spirit

of immigrants is expected to bring them closer to what they have come for in the first place.

In a similar vein, Joseph Carens (1992, p. 26) equates freedom of movement with equality of opportunity, claiming that “You have to be able to move to where the opportunities are in order to take advantage of them.” In Carens’s egalitarian view of freedom of movement, it is a means to escape an antagonistic relation rooted in “political and economic inequalities.” Arguing that the right to move freely must become an indispensable human right and foundation for promoting other liberties and freedoms, Carens asserts the moral entitlement of the poor to access that which remains in abundance in wealthier countries. In his account, the very acts of escaping and arriving constitute acts of redistribution.

Carens’s critic, James Woodward (1992), argues that the possession of a “fundamental right” to freedom of movement is not exclusive to the needy and the poor; it would also allow the movement of more affluent members of society. Woodward’s reservations about Carens’s egalitarian perspective on freedom of movement stem from concerns about the potential conflicts that an unrestricted number of immigrants could bring to a host society, the wage dumping that labor will inevitably experience, and the rise of racist sentiments. Woodward’s focus on economic patriotism and the moral duty to avoid conflicts by protecting the citizens of an affluent country implies that social antagonisms are the by-products of immigration, not of capitalist relations and racializing grammars. Nevertheless, his insights prompt us to rethink the arguments for freedom of movement based solely on moral grounds. Namely, that

freedom of movement, in itself, cannot alleviate poverty or inequality, and in fact often exacerbates them considering, for example, existing relations of private property and consequent modes of appropriation and distribution, and not least, practices that extract exorbitant economic value from racialized groups.

Much like the debates on migrants' agency and its relation to citizenship, where there is an assumption that migrants act politically with the aim of becoming members of a host society, Carens's and Lomasky's propositions fall into the trap of integrationalism. Such accounts of freedom of movement articulate it as an infrastructure, as a logistical element that brings individuals closer to a commons (e.g., welfare system). However, the dismantling and destruction of the notion of the commons (exemplified by, for instance, the austerity state) in our contemporary context have effectively relegated it to an unattainable horizon.

The fleeing subject, as portrayed in studies of refugees and "illegal" border crossers, represents one of the fundamental living conflicts in contemporary liberal democracies. On the one hand, we are used to seeing detained people at the European borders, but on the other, these same borders are constantly penetrated. The migrating body is both immobilized yet successfully migrating. This apparent contradiction is well captured by the Autonomy of Migration (AoM) approach, which shifts attention from the often taken-for-granted power of regulation to the excess of this regulation and the ways this excess in fact shapes institutional practices (see, inter alia, Casas-Cortés et al., 2015; Mezzadra, 2011; Mezzadra & Neilson, 2013; Papadopoulos et al., 2008). Inspired by the Italian *operais-*

mo of the 1960s, which shifted the focus of Marxist debates from the moving power of capital to the moving power of the worker (Tronti, 2012), AoM is similarly concerned with practices of insubordination and struggle.

For some, AoM holds the risk to ultimately fall “back to a representationalist understanding ... and potentially essentialise a specific phenomenology of migration” (Schwab, 2014). In my view, however, the problem is not in AoM’s romanticization of migration (for a critique of the AoM approach, see also Scheel, 2013), as ambivalence is one of its major conceptual tools (Casas-Cortes et al., 2015; Schwab, 2014), but in that some AoM accounts tend to focus solely on (attempted) immobilization as a terrain of struggle. This particular approach within AoM is a consequence of the choice of the subject of research, namely the individual subjected to border controls: the non-citizen, the third-country national. Such an approach, however, risks portraying the immobilized subject as an outsider or surplus to struggles within and against capital. Considering AoM’s roots in *operaismo*, we can argue that an approach situating accounts solely in the field of attempted immobilization does not reveal much about the relation between labor power, capital, the state, and freed movement. In this sense, AoM risks being methodologically narrow.

To exemplify:

If *operaismo*’s Copernican revolution was to invert capital–labour relations, refocusing on the multiplication of labour struggles and the diverse mechanisms capital employs to fix the social relation in its favour, AoM similarly seeks to focus on the ways in which equivalent

relations of *detrterritorialization by migrant mobilities* are currently forcing the state to reterritorialize its border management regime. (Casas-Cortes et al., 2015, p. 908; emphasis in original)

This approach implicitly separates “labor struggles” from “migrant mobilities” and does not scrutinize mobilities as an actual part of labor struggles. Movement, in this account, is denied its inextricable relationship with capital. Such readings pose the risk of confining migratory categories, such as the refugee or the asylum seeker, to pre-conceived notions – that is, that these movements belong to a particular realm, namely the border and the camp. Furthermore, the reader is implicitly invited to exempt these relations from labor-capital relations, as mobilities are suddenly disconnected from labor markets. However, we should always keep in mind that, regardless of the reason for fleeing or the category under which this flight is classified, the only commodity possessed by those crossing when they reach the final destination, or even during transit, is that of labor power. In this sense, everyone is a potential laborer. This is one of the defining characteristic of capitalism: there is a necessitated “economic” compulsion to sell one’s labor power.

Indeed, AoM cannot be viewed as a flat terrain, despite attempts to present it as such. There are different levels of engagement with the issues at hand. In some accounts, borders do play a role in the configuration of bodies as labor power, thereby giving rise to border struggles (Mezzadra & Neilson, 2013, pp. 20-21). This take on the productive aspect of the border views labor power as a

pure potential (Virno, 2015), where, eventually, labor power (as a capacity) stops being potential and becomes productive labor. In the realm of labor power and freedom of movement, it is evident that the legal and political theoretical frameworks crafting this freedom have produced effects that intensify and facilitate the movement of labor power in and out of labor markets. Freedom of movement has influenced the ways labor power is sold and bought, reducing the temporal gap between the potential of labor power and its actual realization in labor. Furthermore, freedom of movement diminishes the bargaining power of labor power, as we saw in the struggles of the Bulgarian and Romanian workers.

The “market” is of universal concern in liberalism. Moving labor power can serve as an indicator of the needs of this universal. When refugees enter “Fortress Europe,” they simultaneously cross the threshold of capital accumulation in Europe – to use an *operaist* insight, the struggle is already *dentro e contro* (within and against). As Matteo Pasquinelli (2014, p. 182) suggests, Mario Tronti, one of the leading figures in the *Operaismo* school, never lost sight of “the wholeness of capital.” We, too, should not lose sight of this comprehensive perspective when considering moving labor power, and especially when attempting to historicize freedom of movement in relation to the other forms of movement peculiar to contemporary capitalism. This threshold is decisive for political economy: the possession of labor power, the particular type of labor that is in demand, the temporal gap between the potential to gain and the actual contracting of labor. Movement – and hence the lack of movement – configures these.

To further our understanding of AoM, we need to keep in mind that:

An autonomous reading of migration goes beyond the victimization and objectification of migration, questioning classical functionalist analyses that attempt to explain migration as either the product of cost–benefit calculations in the framework of push and pull factors or as a mere supplier of labour market worker shortages. (Sabine Hess, cited in Casas-Cortes et al., 2015, p. 899)

Of course, labor markets are not mere black holes defined solely by their shortages. In fact, as Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson (2013, p. 22) point out, the processes of legal and political constitution of labor markets should be “analyzed in terms of their consequences for the subjective composition of living labor,” which does not exclude migrants. On the contrary, as the authors argue, borders – and may I add, the absence of borders – should be analyzed in their relation to labor markets. Under capitalist relations, there is an umbilical cord between the two. While I believe that it is of utmost importance to eradicate victimizing and objectifying readings of migration and to do away with cost-benefit analysis, I am afraid that turning a blind eye to the so-called labor market and its workings will obscure the working logics of capitalism as well, where not only “shortages” or pull and push factors dictate. Such narrow readings of the labor market jeopardize an understanding of the changing patterns of capitalist accumulation, conceal the continuum between moments of expropriation and moments of exploitation and the struggles that are contained by and within this continuum,

and risk viewing migration systems as isolated entities, in the realm of abstract thought.

Reducing restrictions on movement allows EU nationals to follow capital wherever it goes. The same could be said about capital itself. There is a sharp contrast in the ways in which labor power and capital are organized, however (Moody, 1997). Whilst capital tends to consolidate within transnational corporations and thereby concentrates power, the movement of labor power is dispersed and often leads to the impossibility to organize politically, as expressed in the freedom to escape. These, in conjunction with the retrenchment of the welfare state, have direct consequences on the social reproduction and political struggles of EU migrants. As Mezzadra and Neilson (2013, p. 95) show, translating between subjects and struggles is only possible by analyzing “the complex ways [in which the heterogeneous constitution of global space] crisscrosses the production and reproduction of labor power as a commodity.” Above I addressed some of the productive spatial and temporal aspects of freedom of movement that speak to the reproduction of labor power.

One of the intrinsic characteristics of that reproduction is the ability to move quickly and widely. Freedom of movement, as a historical form of moving labor power, coupled with the flexibilization of labor and strong reliance on fixers and subcontractors as a primary recruiting force globally (Leiber et al., 2019; Ortlieb & Weiss, 2019; Rai, 2020), has led to the emergence of a continuously migrating workforce. These workers are often transported en masse directly to their designated work locations. Of course, as was the case with the laborers in Munich, the la-

bor market still relies on recruitment that is individualistic in nature. Fragmented by numerous subcontractors, the labor market needs easily disposable labor and movement which is neither hindered nor slowed down by barriers. Usually, such workers do not get attached to the workplace and go through cycles of deskilling since hopping from town to town, from country to country, and from sector to sector, requires speedy adaptation. The type of worker that is being created is not one that identifies with a workplace or a skill but with the capacity to move.

The struggles described above are confronted by a double-bind logic. On the one hand, they tackle the front-stage of capitalism, the “legitimate sets of commercial and productive relations,” and on the other, the backstage of capitalism, “shadowy markets, unpaid work of all sorts, and irregular recruitment and hiring practices” (Rajaram, 2015, p. 68). If the decision to leave one place for another is a social movement in itself (Mezzadra, 2004; Papadopolous et al., 2008), then freedom of movement has the potential to multiply these social movements and to radicalize them. However, this potential exists only if freedom of movement transcends its embeddedness in the making of capitalism and turns its power precisely against such makings. This is hidden in its spatio-temporal character, which enables the fast and wide physical movement of people who are subject to the double bind of accumulation by dispossession and accumulation by exploitation (Mezzadra & Neilson, 2013, pp. 232-242). Political organization at the intersecting points of this labor is necessitated by the way labor power moves. As we learn from Sergio Bologna (2005, p. 8), at the turn of the 20th century the

labor movement in the US was well equipped to face the challenge of the “mobile proletariat.” The International Workers of the World (IWW), in particular, organized the latter by using agitators who swim “within the stream of proletarian struggles, who mov[e] from one end to the other” (Bologna, 2005, p. 8).

In the struggles described above, a dimension emerged that is not celebratory; there is nothing heroic about it. It is the failure to keep struggling, to continue the struggle. Continuity has been interpreted as the umbilical cord between immediate demands and general ends (Panzieri, 2014) and, hence, as an immediate task. Struggles are most often discontinued when laborers lack political networks. Often, however, even if such networks exist, they can rarely ensure shelter, food supplies, new jobs – in other words, social reproduction. Consequently, people move on to the next opportunity in order to fulfill such basic needs.

One of the spatial dimensions of the struggles of EU workers in both Berlin and Munich was that they took place literally blocks away from the proliferating refugee social movements in and around these two cities. I have heard of short-lived instances where participants in these differentiated struggles have crossed paths; however, to my knowledge, there has not been a persistent organizational endeavor to combine their efforts. And even when and where such attempts were made, they failed. In fact, according to many of my interlocutors, such efforts would be too difficult, or impossible to achieve, as the rights held by EU migrants are too great compared to those of third-country nationals. Deportability was perhaps the most cited reason for the impossibility to translate Eastern

European pauperized laborers' struggles into the structures of the refugee and anti-racist movements, or vice versa. "You know, this is all great, but then these labor migrants can at least stay here. They don't face deportation," I was sometimes told.

The struggles *for* movement are always already struggles *against* movement, however. This is one of the social effects produced by the tensions between the fixing and freeing of labor power discussed in the Introduction to this book. At the same time, we see how the gap discussed at the beginning of this chapter, the void between the absence and the presence of the right to move, has grown wider. Perhaps this is due to the strong, albeit not the only, focus on border controls in refugee movements and the theoretical construction of freedom of movement as being an outstanding demand. Meanwhile, such presuppositions set aside considerations of class and eliminate opportunities for connecting the ongoing struggles. Moreover, they overlook the heterogeneous yet common aspects of many of these movements. To create radical possibilities for collective responses, we must first shift away from the habitual political approach that frames freedom of movement. This is not to say that the millions of migrants who are struggling with violent border controls, often dying at sea, or those who have already made it to peripheral Europe and are still struggling to reach the "core" of European capitalist societies should abandon this demand. But we need to denaturalize the liberation potentialities of freedom of movement and interrogate its material and conceptual instabilities. Failing to do so keeps us within the cycle of *making capitalism normal again*.

3

Economic vs. Political Violence

Before 2015, the terms “refugees” and “migrants” were often used interchangeably, showing the inadequacy of international law on migration flows.* In 2015, when third-country nationals successfully bypassed European border controls, it became a moral imperative to use the words “refugees” and “migrants” side by side in order to emphasize that those crossing European borders were driven by different motives. This language – reflecting the differentiation between refugees (political migrants) and economic migrants as enshrined in international law and in practices characteristic of the Common European Asylum System (CEAS) – solidified even further the reproduction of subjects of legitimate violence and illegitimate escape. Upon reaching European shores and land borders, these subjects must demonstrate which type they belong to – that is, whether they are fleeing from political violence or escaping from economic hardships.

We should not use the word “migrant.” “Migrant” is a political word that is used to take away the real status of these people. They are refugees. They are running from war, and they actually liked their homes and they’re not leaving their homes because they want to live in Italy, or they want to live in Ireland. They’re leaving their homes because they don’t have any homes. (Bono, 2015)

* Parts of this chapter have been published in Apostolova (2016) and Apostolova (2015).

This is Bono, the frontman of the world-famous rock band U2 and the voice of Western good conscience, who also tops the charts of charitable initiatives that donate millions of dollars to fight poverty and hunger, mainly in Africa. At the time of his talk, speaking simply of refugees or simply of migrants had become a heresy following the “refugee crisis” of 2015. What we learn from Bono is that the refugees liked where they (used to) live, and the migrants did not; refugees have no homes to return to and migrants do; the state of being a migrant is political; the state of being a refugee is real. Bono articulated these insights against a backdrop of thunderous applause and screaming fans in the days after thousands of migrants from Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Somalia, and other countries had made their way across Europe, defying long-established mechanisms of movement control.

U2’s frontman delivered this speech amid the so-called refugee crisis of 2015, which saw unprecedented numbers of people openly resisting European border regimes. This unprecedented movement began when thousands left the crowded Keleti railway station in Budapest and set off for Austria on foot in August 2015 (Gunesch et al., 2016; Kallius, 2016; Kallius et al., 2016). Such images would reappear continuously in the subsequent months at the Croatian-Serbian, Macedonian-Greek, and Serbian-Macedonian borders. Bono’s message seemed to be simple: some of those we see coming into Europe deserve to be welcomed as they are running from war. They are not all “migrants” – that is, people who have the agency to choose to escape and who are typically fleeing from economic hardships; they are refugees, participants in a

zero-sum game where choice is not an option: one either flees or dies. In August and September 2015, readers of popular European media outlets such as The Guardian, The Telegraph, and Deutsche Welle became increasingly involved in debates over whether the word “migrant” has derogatory connotations.

On August 20, 2015, Barry Malone (2015) explained in an editorial for Al Jazeera, “Why Al Jazeera will not say Mediterranean ‘migrants.’” The author argued that the term “migrant” is pejorative and obscures the horror of Syrians’ war experience as well as Europe’s humanitarian duty. By using the term “migrant,” we “give weight to those [governments] who want only to see economic migrants.” This symbolic displacement was meant to elicit more compassion from its target audience. Al Jazeera’s profession of faith resounded like a call, and the call reverberated quickly throughout major media outlets. Media across Europe questioned the legitimacy of narratives about “economic migrants,” proposing instead to tell a story about “refugees,” “asylum seekers,” and “displaced people” – in other words, “a story about humanity” (Marsh, 2015). “Economic migrants, unlike refugees, do not necessarily suffer persecution,” confirmed The Huffington Post (Bowden, 2015). In this ideological context, the economic migrant was cast out of humanity.

Two months after the media debate over how to refer to the people crossing Europe’s borders, the material effects of the ideology underpinning Al Jazeera’s and Bono’s symbolic gestures translated into segregation of “genuine refugees” and “economic migrants” along the European borders. In the Serbian town of Šid, police stopped more

than 500 people from boarding a train to Croatia on November 20, 2015. Those people were not from Syria, Iraq or Afghanistan. A volunteer on the ground recalled that about twenty Moroccans and Pakistanis were locked behind a metal gate that day without any explanation as to why they were being segregated. As the volunteer explained, representatives of the UNHCR had told her that “Segregation is done on economic migrants and refugees from war zones.” “Welcome to apartheid!” concluded the volunteer.*

Towards mid-December 2015, such segregation became commonplace along the Greek-Macedonian border as well:

While only SIA [Syria-Iraq-Afghanistan] refugees and non-SIA families can get shelter in Athens (single non-SIA men are left in the streets with no protection), tension is building up on the [Greek] islands, where ethnic segregation is ongoing, and registration is extremely slow. In scenes reminiscent of Idomeni a few weeks ago (in which those who weren’t from Syria, Afghanistan or Iraq were refused entry to Macedonia), the authorities at Camp Moria in Lesvos have stopped registering asylum seekers from Morocco, Tunisia and Algeria, prompting some of these people to go on hunger strike at Moria yesterday ... [The] situation in Moria camp on Lesvos is getting worse every day. While the immigration [office] is officially rejecting “unwanted nationals,” today they didn’t open the offices to anyone.

* This information is taken from a public social media volunteer group dedicated to disseminating information about the conditions refugees face in various parts of Europe.

As a result, around 5000 people are stuck in front of the camp, some of them waiting for days to get any kind of help. (AYS, December 22, 2015)

Why do we distinguish between economic migrants and refugees? What are the conditions of possibility that allow us to see those fleeing war and persecution as more worthy of protection, as more human than those fleeing poverty and social desperation?

Refugees and History

Genealogical readings of the figure of the *refugee* have captured much of the scholarly attention in recent decades (Barnett, 2002; Chimni, 2004; Lippert, 1999; Salomon, 1991; Skran, 1992). Dimitris Parsanoglou and Konstantinos Tsitselikis (2015) examine the institutionalization of refugeedom as a consequence of two interconnected events: the emergence of the “refugee question” and the subsequent definition of a “refugee” by the United Nations in 1951. The so-called “refugee question” – later to be turned into an institutionalized regime – is traced back to the disintegration of the Ottoman and Russian empires. Three representations emerged after the disintegration of the two empires and informed the subsequent institutionalization of the “refugee.” One of them was the so-called “exchange of populations” among Greece, Bulgaria, and Turkey in the aftermath of the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and the Balkan Wars. The second representation, according to Parsanoglou and Tsitselikis (2015, p. 23), revolved around

the simultaneous unprecedented waves of *forced migration* in the first half of the 20th century and the “collapse of empires and the formation of new nation-states.” The third historical representation of the “early refugees” was that of the Armenians escaping the Ottoman massacres and the people fleeing Tsarist Russia. These three events-representations converged, giving us an idea of the “early refugee” – an individual who was not quite a refugee but was on the way to being tamed and defined by the emergence of the “international migration management” regimes. However, refugees – or individuals who are forced to flee a territory – had to be distinguished from other similar processes in order to delineate the conceptual boundaries of “refugee.”

At the same time, there is a complex relation between two seemingly separate spheres – that of the “economic” and that of the “political” – which informs the formation of liberal approaches to international law, including the governance of movement and migration. As Sundhya Pahuja’s (2011, p. 10) critical investigation of international law shows, the attempts to define meanings for ostensibly universal categories operate through the law’s “constitutive function to cast and recast certain issues or questions as properly belonging to one set of institutions rather than another – the ‘economic’ rather than the ‘political.’” It is in this sense that the author argues that the institutional separation between the “economic” and the “political” spheres in international law that took place in the aftermath of World War II, has had concrete implications for a specific mode of power that governs the conduct of international relations.

According to Rieko Karatani (2005, p. 522), two approaches to migration came head to head in 1951 and

produced the model of migration management that was to govern international movement of people in the next decades – namely, the International Labor Organization’s (ILO) “comprehensive approach on the basis of international co-ordination, and the functional operation principles of the US government.” The former was foreseen as an addition to the predominant organization of migration at the time, via bilateral agreements. In 1947, the common understanding regarding “migration problems” was that the ILO, in cooperation with the UN, would have the permanent mandate to deal with “international problems of an economic and social nature” stemming from migrating populations (ILO, quoted in Karatani, 2005, p. 524). Five institutions (such as the World Health Organization and the Food and Agricultural Organization) in a second category were to deal with migration problems on an “incidental” basis (Karatani, 2005, p. 524). The second category included the Preparatory Commission of the International Refugee Organization. This two-tier institutional division speaks to an approach that defined migration in its generality and permanency, while addressing refugee flows as specific occurrences. In other words, while migration was acknowledged to be a permanent phenomenon – that is, migration is transhistorical – its particularities (e.g., workers’ transfers, refugee movements) were to be dealt with specifically as they occurred.

Eventually in 1947, the Secretariats of the UN and the ILO agreed upon the division of responsibilities between the two bodies, where “the rights and situation of ‘migrants’ ... as workers fell under the mandate of the ILO, whereas those as *aliens*, the UN” (Karatani, 2005, p. 524; emphasis in

original). Thus, the alien (later to become the refugee) was disarticulated from the worker. In the next few years, international coordination was organized under the mandates of the ILO and the UN. In the meantime, however, as Karatani (2005, pp. 526-527) points out, the US had come under increasing pressure to tackle problems emerging from the increase in people fleeing Europe in the 1930s and 1940s, while its immigration policies remained restrictive. As a result of public pressure, the US helped establish three organizations that were to deal with questions of refugeedom and displacement: the Intergovernmental Committee on Refugees (IGCR), the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA), and the temporary International Refugee Organization (IRO) as their successor (Karatani, 2005, pp. 527-528). The author further demonstrates that the IRO's selective membership policy made possible the exclusion of the Soviet bloc and therefore decision-taking without the latter's participation (Karatani, 2005, p. 529). Additionally, the notion of the refugee was individualized for the first time – that is to say, the collective basis underlying previous conceptions of the term “refugee” faded away. In this last line of thought, Karatani (2005, p. 532) proposes that the distinction between refugees (forced to flee by their country of origin) and migrants (fleeing voluntarily as surplus labor populations) was “theoretically plausible [at the time], but difficult to draw in practice.” This distinction has persisted to this day.

This legal distinction persists in the way research on migration apprehends international movements. The application of the political/economic migrant binary is a common approach in the social sciences, and there seems

to be a consensus centered around the need to differentiate *labor migrations* from *forced migrations*. This need arises from the ways in which the particularities of migration must be studied (see, e.g., Diner, 2008). Migration studies tend to focus on the *determinants* and *consequences* of people's movements. Methodologically, this approach has been translated into "Migration Studies" as a way to study specific patterns of movement (e.g., green card movements, asylum systems, labor movements, climate refugees), but rarely in relation to one another (for exceptions, see Kmak, 2015).

Andreas Demuth (2000) translates the categories defined by international law in order to describe different approaches in migration studies. According to the author, "The refugee is an involuntary migrant, a victim of politics, war, or national catastrophe. ... In short: every refugee is a migrant, but not every migrant is a refugee" (Demuth, 2000, p. 27). These words strikingly remind us of Bono's take on migration at the beginning of this chapter. Demuth does not question these classifications; instead, he leads the reader to the conclusion that such categories are legitimate as a basis for methodological approaches in the field:

Categories therefore have their worth as an analytic tool. As opposed to some academic, judicial, or administrative delineations of such categories, it must be clear that in real life there are mixtures of migration types ... Also, academic categorisation does not *per se* have other objectives than clearing a path through a jungle of difficult academic terrain: explain the complicated. (Demuth, 2000, p. 27)

Following such paths gives epistemic primacy to legal categories, endowing them with a science-like form while concurrently ignoring the conflictual nature of such taxonomies. Scholars have indeed questioned such epistemological approaches. For example, Elca Stigter and Alessandro Monsutti (2005) have argued that the reason for flight among Afghans is a combination of both livelihood strategies and a response to war – hence, it is hard to determine a single “true” reason for their flight. However, even when such studies question such categorization, they nonetheless reproduce its premises by examining the particularities of escape within the general framework of migration, but not their ideological underpinnings. In other words, such studies tend to scrutinize the analytical points of arrival at a particular categorization, and not of departure, that is, of its epistemological beginnings.

Examining the reasons for migration and creating complex taxonomies has always been a particular preoccupation in sociological research. For example, the well-known study by William Petersen (1958) has categorized migration according to the individual’s relation to the state, to nature, and to cultural norms. This study laid the groundwork for exploring migration in terms of its voluntary or involuntary nature (Jackson, 1969). The importance of migratory typologies lies in that

they force us both to make explicit the logical relationship between categories and to select the distinguishing criteria with some insight into the migrant situation. They are neither theories nor, in the absence of causal relationships between categories, classificatory

systems; nor does any one yet produced meet all our requirements. But they are useful in imposing order on a large mass of heterogeneous material and marking out clearly the ground to be covered by any general statement. (Price, 1969, p. 195)

Even when the theoretical plausibility of models scrutinizing migration as either “voluntary” or “forced” is being questioned, methodological individualism still creeps in. This is evident, for example, in Anthony Richmond’s (1993) distinction between “reactive” and “proactive” migrations, which delineate the distinction between the different types of agency exercised by the individual. Ultimately, when the analytical starting point is the typology of migration according to reason (whether it is voluntary, involuntary, climate-driven, economic, political, etc.), what is generally maintained is an explanatory model focusing on the imputed choice of some abstract individuals (that is, methodological individualism).

The Logic Behind Violence Hidden in the Notion of the “Economic Migrant”

European asylum systems have been approached from various methodological angles that often privilege European borders as a subject of research. For a long time, the notion of “Fortress Europe” – the idea that the management of migration flows is geared towards sealing the Union’s borders – has preoccupied both scholarly research

and activist practices. Criticizing the concept of “Fortress Europe” which views European asylum systems as producing impenetrable borders, Vassilis Tsianos and Serhat Karakayali (2010) propose instead that permeability be seen as constitutive of border governance. In a similar light, Peter O’Brien (2019) argues that border processes simultaneously combat and facilitate irregular crossings. In an important study, Martina Tazzioli (2020) demonstrates that mobility has in fact developed as a technology of government, which forces illegalized migrants to participate in “convoluted geographies.” Through a case study focused on the contested nature of the EU’s Dublin Regulation, Bernd Kasperek (2016) demonstrates how the Common European Asylum System functions as a “selective filter,” historically developed as a mechanism for labor control of populations originating outside Europe. Introducing the concept of “coloniality of asylum,” Fiorenza Picozza (2021, p. 7) captures the ways in which the linkages between humanitarianism and securitization and between welfare and deportations have produced an administrative distinction between “refugees” and “migrants.” Importantly, Picozza ethnographically demonstrates that coloniality is an internal logic that informs asylum, border, and even solidarity practices, ultimately informing hierarchies of lives.

These theoretical paths have greatly contributed to our knowledge of asylum systems and the production of differences within them, but my research strategy here is different. I focus on the conditions of possibility that structure the persistence of the differentiation between economic migrants and refugees, and the implications of

this differentiation for those crossing European borders (their struggles, housing arrangements, and relation to European labor markets).

One of the effects of the so-called refugee crisis of 2015 was that it solidified consensus across the EU that the “economic migrant” must leave. From Berlin’s widening of the conceptual boundaries of what constitutes a safe zone within a dangerous territory and the prompt execution of deportation orders, to hunters of economic migrants along the Bulgarian-Turkish border and their employment by the government of Viktor Orbán in Hungary, the message drummed into us was that the European space is reserved for “genuine refugees” only. Refugees are welcome. Their counterpoint – the economic migrants – are not. Back in 2015, in the midst of the “refugee crisis,” Manuela Bojadžijev and Sandro Mezzadra (2015) wrote that “One can see ... a ‘difference machine’ at work, which discriminates between ‘first-class’ refugees of brutal war (the Syrians) and potential seekers of political asylum (the Iraqis) while branding people from the Balkans as ‘economic migrants.’” What we also saw was that this “difference machine” worked in oscillation mode, swinging back and forth between extremes and feeding on the contradictions it inevitably breeds. It produced unstable categories, and where “first-class” qualities could ostensibly be perceived for a moment, they quickly gave way to previously engendered anxieties. The temporary protection that was being granted to Syrian asylum seekers throughout Europe was precisely this: temporary protection from being labeled an “economic migrant.” What does it mean, however, to accept one’s

refugee-ness but not one's economic migrant-ness? How did the so-called "refugee crisis" articulate which type of violence is legitimate?

To answer such questions, we need to turn to the coding role of ideological assumptions in the construction of the categories of migration. Retracing the legal definition of refugee, Robert Miles (1993, p. 120) concludes that the notion was "structured by ideological considerations which refracted the domination of capitalist interests in western Europe and the United States." But what are these ideological considerations? Although Miles does not provide us with an answer, the premise here is that the constructed division around refugees and economic migrants has a particular impact on how we are conditioned to think of the "market," the "economy," and of globalized capitalism. To describe someone as a non-genuine refugee is to construct the opposite of what constitutes political persecution, and hence political violence. Therefore, the opposite of political violence is the economy as prescribed in the concept of the economic migrant, and in the "genuine refugee/economic migrant" binary.

The category of the economic migrant and the debates around genuine refugee-ness teach us that the pre-migration world is divided into two distinct zones. The one where refugees come from is a space where bombs fall, heads are cut off, and murder has become the norm. The flight of the refugee is "involuntary." We learn that political violence leaves no room for choice. Conversely, economic migrants come from places where "economic" mechanisms are at play. Here, the act of fleeing is considered voluntary because capitalist economies, it is widely accepted, grant

choice and agency to their subjects; these subjects are encouraged to endure poverty and unemployment and to be more entrepreneurial as, eventually, the economic hardships will disappear as the market clears. As such, the pre-migration world closely follows the ideological tenets of economic liberalism. Capitalism, in this mythological account, is portrayed as a realm where distribution and production are nonpolitical. “Economies” are nonviolent. Hence, Europe has no obligation toward those who decide to flee the “economy.”

Whether excess populations are pronounced economic or political migrants, however, they always seem to reach their destination. Unlike the economy in its neoliberal variant of flexibilization and differentially withdrawn state intervention (Foucault, 2007; Hathaway, 2020), migrants, as relative surplus populations, must be monitored and regulated by all possible means. Hence, a complex hierarchical system has been assembled, wherein people are classified under different migratory categories, pitting them against each other in fierce competition for both state assistance and opportunities on the labor markets. The initial classifications, as interwoven into the apparently straightforward economic/political migrant dichotomy, have produced a complex sequence of “bogus asylum seekers” that the European asylum system needs to control. This sequence has merged with juridical rationales, further complexifying the migratory classification by fragmenting migrants according to differentiated access to work permits, labor markets, social benefits, and labor rights. In our contemporary context, it seems that discussing one side of the political/economic migrant binary inevitably entails negating the other. Why?

The economic/political migrant binary aligns with political theoretical and ideological assumptions readily embraced by economic liberalism, that is, the way the latter construes the “economic” and the “political” vis-à-vis violence. Economic liberalism disembeds the “economic” from the “political” by detaching coercion from the processes of production, distribution, and allocation, which makes “the economy” appear to be coercion-free. The elements that enable this particular ideological assumption have been translated and captured by the economic/political migrant binary so as to accommodate the two central notions of the political and the economic under liberalism: that of the political being violent and that of the economic being voluntary.

Building on Karl Marx’s account of the historical development of private property into a pure economic form, Ellen Meiksins Wood (1981; 1995) offers an insightful perspective on the historical path that led to the separation of the “economic” sphere from the political. One element of this separation concerns the ways in which the appearance of coercion is structured. Wood (1995, p. 33) demonstrates that “to understand the unique development of capitalism, ... we must understand how property and class relations, as well as the functions of surplus appropriation and distribution, so to speak liberate themselves from – and yet are served by – the coercive institutions that constitute the state, and develop autonomously.” Such “liberation” entails the extraction of surplus labor, which suddenly takes a purely economic form – thus, the political coercion previously at work in its extraction is now removed from the relation between capital and labor. In this sense, eco-

conomic categories such as “poverty” and “unemployment” (which economic migrants are often accused of escaping from) appear as if free of coercion. Sébastien Rioux (2013) argues that political Marxism (or the account of capitalism as being characterized by economic coercion in surplus appropriation – of which Wood is representative) offers a “sanitized conception” of capitalist relations and reproduces a bourgeois understanding of the market – namely, the understanding that the economic is separated from the political, whereby extra-economic coercion disappears from capitalist relations. Rioux’s critique is crucial. Considering the existence of different forms of labor and surplus labor extraction in relation to capital, as well as the persistence of different forms of dependence and slavery under capitalism, speaking of “economic” and “extra-economic” coercion indeed becomes questionable.

The “economic migrant” epitomizes this uncertainty. When we introduce the notion of the economic migrant into debates on whether economic coercion is a feasible notion that describes the structure of violence under the capital relation, we see that the ideal-typical conception of the European liberal state and its migration regime is meant to convince us that the social has two parts. One is marked solely by political violence, and the authentic refugee escapes that. The other part is constituted by economic relations that are free of political violence. These economic relations are reserved for those who migrate out of an entity (e.g., nation-state) with the aim of improving their lives.

Despite Rioux’s critique, however, we can see that this construction continues to have real effects. The separation

of the “economic” from political coercion, thus, becomes a field of struggles. The economic/political migrant binary is its real appearance (Hall, 1973), that is, the effect of the ideological construction that the market is violence-free. The aforementioned struggles unfold on the terrain of this real appearance. This allows us to think of the European asylum regime and its concrete practices in the state forms of detention, pushbacks, and asylum procedures as attempts to sustain the apparent separation of violences. These relations structure the appearance of violence, which now becomes possible to define only when its manifestation is of a “political” nature. Yet, the economic migrant/refugee binary is, in a sense, oxymoronic. It is oxymoronic not because it is paradoxical but because it creates its own terms.* As applied by Rioux, the separation of economic and political is an impossible dualism, but it is also a desirable condition of freedom under liberal ideologies. If the process of “creating terms” assumes the existence of conflict and struggle, then let us read the relation between the economic and the political as an oxymoron, as always antagonistic. The surplus of that conflictual relation is locked in the “economic migrant,” explicitly defined by the UN refugee convention as the opposite of the refugee; a construction that has made it possible to divide moving bodies into ones that exhibit economic voluntarism and ones that exhibit political coercion. Then, we can treat the political/economic (migrant) binary not as a “true” separation but as an illusion to be sustained.

* I borrow this insight about the “oxymoronic” from Jean-Jacques Lecercle’s (2016) review of Paolo Virno’s *When the Word Becomes Flesh: Language and Human Nature*.

An assumption that drives the analysis here is that distinguishing economic migrants from refugees is instrumental in the formation of asylum knowledge from two antagonistic points of view. One is the point of view of the border custodians and technicians (e.g., border guards, interpreters, interviewers, judges), who are tasked with protecting a certain territory against economic migrants. The other is the point of view of those crossing the border and hoping to convince the former that they are not economic migrants. The clash between these two knowledges, which are seemingly different yet guided by the same reorientation of rationales (Miyazaki, 2004) – between the practice of the guardians of differentiation, on the one hand, and the migrants, on the other – perpetuates their antagonistic counterparts. It is in this sense that the struggles unfolding within European asylum systems can be read as attempts to sustain or eliminate the difference between what is “economic” and what is “political.”

In what follows, I examine the economic/political divide from two perspectives: from the perspective of the asylum system and its organization in Bulgaria, and from the perspective of those resisting the imposition of the categories under examination. I have chosen Bulgaria as the focus of analysis, considering its location at the European periphery where the dialectic between freedom of movement and Fortress Europe is often played out. The struggles against the imposed categories of economic and political migrants emerge within this context and unfold in opposition to the very production of knowledge that disciplines migrants based on their “belonging” to different levels of the taxonomy.

Asylum in Transition: From Socialism to Liberalism

By Decision No. 590 of December 1992, the Council of Ministers under Prime Minister Filip Dimitrov approved a Draft Law Amending and Supplementing the Law on the Residence of Foreigners in the Republic of Bulgaria. This was reasoned as follows:

The shift in the country's foreign political and economic priorities, and the growth and intensification of migratory flows in recent years, necessitates a revision of the system of entry and residence of foreigners in the Republic of Bulgaria on the basis of a new concept of visa requirements. This concept should be in line with European standards that have been developed and applied by both regional and targeted structures, and by individual countries experienced in regulating and controlling migration processes. (Central State Archives, 1992)*

Bulgaria's political and economic reorientation towards the Euro-Atlantic axis in the early 1990s, required a "westernization" of its asylum procedures, policies, and legis-

* Central State Archives, 1992. Fond [archival collection] 136, opis [inventory] 88, arhivna edinita [archival unit] 986. Reshenie No. 590 na MS ot 30.12.1992 za odobryavane na proekt na Zakona za izmenenie i dopalnenie na Zakona za prebivavane na chuzhdentsite v Republika Balgariya [Council of Ministers Decision No. 590 of 30 December 1992 to approve a Draft Law Amending and Supplementing the Law on the Residence of Foreigners in the Republic of Bulgaria].

lation (Nakova & Erolova, 2019), eliminating all socialist presuppositions guiding such practices.

While some voices claim that socialism was a closed society (Krasteva, 2005; Nakova & Erolova, 2019), a growing body of evidence challenges such interpretations and demonstrates the complex organization, governance, and heterogeneous temporalities of international migrations during that period (Alamgir, 2014; Bernard, 2022; Ivancheva, 2019; Kachakova & Koleva, 2022; Koleva, 2020; Schwenkel, 2014). Socialist Bulgaria had its own asylum provision schemes, even though they were very different from those of asylum systems in a liberal democratic context. The new Constitution of the People's Republic of Bulgaria, adopted in 1971, defined those eligible for asylum as follows: "foreigners persecuted for defending the interests of the working people, for participating in the national-liberation struggle, for progressive political, scientific and artistic activities, for fighting racial discrimination or in defense of peace" (Mashev, 1977, p. 139).

Historical studies in Bulgaria usually focus on refugees from the Greek Civil War in the 1940s and reconstruct the development of asylum infrastructures of support (Daskalov, 2008) without necessarily delving into the larger discursive and conceptual contexts of asylum provision.* Such studies in turn reproduce a rather sanitized and anachronistic account of migration processes and the foreign groups that resided in Bulgaria during the socialist period (see Otova & Staykova, 2022, pp. 8-10), which closely follows post-1989 epistemological frameworks and

* For a similar tendency in Hungary, see Kelemen (2022).

does not attempt to understand migration processes during socialism on their own historical terms.* Such studies seldom delve into the epistemological, conceptual, and even infrastructural differences between the two social formations – that of socialism and that of liberalism.

Yet, an examination that approaches the asylum system in Bulgaria under socialism from its periphery – that is, not necessarily focusing on the legal practices and material infrastructures that were exclusive to the field of asylum, but on the conditions enabling the multiplication of asylum channels, the accumulation of asylum spaces, and knowledge apparatuses – demonstrates its porous conceptual boundaries and the existence of infra-legal structures that enabled the arrival of refugees who did not have to go through the officially established procedures. That is, state institutions created asylum pockets within seemingly different institutional spheres and infrastructures (e.g., universities, political schools, spaces of balneotherapy). While Bulgaria was trying to balance between abiding by its own socialist legal framework and following provisions established by international law (Mashev, 1977), the country's official stance as an anti-racist and anti-imperialist state provided an epistemological basis for decentering and widening the scope of asylum channels via which refugees from the Middle East, South Africa, and other parts of the world, reached the country.

This is evidenced, for example, by the various ways members of the Iraqi Communist Party (ICP) reached

* On the importance of studying socialism on its own historical terms, see Alamgir & Schwenkel (2020). For what that entails in my own research, see Apostolova (2023a, pp. 408-409).

Bulgaria during the Iraqi Ba'ath Party's persecution of ICP members and activists in the 1970s. As Bulgaria's official partner in Iraq was the Ba'ath Party, the People's Republic could not officially announce its support for Iraqi refugees, as this would likely have led not only to freezing economic relations between the two countries but also to cutting off all possible ways for taking in ICP refugees.* Instead, the People's Republic multiplied the possible ways of arrival by providing state scholarships for education and financing supposed medical treatment. Once refugees arrived in Sofia, many were then transferred to other countries that were taking in ICP refugees (e.g., Syria).

The restoration of capitalist organizations and the emergence of liberal democratic forms of governance brought new understandings and rationales in the management of foreign populations in relation to national security. One of the primary concerns of border technicians during the socialist period – including of the secret service, State Security (DS) – was to protect the People's Republic from the “enemies of socialism.” Perhaps paradoxically in view of the latter claim, while the socialist era widened the meaning of asylum and multiplied the available avenues for people fleeing persecution, the transition integrated Western logics within its asylum system and started protecting the Republic from “economic migrants.” What concerns us here is the changes in the meaning of asylum, its legitimate subjects, and the implications of these changes for the political/economic divide in migration management.

* For examples, see Central State Archives, fond 1B, opis 81d, arhivna edinitsa 99, 124.

In 1992, the definition of those eligible for asylum changed as follows: those “persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, or for activities defending the rights and freedoms recognized in international treaties to which the Republic of Bulgaria is a party.” Bulgaria’s transition to a liberal-democratic state required a substantial change in its definition of asylum. If we compare the wording of the two definitions quoted above (that of the People’s Republic, see page 147, and of the Republic), we will see that the class-based approach (“working people” is replaced by “social group”) and anti-colonial basis (national-liberation struggle) towards those eligible for asylum in Bulgaria were erased in the first years of the transition. Furthermore, as demonstrated by anthropologist Rossitza Guentcheva (2012, p. 12), already in 1991 the fear of the potential influx of “economic” migrants into Bulgarian territory had gripped members of parliament. Guentcheva (2012, p. 14) argues that such fears “laid the groundwork for a new understanding of refugees as fake [*falshivi*] refugees.” The restoration of capitalism in Bulgaria was conditioned upon a specific understanding of who is to be admitted, and perpetuated the economic/political binary from the very beginning. This understanding of a population also required a particular response to its undesirable (economic) portion. However, as Guentcheva also demonstrates, these conditions were not peculiar to Bulgaria. In her words: “In the 1980s, the Western European countries transitioned from the generous acceptance in the preceding decades to practices of strict migration control, in which the refugee is considered to

be an unwanted foreigner prone to cheating and abuse, solely intent on achieving her/his aim: economic migration” (Guentcheva, 2012, p. 15).

Also in 1992, Bulgaria ratified the Geneva Convention on the status of refugees and established a National Bureau on Territorial Asylum and Refugees under the Council of Ministers, renamed to Agency for Refugees in 2000 and to State Agency for Refugees (SAR) in 2002. After a series of legal and infrastructural changes (e.g., the introduction of detention centers exclusively for foreigners in 2006), Bulgaria is now part of the Common European Asylum System (CEAS) which sets out “common high standards and stronger co-operation to ensure that asylum seekers are treated equally in an open and fair system” (European Commission, n.d.). Like other countries within the CEAS, Bulgaria’s asylum procedures and policies are guided by international and EU law. Under Bulgarian and international law, every foreigner has the right to submit an asylum application, irrespective of whether they have crossed the border legally or illegally. Asylum applications can be submitted to any state representative, but they are officially registered only by the SAR. According to the Bulgarian Helsinki Committee, the majority of asylum applications are submitted to the Border Police (at the border) and to the Migration Directorate of the Ministry of Interior (in detention centers). This is because most asylum seekers enter the country “illegally” (typically crossing the border from Turkey by land) and are subject to arrest and detention. Hence, it is at this point in time that those crossing must start convincing the state (the State Agency for Refugees) that they are not economic migrants.

Before 2013, Bulgaria received a relatively low number of asylum applications (Otova & Staykova, 2022). However, there was a sharp increase in applications in 2013, 2014, and 2015, followed by a decrease in 2016. This decrease was due to pushbacks and the construction of a border fence in 2015. The low number of asylum applications was due to the country's overall unattractiveness as a destination, and its transit character. Even when people made it to its territory, for the most part they left for Germany, Switzerland, or Austria at the earliest opportunity. According to many of my interlocutors who had made it to Bulgaria one way or another and were with varying legal statuses, before 2006 (a year before Bulgaria's accession to the EU), it was much easier to stay in the country even without proper documents and without going through the asylum procedure.

Statistics reflect the state's focus on what is deemed important knowledge about a particular population. The State Agency for Refugees presents its knowledge about asylum seekers to the public through statistical tables that address questions such as: how many people have sought asylum in a particular period; how many of them have been granted refugee or humanitarian status; how many have been denied status; how many have had their application procedure terminated; which nationalities seek protection in Bulgaria, etc. We can read these statistics as an exercise in "knowledge-gathering" that sustains hegemonic projects (Rajaram, 2015). The numbers also reveal who is considered worthy of protection and who is not – a rationale productive of the economic/political binary.

Before 2016, detention of asylum seekers was not provided for by Bulgarian legislation, but in 2016 the latter was amended to introduce such a possibility (Ilareva, 2015; 2016). The amendment was a response to a regularly reported malpractice in previous years, where asylum seekers were frequently detained despite having submitted an asylum application (whether in written or oral form). Although Bulgarian law did not explicitly authorize the detention of asylum seekers (Global Detention Project, n.d.), it was a common practice in the country, primarily existing in the gray area of the law. This gray area was legalized in 2016, and within it, the conflict related to political/economic migrants unfolds both spatially and temporarily.

Bulgaria provides four types of international protection: asylum (granted by the President of the Republic), refugee and humanitarian status (granted by the State Agency for Refugees), and temporary protection status (granted by the Council of Ministers). The asylum system is not centralized. The two main bodies with responsibilities in the field of asylum are the State Agency for Refugees under the Council of Ministers, and the Ministry of Interior, which guards the borders and manages the detention centers for foreigners.

It follows from the above that detention facilities are not supposed to hold asylum seekers, yet the practice of the Bulgarian state for years has been to imprison people despite their verbal assurances that they are seeking protection. There are two detention centers in Bulgaria: one in the town of Busmantsi (near Sofia), the other in the town of Lyubimets (close to the border with Turkey). The SAR manages the so-called registration and reception

centers, which accommodate those whose asylum applications have been *accepted* by the SAR. There are seven such centers: three in Sofia (Ovcha Kupel, Vrazhdebna, and Voenna Rampa), two near the Bulgarian-Turkish border (Harmanli and Pastrogor), and one in Central Bulgaria (Banya). The SAR is also the institution that determines whether one is a *genuine refugee* at the first instance.

What is to be done with those who are potentially economic migrants? How are we to distinguish them from genuine refugees? These are the questions the state preoccupies itself with in the historical form of moving labor power locked in the European Asylum System. These questions are posed and answered throughout the asylum procedure, from the initial moment of crossing to the ultimate decision on asylum. They take on peculiar spatial-temporal dimensions.

Temporal Spaces Between the Potential and the Actual

As an external border of the EU, Bulgaria has been deeply committed to its role as a guardian. Fences, people-hunters, border arrests – all resources for protecting the Union and the homeland have been employed to capture the false, the economic (that is, the economic migrant) and to separate it from the genuine, the political (that is, the war-fleeing migrant). The refugee system at the external borders is guided precisely by this logic: to catch the tricksters and hunt down the economic migrants. This *hunt for economic migrants* imparts meaning to a whole

array of technicians (interpreters, interviewers, smugglers, human rights activists, psychologists), infrastructural improvements (the so-called “smart borders,” accommodation centers, school classes exclusively for refugees), a legislative and an executive system. In addition, this *hunt for economic migrants* has its own course: crossing the border, pushbacks or detention, interrogation, legal proceedings, imprisonment, registration center, and ultimately, rejection or award of refugee or humanitarian status. In this temporality of becoming a refugee, it seems that one of the most important tasks of both migrants and technicians is to adjust their knowledge to this movement from potentiality to actuality. This task is also spatially incorporated in detention centers such as those in Lyubimets and Busmantsi, but also in the reception centers in the country. In other words, an answer is sought to the questions, “How to convince them that I am a genuine refugee?” and “How can we be sure that this person is *not* a genuine refugee?” We could imagine the progression of the *hunt for economic migrants* as a string of knots of temporal spaces, where the potentiality-actuality movement is constantly renegotiated.

When asylum seekers cross the Bulgarian border, they are placed in a detention center: in the towns of Lyubimets, Busmantsi, or, back in 2013 when Bulgaria experienced a high number of crossings, in Elhovo, again near the Turkish border.* As Lydie Arbogast (2016, p. 10) notes, “Since the 1990s, detention has become the method of choice to manage migrant populations in Europe and beyond.”

* The detention center in Elhovo has since been closed.

The building of detention centers for immigrants in Bulgaria, however, was a prerequisite for the country's EU accession. The first such facility was opened in Busmantsi in 2006, one year before Bulgaria's accession to the Union. Before 2006, migrants were detained together with Bulgarian "outcasts."

I learned this while doing research in the public garden behind the Mosque in Sofia in 2012. At the time, this public garden served as an informal labor market, where both third-country nationals and Bulgarians hung out, hoping to be picked up by a subcontractor for a small job. This is how I met Kalin (an Iraqi in his 40s who had been in Bulgaria since the early 2000s) and Vassil (a Bulgarian "junkie" in his late 20s), both of whom had spent time in Druzhba. Druzhba was a place where "illegal" migrants and Bulgarian "junkies" were detained in the same facility prior to the establishment of the detention center for foreigners in Busmantsi, which opened a year before Bulgaria's accession to the EU. Kalin and Vassil were eager to show me the place for "outcasts."

After a forty-minute tram ride, we arrived at Druzhba, a neighborhood on the outskirts of Sofia where "illegal migrants" used to be detained. The premises were hidden from view, accessible only via a dusty, unpaved and narrow road. Upon reaching the building, Kalin and Vassil decided to stay back. They stood at the beginning of the dusty road while I made my way towards the premises. I approached the low metal sheet wall, adorned with cameras and barbed wire, which barred entry to the detention premises. Despite the relatively low height of the wall as compared to other detention facilities, I still

had to jump to catch a glimpse what lay behind it. My efforts were in vain. Shortly, two police officers came running and opened the door to the prison. "What is this building?" I asked. My puzzlement was genuine. I saw the logo of the Ministry of Interior on the entrance, but I had never heard of this place before. "This is for people living in vagrancy," responded one of the guards. "Is it true that it used to hold illegal migrants?" "Yes. But ask the press center." That was all I managed to get out of the guards before they slammed the door and sneaked back into their booth to hide from the summer heat. It was obvious they wouldn't let me in, so I left.

On the way back to the public garden behind the Mosque, Vassil broke the silence and told me about the first time he was detained in Druzhba. "I was walking back home that night. Indeed, I did look dirty, I was on heroin back then, you know how it is... but I did have somewhere to live. They didn't have to detain me just because I looked dirty." The Ministry of Interior detains even mothers with small children, according to Vassil. "They keep detaining the same people. They eat from bowls like dogs, you know. I don't understand why they detain them. Why do they detain them? They then just let them go and do nothing for them. It's all for money." Vassil's monologue further revealed that many of the homeless were picked up from parks and streets when foreign "VIPs" came to town.

The story above reveals a rupture. A rupture that performed the separation of one "other" from another "other"; the external other from the internal other; the "illegal/economic" migrant from the Bulgarian "vagrant." This rupture has two sides: it is an outcome of the

increased dependence on European funds to sustain state institutions in the EU (a mode of neoliberal governance), and a combination between humanitarian and securitizing policies towards migrating populations within the EU during the first decade of the 2000s. In Assisted Voluntary Return Programs (AVRP), for example, migration management within the framework of the EU has mitigated the apparent tensions between securitization and humanitarianism, and the various mechanisms employed in this type of management in fact exemplify a hybrid approach towards populations in motion (Howard, 2021). This separation of the detention of immigrants from the detention of internal outcasts is one such instance. Humanitarianism is an important logic in this relation, as (potential) refugees are subjects of regimes of care (Ticktin, 2011a). Ultimately, the newly established Special Homes for Temporary Accommodation of Foreigners (the official name of the detention centers in Busmantsi and Lyubimets) had to meet human rights standards set by European institutions and actors working in the field of humanitarian relief (e.g., NGOs such as Caritas and the Red Cross). These Homes (even if only symbolically referred to as “home”) are a case in point. They accommodate (humanitarianism), but they also secure the “nation-state” from undesired populations (securitization).

But if we go back to Lydie Arbogast’s (2016, p. 10) proposition that detention is one of the predominant migration practices within the EU and consider also Julia Morris’s (2017) research which shows how detention centers have grown both in popularity and numbers throughout the world as the result of a humanitarian nex-

us, then we can also see how detention becomes a point of potentiality for capital as well. Indeed, as Arbogast (2016) well demonstrates, detention centers are turned into points of capital accumulation. According to her, the management of detention facilities in the EU “reveals three distinct forms and levels of privatization” (Arbogast, 2016, p. 20). We can classify the latter into two types: full privatization and semi-privatization. Detention management in Bulgaria is of the second type, a public-private partnership: while detention as such falls within the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Interior, some of its services are outsourced to private entities.

Between 2012 and 2016, the Ministry of Interior claimed that the reception centers in the country lacked sufficient space to accommodate all those entitled to be there. Consequently, people could remain in detention for months before being transferred to a reception center. During this period, it became clear that there was a definitional vacuum, as it was not uncommon for people to be detained even though they had declared that they wanted to claim asylum in Bulgaria: a declaration that, according to international law, is a sufficient ground for a person to be considered for refugee or humanitarian status. In the meantime, these people were imprisoned in the so-called Special Homes for Temporary Accommodation of Foreigners, which are in fact detention centers, thus being classified as illegal migrants. These centers are designed to hold people awaiting deportation based on the grounds that, firstly, they failed to prove to the state that they had arrived because of fear of political persecution and were therefore classified as economic migrants, and secondly,

they had been caught at the border but had not claimed asylum. This vacuum was often exploited by the state as a justification for detaining asylum seekers.

Relocation to a reception center means a transition from being considered an illegal alien to attaining the status of a legalized asylum seeker. The possibility of classifying a person as illegal within the prerequisites for asylum is rooted in the very obsessions that characterize European asylum systems in general, and the Bulgarian one in particular. Schematically put, between the 1980s and the early 2000s, the European obsession with the figure of the migrant was marked by the need to identify the “objective” reasons for their escape. Was it voluntary or forced; was it economic or political? Today, this obsession has taken another turn. There is a constant need to convince the public that those crossing European borders are here because of “subjective economic reasons,” not because of an “objective fear of political persecution.” They are, hence, economic migrants, not refugees. Once humbly confined to the realm of asylum seeking, this type of narrative is now ubiquitous. It teaches us that for “economic migrants” to stay with “us,” they have to trick us and to change their outward appearance from an economic to a political migrant. The outward appearance becomes enshrined in the stories they subsequently present to the state, which will determine whether their stories are true or false. These stories have one goal: to convince the State Agency for Refugees that the person concerned is not an economic migrant. More precisely, their goal is to delineate a rigid boundary between “me, as a genuine refugee” and “them, as economic migrants.” This boundary has a special place

in the ways the Bulgarian State Agency for Refugees approaches its “outside.” This boundary shapes struggles to a large degree, for it creates a vacuum wherein competition emerges among the different categories of migrants as they are differentially included within legal frameworks, labor markets, healthcare, and the crumbling welfare state in general. Being on the right side of this boundary holds the potential for its subjects to stay within and to perhaps enjoy the “fortunes” of legality.

The boundaries of what is to be considered “political” in these stories is elastic. Miriam Ticktin (2008; 2011a; 2011b) shows that in the case of the French and US asylum systems, “the political” can be extended to include sexual violence and illness as a formidable ground for claiming asylum. Thus, a loop is created, where illness and sexual violence, considered to be of humanitarian urgency, are treated as exceptions and therefore form a ground for asylum. Focusing on humanitarianism as a form of governance, Ticktin (2011b, pp. 141-142) suggests that the above is double-edged: “while biology and the evidence it is seen to provide fuels hope for a better life whatever the context, it simultaneously provides a means for stratifying populations and maintaining discriminations that derive from colonial and imperial histories, by rendering those histories invisible.” In other words, the political in the equation can be extended to accommodate humanitarian reasons for escape. Humanitarianism becomes yet another boundary of the “political,” functioning as a front that guards the political-economic equation, that is, invisibilizing histories of economic violence. While the “political” out of the economic-political equation can be extended, it

can never resemble an economic form. In this equation, the “economic” is the negative conception of the political. Otherwise, no protection will be provided.

Studying perceptions of economic migrants, we are faced with the constantly recurring notion of the “trickster.” Trickstery is invariably assumed in matters concerning the “outside” – even if the “outside” comes from “within,” as is the case with the EU “social benefit tourist” or the outcast “junkies” such as Vassil. This symbolic structure informs the asylum infrastructure in Bulgaria, which is designed to track tricksters. This is especially pronounced in light of Bulgaria’s role as a guardian of the EU’s external borders – a role that has been taken very seriously by all political parties in the country despite their seemingly different ideological stances. Such asylum systems employ forms of knowledge that speak to the old anthropological archetype of the figure of the trickster: “complicated characters, as they easily slip and slide between one extreme to the next” (Nadelberg, 2008, p. 8). This type of knowledge practice, both in its implementation requirements and its outward effects, valorizes different forms of intelligence, which are integrated into the asylum system itself: interviewers, interpreters, detention and reception camps, and even smugglers and “story sellers” who operate before the reaching of the border.

As the economic migrant is always relational to the refugee, my aim is to engage with ideology as a “real effect” and examine the political/economic migrant binary as belonging particularly to classic economic liberalism. This approach enables us to expand our understanding of the concrete ways in which liberal political theories produce

the struggles around the historical form of the “economic migrant.” Moving labor power does not always appear to be potential labor on the move, as was the case with the “social benefit tourist.” In the case of the economic migrant, this disappearance of the relation of labor power stems precisely from the struggle of those who are on the move, even if it is a struggle subsumed under a particular ideology.

But to what type of historical moment could we refer in attempting to think through the relationship between the term “economic migrant” and the relation of labor power? What is the connection between economic migrants and labor power, so to speak? Firstly, the confluence of non-violence and the economy has translated into economic migrants’ ineligibility to claim the right to remain in the EU. The assumption is that economic migrants are people on the move who are ready to commodify their labor power. However, to claim entitlement to stay in a country, economic migrants must convince the asylum technicians (interviewers and judges, among others), that they are not traveling as labor power, that is, that they are not arriving in the country to commodify their capacity to work. If we go back to Jason Read (2022), we will recall that the term “human capital” erases the opposition between labor and capital and the latter is subsumed under activity, while labor becomes history. Following Read’s logic, I claim that the term “genuine refugee” conceals and cancels out the relation of labor power through the very struggle undertaken to maintain the illusion of being a genuine refugee.

The relation of labor power is hidden from visibility when the migrants are “refugees.” However, this does not mean that refugees are not carriers of labor power. The

asylum system in Europe approaches moving labor power from the perspective of race/ethnicity/nationality (e.g., the “safe country principle”), not from the perspective of class (e.g., the poverty migrant is one such historical form). The relations stemming from this ideology have been translated into the asylum system. The next part of this book is devoted to the “real appearance,” the effect of this distinction as it pertains to those who have been forced to seek asylum in one of countries at the EU’s external borders – Bulgaria.

My point is not to reiterate that the people who move from one state to another do so for a variety of reasons that are entwined with both political and economic factors, therefore the categories that govern migration are inadequate and need to undergo conceptual change. My point is to see what quality the border acquires when we approach those who travel from the perspective of moving labor power through the prism of the ideological assumptions of economic liberalism. Approaching border crossers in this way enables us to ask questions that go beyond asylum systems and border regimes as such, and to identify patterns of travel to labor markets and social security systems. The border de-classes people. It places them in a specific social position that compels them to sell their labor power, more often than not, on the “backstage of capital” (Rajaram, 2015). But before those who cross borders illegally reach that point, they have to jump through the loops of the hunt for economic migrants.

Third-country nationals must prove that they are not economic migrants after physically crossing the European border. They must prove that they are genuine refugees in

order to remain on European territory. The entire apparatus deployed for the purpose – interviewers, interpreters, professionals collecting evidence about the “intensity of problems” in the “problematic zones,” psychologists – is the condition known as “asylum seeking.” The latter is a temporal space set aside for the possibility of being pronounced a refugee or being turned into an economic migrant. This temporal space is constituted by knots along the path towards being declared worthy of protection. I will focus on two of these knots: the crossing of the border and the relocation from detention to reception centers. I call this process a “hunt for economic migrants”: the filtering of the “economic” from the “political.”

4

The Hunt

“Hunters catch [*zaloviha*] illegal migrants during hunt” – December 2015; “Police officer critically injured after chase of illegal migrants” – November 2022; “Over 300 illegal migrants caught [*zaloveni*] in special operation” – July 2023; “After chase: police catch Ukrainian transporting 11 illegal migrants” – August 2023.

Such are the news headlines announcing the apprehension of “illegals” in Bulgaria. The verbs used to describe the encounter between those deemed illegal and the state and citizenry are etymologically connected to the noun *lov* (“hunt” in Bulgarian). Grégoire Chamayou’s (2012a) historical and philosophical reflections on manhunts demonstrate that the hunting of humans – from ancient Sparta to the modern practices of chasing undocumented migrants – establishes and reproduces relations of domination. Each hunt, according to the author, is based on a theory of its prey that rationalizes “by virtue of what difference, of what distinction, some men can be hunted and others not” (Chamayou, 2012a, pp. 1-2). In examining modern practices Chamayou focuses on the “weapons” – identity checks, ambushing, and personal examinations, among others – utilized in chasing “illegal game” in France, this chapter looks at one of the countries on the EU’s external borders: Bulgaria, where the criminalization of border crossings is rationalized as a crime against Europe as a whole.

Hunting those involved in such crimes is not a metaphor. State pushbacks, police chases, arrests, beatings,

and imprisonment empower citizens to become real “refugee hunters” to protect the state, Europe, Christian values, Bulgarian women, and Bulgarian workers. Dinko Valev, one of the best known “refugee hunters” in Bulgaria, started hunting “illegals” back in 2015. Valev organized vigilante bands of border hunters, employing horses, dogs, and even abandoned tanks for his hunts. The hunter would brag about his intimidating methods, openly admitting to conducting chases of migrants before the actual citizen arrest. Valev is not an isolated case. Hunting parties along the Bulgarian-Serbian border have been instructed how to hunt “illegals,” and refugee hunters along the Bulgarian-Turkish border have been joined by volunteers from Germany and the Netherlands. In contrast to Hungary (Kallius, 2017), where border hunters have been recruited by the state, the situation in Bulgaria is more ambiguous. State officials do not publicly admit to recruiting or in any way encouraging such hunts. Yet, with its eyes wide shut, neither does the state discourage them. Vigilante hunts are an extension of the legitimate state hunts.

Following Chamayou’s proposition that there is always a theory delineating those who can be hunted, I show how the effects of the ideology underlying economic liberalism, which I examined in the previous chapter, unfold at Bulgaria’s borders and within its asylum system. These effects can be best grasped through the notion of the “economic migrant,” a notion made possible by the separation of the “economic” from the “political” sphere. “Economic migrants” and “illegal migrants” overlap both in public perceptions and in state-sanctioned asylum practices. The empirical cases I explore demonstrate how the assump-

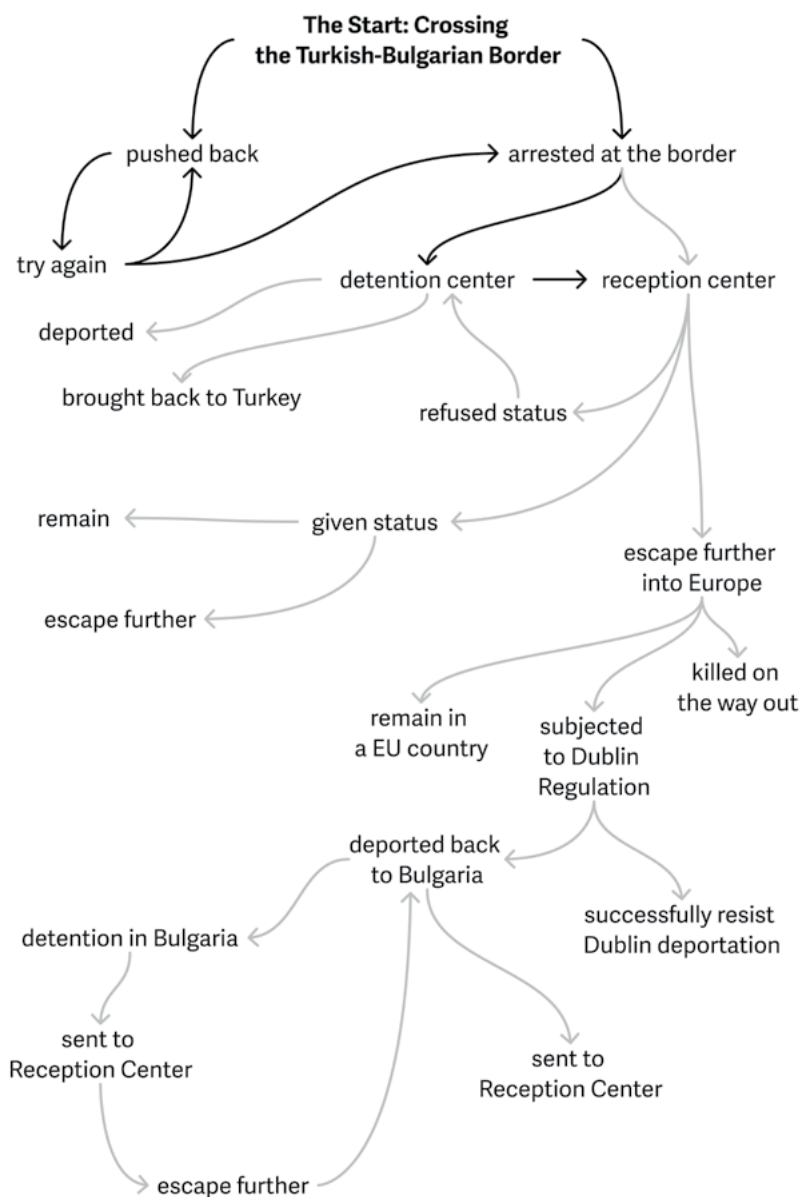
tions informing the Common European Asylum System use the typology of “economic” migrants and “genuine” refugees to perpetuate abstractions such as the “economy” and its voluntary character.

The very notion of the “economic” migrant and the refusal to offer them protection hides coercion as a possible characteristic of the market, or the sphere that “economic migrants” are supposedly escaping. This point is important in identifying the distinctive character of the forms that govern migration today in order to grasp their inner logics and not treat them as separate from broader ideological assumptions.

Such separation is a relation of domination that is evident not only in the vigilante hunts but more persistently in the state-sanctioned hunts. In other words, the political/economic migrant binary is not simply an abstract structure. Asylum systems throughout Europe have embedded the coercion inherent in the binary itself, creating pockets of alienation and exclusion: border arrests, detention camps, registration camps, where the prime function of the European guardians is to isolate the “economic” from the “political”; the “bogus” from the “genuine.” This confronts people in a very real way, and some resort to hunger strikes and self-harm to eradicate such boundaries. This is a terrain of struggle where those subjected to such differentiation act in response to it. The battle of individuals held in detention centers to be relocated to reception centers, thereby ensuring the initiation of the asylum procedure, is one instance of this struggle.

The second part of this chapter is concerned with the way detention centers slow down the movement of labor

Figure 3. The Hunt for Economic Migrants



power into labor markets. I build on the concept of the “decompression chamber” as utilized by Mezzadra and Neilson (2013, p. 149), complementing their analysis of the movement between asylum systems and labor markets by introducing one more actor – namely, the entrepreneur. I explore how an entrepreneurial entity (in our case, an architectural company) engages with the struggles that unfold between the state and the alleged economic migrants captured by the latter. Rather than distancing itself, it embraces these struggles, showing ingenuity in finding ways to derive profit from them.

Border Crossing

As any other external EU border, the Bulgarian one is like a swing oscillating between life and death. Every year, thousands attempt to cross it in pursuit of “better life opportunities,” but some, instead, meet a fatal end. What is extreme in the case of Bulgaria is that it offers death not only at the point of entry but also at the exit. In February 2023, eighteen people suffocated to death while attempting to leave Bulgaria (The Guardian, 2023). On November 19, 2014, four refugees seeking to cross the Serbian border on their way out of Bulgaria were found dead (Novinite, 2014). Cause of death: freezing. On March 12, 2015, Mohammed Jawad Kadima and Elias Murad died after sustaining leg injuries in a violent attack by the Bulgarian border police (Leviev-Sawyer, 2015). The limbs of the two refugees were broken, rendering them immobile and leading to their subsequent death from exposure. Bulgaria’s preoccupa-

tion with guarding the EU borders creates an environment where “illegals” are hunted not only at the entry point but also at the exit. This is evidenced by the number of asylum seekers apprehended on exit and transferred to detention centers. According to the Bulgarian Helsinki Committee (BHC, 2022, p. 3), in 2021, 53% of all asylum seekers, who were apprehended at the border and transferred to detention centers, were apprehended on entry, while 47% were apprehended on exit (mainly on their way to Serbia).

Those who have made their way into the asylum system in Bulgaria have crossed a border illegally – there is no alternative. Embassies almost never issue visas to people deemed “undesirable,” while refugee resettlement, which is within the remit of the UNHCR, is rare and seldom includes countries like Bulgaria. An “illegal” border crossing is the first step that migrants must take to engage in negotiations over their eventual legal categorization: either being granted humanitarian/refugee status or being classified as economic migrants. But what takes place *at the border* – and here I mean the delineating line between one nation-state and another – is a reversal of the fundamental principle in criminal justice, that of “innocent until proven guilty.” The border crosser’s body is *a priori* perceived as that of an economic migrant and hence guilty of illegal border crossing. Among hundreds of others, Hassan shared his experience of crossing the Turkish-Bulgarian border in this way:

There were four of us, and we hid in the bushes before crossing [from Turkey to Bulgaria]. It was dark. We crossed and, after some time, we were stopped by

police. Green jackets. They made us sit on the ground with our hands behind our backs, and wait. They took our luggage, which I never saw again. Two cars arrived. We were taken to a police arrest facility in Svilengrad. We spent two days there before we were taken to Court. We said we were refugees. After that we were placed on buses and told we were being taken to “Camp Sofia.” We felt very happy. We celebrated on the bus. We sang songs. We were going to a refugee camp. After just a few minutes, the bus turned onto a secondary road. We realized we weren’t being taken to Sofia when the police told us to get off the bus and led us into a yard surrounded by high walls with barbed wire on top. We weren’t happy anymore. We realized we were in prison now. Why? We are just refugees. (Hassan, personal communication, August 2012)

Hassan is from Afghanistan. He told me his story during one of my trips in 2012 to Pastrogor, a small village that is home to the transit center for asylum seekers near the Bulgarian-Turkish border. The storytelling took place in the local park: a small concrete square surrounded by small flower islands belonging to the village mayor’s office. Hassan sat across from me as part of a “story circle,” a research practice resembling focus group discussions between activists and asylum seekers. People left the “story circle” from time to time as it was close to 40 C°. The nearby water fountain was the only place where one could wash off the clammy sweat and avoid a heatstroke. Hassan had only just been transferred from the detention center in Lyubimets to the reception center in Pastrogor, where he was free

to walk out “anytime he wants,” except between 10 p.m. and 6 a.m. As he spoke, I struggled to hide my yawn. I had heard similar stories over and over again for at least a year.

Let us compare Hassan’s story with Mikita’s, which unfolded a year later. My conversation with Mikita took place over the phone, as she was in Edirne, Turkey, at the time of the interview. Mikita told me that she and her four children had set out on foot for Bulgaria, hoping to reunite with family members. After walking for two days, they got lost in the forest. Eventually, they reached the town of Voden, Bulgaria, where a local resident called the border police for them. Her story then went on as follows:

Bulgarian border police arrived to pick us up. They told us we were being taken to “Camp Sofia,” but instead they transported us [back] to the border. Initially, there were two policemen, then another six or seven joined them... On the Turkish side of the border, they started beating us because the boy wanted food. “No, no, go away, don’t come to the Bulgarian side,” they were screaming and beating us. (Mikita, personal communication, 2014)

Mikita and her children were pushed back. Border crossings can be terrifying. The violence at the Bulgarian border, however, cannot be understood without considering its connection to the European Union in general and Germany in particular. Bulgaria’s long struggle to join the Schengen Area has been translated in the country as a goal that is achievable only by proving the country’s effectiveness in preventing illegal and economic migration. In March 2015,

for example, Germany's Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier spoke in the capital, Sofia, and assured the public about his country's commitment to increase investment in Bulgaria, emphasizing its role as Germany's key partner in the fight against illegal migration. Such "hints" are taken very seriously by Bulgarian authorities. German capital is very important to the country. After all, we shop at Kaufland, repair our homes with Bosch, and the Bulgarian garment industry, composed of underpaid mostly female workers, relies on the German market for exporting its products.

In 2014, pushbacks were a daily occurrence. As part of my involvement in a project executed by Border Monitoring Bulgaria, a non-profit organization, I focused on bringing stories such as Mikita's to light. This is how knowledge production works in asylum activism. Since the grounds upon which asylum decisions are made are humanitarian, one has to make a humanitarian scandal out of such stories as: firstly, in some rare instances, somehow someday this might change the "treatment of refugees," and secondly, because such humanitarian scandals have the power to increase one's chances of making it into Germany. When I went on Bulgarian National Radio to tell the shocking story of how Mikita and her four children were beaten and pushed back by Bulgarian border police, I knew exactly what to expect. To be called a "liar." The accusation of "lying" is not solely directed at the alleged "economic migrants" but also at their "defenders." My opponent on the radio show was Chief Commissioner Zaharin Penov, Director of the Border Police Directorate General at the time. He stated:

[On the day mentioned by Raia Apostolova, the] Bulgarian Border Patrol detected five individuals near the border line [between Bulgaria and Turkey] on the Turkish side. The Turkish border authorities were notified [by the patrol]. Until their arrival, the five individuals exhibited extremely provocative and aggressive behavior, throwing stones at the Bulgarian border guards, throwing stones at the patrol car and, speaking in broken Bulgarian on the loudspeakers of their phones, offering money to the Bulgarian officers for assistance in crossing into Bulgarian territory. Upon the arrival of the Turkish authorities, the individuals attempted to flee. It was necessary to give chase in order to arrest them. At no point did any contact occur between the individuals and the Bulgarian border officials. [The individuals] never entered Bulgarian territory. (Penov, 2014)

In a statement issued a couple of weeks later, the Bulgarian Minister of Interior at the time qualified a report on push-backs issued by Human Rights Watch as an “outpouring of outright lies and slander.”

The increased number of border crossings in 2013 and 2014 also led to an increased presence of migrants in the central areas of Sofia, which did not go unnoticed by neo-fascist organized militias who started patrolling the streets to “protect civilians.” Over the course of a couple of years, Bulgarians were also urged by neo-fascist groups such as National Resistance, or the Patriotic Front which was represented in Parliament at the time, to go to the border and defend it against the intruders. Refugee hunting became a concrete practice. Its emergence is not surpris-

ing, considering the long-standing simultaneous use of the words “catching” (*zalavyam*) and “illegal immigrants” (*nelegalni imigranti*) by media outlets. This wording effectively reduces migrants to prey that has to be caught. One such instance was the citizen arrest of fifty border crossers on October 20, 2015, conducted by a group of thirteen game hunters who “admired the courage of the three border police officers” who had killed an unarmed Afghan boy just a few days earlier. When hunters hunt, they look for economic migrants, “who [do] not look like refugees” (Novinite, 2015).

Unlike the surgically precise organization we witnessed in the movement of migrants through formalized corridors during the so-called “long summer of migration,” the crossing in and through Bulgaria in 2015 was different. It involved a dispersal of people’s movement through acts of constant escape – escaping border guards, escaping fingerprinting, escaping refugee camps. Shootings, pushbacks, and hunts also played a significant role as motivations for escape. All of this resembled an escape from the *politics of death*, as “the ultimate expression of sovereignty resides, to a large degree, in the power and the capacity to dictate who may live and who must die” (Mbembe & Meintjes, 2003, p. 11).

Chamayou (2012b) observes that there is a dimension of specific power present in hunts, the power of hope: “without the hope to escape, no prey will run.” As we saw from Hassan’s narrative, people hope that once they cross the border, they will be sent to an open reception center. Most, however, are sent to detention centers which, from the state’s perspective, serve as the first filter in proving that

person X is an economic migrant rather than a “genuine refugee.” As of 2021, a total 78% of the asylum applications received by the state were filed inside detention centers (BHC, 2022, p. 2). The way struggles unfold within detention centers is important as, among other things, they involve the reorganization of knowledge so as to create a space for migrants to be recognized as “genuine refugees.” Let us see how and what is the relation of these struggles to labor markets in the outside world.

Detention Centers’ Power Hold on Time

One of the main premises of this book is that the different migratory categories are coded as mechanisms for controlling labor power on the move. Refugees travel slowly, facing a multitude of obstacles that range from falling into the trap of “modern slavery” to the likelihood of suffocating, hidden in tiny spaces in vehicles, or being constantly forced to wait for the next opportunity to escape to some transit territory in order to continue their journey to the final destination. Refugees are exhausted even before they reach a European border.

If we take Bulgaria’s border as an example, we see that when refugees are caught, they are taken to a jail facility near the border, then convicted of illegal crossing and relocated to one of the Special Homes for Temporary Accommodation of Foreigners (SHTAF). There, they stay between two and six months before being relocated to the open registration and reception centers. The daily routine

of these prisons for aliens provides for “meals, private time, walking, prayer and other religious activities, television, sports games, and other free activities.”* But what type of prison is the prison for “foreigners”? What is its relationship to capitalist modes of production and the movement of labor power?

Here we must turn to Foucault and his notion of *power's hold on time* which is a condition of possibility of both capitalist structures and forced incarceration. Foucault identifies two forms of this operation of interception in capitalist societies – the wage-form and the prison-form – and ably demonstrates how, in the 19th century, they connected up to “the apparatus of power that ensures the real extraction of time and introduces this into a system of exchanges and measures” (Foucault, 2015, p. 83). In other words, both wages and imprisonment presuppose that “the time of life becomes an exchangeable material ... [while] the measure of time allows the quantification of the exchange, through the relation established either between a quantity of labor and a quantity of money, or between a quantity of time and the gravity of the offense” (Foucault, 2015, p. 83). According to Foucault, the prison has been immanently linked to capitalist forms of social organization ever since the first phases of capital accumulation. Momchil Hristov (2023, p. 117) claims that the violent mechanisms employed in the primitive accumulation of capital – among which was the establishment of prisons for the newly emerged “economic migrants” – served “to conquer poverty by making it productive without at the

* This information is taken from the SHTAF’s “daily routine rules.” They were given to me by somebody who wishes to remain anonymous.

same time eliminating it.” Today, despite the whole array of violent techniques employed to prevent the movement of “economic migrants,” we see constant defiance of national borders. Detention centers for migrants, being part of this equation, are not equipped to prevent the movement of people driven by the necessity to socially reproduce and survive. “Time,” however, has developed as one of the major points of conflict in both the penal system and the capitalist enterprise.

Prisons for migrants intercept the travel time, slowing its pace towards the labor market.* But this is precisely what those imprisoned in detention centers rebel against: prolonged stays are the most common cause of riots. Those trapped in this type of institution often resort to self-harm in order to speed up their relocation to an open-type camp, thereby gaining access to the labor market or to a channel that will eventually take them to their final destination. If Foucault (2015, p. 210) speaks of the emergence of a necessity to “control the rhythm at which people wanted to work,” we can anticipate, through the prisons for migrants, the emergence of a necessity to control the rhythm at which labor power moves towards labor markets. The prison for migrants functions as a power apparatus that controls the rhythm and speed at which refugees will reach a labor market where to sell their labor power, thus becoming subject to a specific mode of exploitation.

* In Bulgaria, relocation to an open-type camp legally guarantees that the foreigner will be entitled to work after three months. Many migrants find work in the “gray sector” before, and even after, this period expires. In most cases, however, they continue their journey to countries such as Sweden and Germany.

Mezzadra and Neilson (2003, p. 5; emphasis in original) claim that the prisons for migrants “diffus[e] tensions accumulated *on the labour market*” and have developed as administrative units that detain women and men who have committed no crime but are punished by being denied the right to move and therefore the right to work. However, this argument can only be applied to cases where labor power moves from labor markets to prisons. The authors also discuss the opposite movement – from prisons to labor markets. Of interest here is their notion of the “decompression chamber,” which explores this type of prisons as a mechanism that controls and alters the pace of supply and demand by prolonging and delaying the extraction of labor in the labor market (Mezzadra & Neilson, 2013). In this way, prisons for foreigners equilibrate the constitutive tensions inherent in capitalist labor markets (Mezzadra & Neilson, 2013, p. 149), which in turn makes them an administrative unit that performs the function of temporarily delaying the movement of labor power in relation to both the national economy and the supranational one (in our case, most often that of the EU). In this sense, rhythm and speed become increasingly important for labor power on the move and “power’s hold on time.” Their importance is not only in relation to patterns of wealth accumulation, but also in relation to the patterns of life resumption characteristic of the capitalist organization of reproduction and access to spaces of social reproduction (jobs, social institutions, medical services). Rhythm and speed become key points in the conflict between labor power on the move and capitalist forms of economic organization.

Refugee prisons punish “raids” against the “national economy.” They are the product of a morality that rigidly distinguishes the economic migrant from the refugee and that is deeply ingrained in European asylum systems. To unravel the nature of these “raids” against the economy, we need to investigate the discourses that demarcate the “economic migrant” as a figure whose movement must be controlled – the very subject for whom, ultimately, these prisons are built. As previously emphasized, according to the moral economy of migration, the economic migrant is the opposite of the genuine refugee. Whereas refugees flee war or political persecution, economic migrants flee adverse economic conditions, unemployment, and poverty, and “choose to move not because of a direct threat of persecution or death, but mainly to improve their lives ... Conflating refugees and migrants can have serious consequences for the lives and safety of refugees” (UNHCR, 2016). In essence, this discourse divorces the “economy” from the violence associated in refugee law with “politics” (political persecution), and imputes it to the economic migrant, portraying the latter as a perpetrator of crimes against the recipient countries and their economy – as we find most often in narratives such as “they will steal our jobs” and “they will lower our wages.”

According to Foucault, in the early 19th century, social fear was directed towards the body of labor power that posed a threat to the accumulation of capital by slipping out of the labor process. Later in the same century, Foucault (2015, p. 171) analyzes the social fear of a “floating population turned out by poverty and the new regime of property, already unemployed, a dangerous, marginal

population pitted against the industrious population,” as determining the development of the penal system. Present-day prisons for migrants attempt to respond to social fears linked to the preservation of “national” cultures, the prevention of “religious contamination” of the local population, and the increasing strain on labor markets. The construction of the figure of the economic migrant is precisely an expression of the social fear of the latter. The prison for foreigners has also played a key role in contemporary debates about foreign workers and what Chamayou (2012a) defines as the social fear of competition. The fact that this prison is the first filter for the removal of economic from political migrants is no accident. Its purpose is to protect the local population from those who are known to have left in pursuit of economic benefits, and, in this sense, prisons serve not to stop the movement of migrants *per se* but to slow it down, to tame it, to sift the “inauthentic” from the “real” and, accordingly, to produce a particular type of worker-subjects characterized not so much by their specific skills but by their ability to move (and to overcome the barriers to that ability).

War of Relocation. From Detention to Reception

The imposition of meaning described above does not go without resistance. Detainees employ strategies inside the prisons that would speed up their physical relocation from detention to reception centers. Such subversive strategies seek to erase the “economic” label, and hence the percep-

tion of being “illegal.” To achieve this, they usually follow a two-stage process. First, detainees attempt to speed up the process of consulting a lawyer through individual actions. If this does not work, collective strategies come into play.

Below, I will examine the transfer of bodies from the detention center in Lyubimets to the transit center in Pastrogor. These facilities – one a closed prison, the other an open camp – are only 13 km apart. When the Pastrogor center was built, its purpose was to serve as a transit station where Dublin decisions and accelerated asylum procedures were to take place. The Dublin decision involves fingerprinting to determine the first European country of entry, the so-called first country of contact. If it is established that this country is Bulgaria, then a Dublin decision is taken that the foreigner’s asylum status will be considered by the Bulgarian state.* Subsequently, the asylum procedure advances to its second stage, the so-called accelerated international protection procedure. During this accelerated procedure, an interviewer employed by the State Agency for Refugees (SAR) evaluates the legitimacy of the reasons behind an individual’s departure from their home country.

* At the time of writing (December 2023), the EU Council and the EU Parliament are negotiating changes to the Asylum System (the so-called “Migration Pact”), which includes the Dublin Regulation. While a decision was taken that the new Asylum and Migration Management Regulation will replace the Dublin Regulation, it still needs to be approved by the EU Parliament. Nongovernmental organizations describe the new migration rules as a “disaster” (Sunderland, 2023) and as “byzantine in their complexity and Orbanesque in their cruelty” (European Council on Refugees and Exiles [ECRE], 2023). NGOs are concerned that the new Pact will increase violence at the external border points of the EU, especially for people who cross “illegally.”

If sufficient evidence is provided to the SAR interviewers that a person meets the criteria to qualify as a “politically persecuted person,” they are granted a protection status. If such evidence is lacking, as it is in most cases, the person is regarded as having escaped a place for reasons deemed illegitimate, and hence, in pursuit of economic benefits. The latter decision is appealable before a higher court. The above shows the importance of finding oneself in a transit camp – this is the first step towards potential recognition as a genuine refugee.

In the summer of 2012, there was a significant surge in the number of people crossing the Bulgarian border from Turkey. At the time, my research consisted mainly of frequenting Georgi’s, a local pub in Pastrogor where people from the transit center hung out for coffee or for smoking cigarettes. I also occasionally visited the transit center itself, which is about two kilometers outside the village. Conversations with asylum seekers often took place behind the premises of the center, next to a small river where asylum seekers would occasionally, albeit unsuccessfully, fish for sustenance. The two-kilometer walk to the village was mostly undertaken by men, as the only route available was a two-lane high-speed road used by many truck drivers. Women with children preferred to remain behind the barbed wire of the center rather than risk the trip. During my visits to the center, the security guards never let me cross the fence separating the residents from the narrow sidewalk outside the center’s gates.

One night in mid-August that same year, I was having dinner with about fifteen people, seated at an outdoor table at Georgi’s pub. The group consisted of activists from

Sofia, with whom I often visited Pastrogor to collect information and conduct research, and people currently accommodated at the transit center. It was during Ramadan and after sunset, so some of the transit center's residents were breaking their fast for the day. Despite Ramadan, the evening was filled with tension stemming from political debates about the situation in Syria, the prioritizing of Syrian refugees over others, and the general conditions of asylum in Bulgaria. The usual mode of research was ongoing – patient listening, recording the everyday experiences in the camp, ranging from no showers due to a hot water shortage to fishing in the small river behind the camp and examining bug bites in an attempt to identify the insects responsible. At some point, a ringing phone interrupted the monotony. “They have declared a hunger strike,” said Alaa, a Syrian in his late 30s. “They” were twenty-one Syrians and four Iraqis, including four minors, who had found themselves in Lyubimets, the nearby detention facility.

Five of us – three Syrian men, a Somali, and I – went to the detention center the very next day. We called a taxi driver from Svilengrad – the largest town nearby – who was known as the “best *shef*” (literally “boss,” commonly used with positive connotations) in the flourishing cab business around the open camp. He dropped us off at a desolate parking lot, easily visible from the prison windows. A valley of thorns and high concrete walls separated the parking lot from the prison. Paradoxically, the long distance between the two eased communication between those on the inside and those on the outside. Indeed, closer proximity would have obstructed the view of the parking lot (because of the high walls), on the one hand,



Photo 5. Lyubimets with the barbed wire and high walls.
Source: Ministry of Interior

and would have too easily attracted the attention of the prison guards, on the other. The parking lot was often used as a communication place. One-on-one communication was only possible, however, because cell phones (without cameras) were allowed inside the detention center.

Standing in the parking lot, Alaa called somebody inside the center. Within seconds, we saw someone climb the grid of a window on the third floor of the prison and wave a white T-shirt. As we looked closer, we saw approximately forty more people, all waving their white T-shirts. On one of them, the word “Freedom” was written with a thick black marker. We waved back. The conversation was conducted over the phone, and it became clear that the prisoners’ sole demand was that they “want out of Lyubimets!” The people inside, according to my interlocutors, were tired of waiting. In fact, *waiting* was invariably articulated in its Bulgarian imperative form, *chakai!* (wait!). The

word had become ingrained in their vocabulary even in the absence of much contact with the outside world.

Hunger striking is not the only strategy used by detainees. Self-harm of all sorts, rioting, refusal to go for walks, and damaging property are all used as a means of demanding relocation to a reception center. Kawe, a Kurd in his late 20s, showed me the self-inflicted wounds on his arm, which he had slowly carved into his flesh with a shard of glass from a window he had broken for the purpose. He had been punished. A doctor had carefully cleaned his wounds before the prison guards threw him in solitary confinement. Kawe wanted out of Lyubimets as well. He escaped Bulgaria shortly after he was transferred to the transit camp in Pastrogor, when he realized that even harsher punishment awaited him for damaging property at the open camp. Namely, denial of humanitarian status.

This form of punishment is in fact possible. The arbitrariness of the political/economic binary perpetuates arbitrariness within the asylum system as well. Articles 17 and 18 of the self-made rules in another reception center in the country read:

(17) You have to be patient in receiving status. Those who are impatient may not receive status if they break off relations with the administration; (18) Those who do not wear badges ... will receive status at a later point.*

Lise Olivarius (2014), describing hunger strikes at other detention centers for migrants, argues that “necropolitics

* A volunteer at one of the reception camps in Sofia showed me a print of these self-made rules in 2014.

is not an alternative to biopolitics; rather, it is a recognition of the crucial function of death in the biopolitical realm. Necropolitical death is a precondition for the biopolitical cultivation of life.” The author notes that this relation between necro- and biopolitics may also be detected in the relation between the dominant and the dominated. Self-harm is also such a relation. Engaging in self-harm brings detainees closer to the reality of becoming a refugee. The summer 2012 hunger strike at the detention center in Lyubimets was neither the first nor the last. Hunger strikes are the most widespread form of protest in Bulgarian detention facilities for foreigners, despite the risks associated with such tactics, as the general invisibility of the inside often precludes one of the most important aspects of hunger striking – the presence of an “unbiased” audience. Hunger, in the case under discussion here, expedited one’s chances of being relocated to the transit center in Pastrogor, and thus being repositioned as a potential refugee.

Making Detention Facilities Vandal-Resistant: The Genius of the Architect

Mezzadra and Neilson (2013, p. 143) write that “The temporality of migration is increasingly marked by the emergence of various zones and experiences of waiting, holding, and interruption that assume many institutional forms, among them camps and detention facilities.”* The

* The part concerning the architectural company in this chapter has been published in Apostolova (2018b). I am thankful to dVersia for permitting me to republish it here.

authors make another two important points. Firstly, that the temporality of migration is often negotiated in spaces where the boundary between economic migrants and refugees is remade and tested, and secondly, that detention centers cannot be studied in isolation from labor markets. On the contrary, scholars need to pay attention to the relation between detention and reception centers, and labor markets. As Mezzadra and Neilson (2003, p. 5) show, “the effort to control the migrant’s mobility becomes the motor of the capitalist system and the contemporary detention centre appears as one in a long line of administrative mechanisms that function to this end.”

Firstly, those held within detention facilities fight for relocation to reception centers, as this will give them a chance not only to receive status but also to enter a labor market. Secondly, and from the perspective of Bulgaria as a transit country, release from a detention center also means that they can continue their journey to labor markets in countries like Germany. The latter scenario is more common. In my conversations with asylum seekers in Bulgaria, the majority have said that it is extremely difficult for them to find a job, and when they do, it is often without formal contracts. All the asylum seekers I have spoken with have refused my requests to join them in their search for work or at their employment sites. Their explanation was that they are afraid of attracting the attention of the police. Neda Deneva argues in a report for the UNHCR that:

Overall, the number of beneficiaries of international protection and asylum-seekers with working rights is

very low [in Bulgaria]. Therefore, the overall impact of these groups on the labour market and the economy is negligible. On the whole, beneficiaries of international protection and asylum-seekers do not compete with Bulgarian workers in the labour market, due to their low numbers and their lack of engagement with formal mechanisms for finding employment. The low impact and low visibility of beneficiaries of international protection and asylum-seekers in the job market makes them a non-priority category for policy makers. (Deneva et al., 2013, pp. 16-17)

What we witness in transit countries like Bulgaria is that once people defy the detention system and are relocated to reception centers, the majority leave the country shortly thereafter. Their imprisonment in peripheral EU countries like Bulgaria slows down their movement to labor markets, viewed not only from a national but also from a transnational perspective. This process carries great implications for the relation and embeddedness of asylum systems within forms of capital accumulation and labor markets. As we saw, in the case of Bulgaria the way the temporality of migration unfolds involves long periods of waiting, eventually bringing people closer to the opportunity to claim and struggle for asylum status. When we consider the ways in which this temporality inherited in the asylum system works as compared to freedom of movement as a form of moving labor power, we can see that there is a stark opposition between the two. We saw that freedom of movement speeds up the movement of labor power instead of slowing it down.

Furthermore, as Mezzadra and Neilson (2013) argue, the Agambenian approach to detention facilities and camps, based on the logic of exception and bare life, precludes us from seeing the more political aspects and the forms of differential inclusion that such “social institutions” produce. Struggles within detention camps, according to the authors, destabilize Agambenian methodologies, and instead demonstrate that the prisons for foreigners are spaces of conflict and antagonism where asylum spaces are not fixed but subject to renegotiation. While Mezzadra and Neilson provide us with an understanding of the relation between detention and labor markets, I would like to complement their analyses by introducing one more actor on the scene of struggles in detention camps. I approach these struggles as emerging from the assumptions that differentiate between economic and political migrants, and pose the question: How does entrepreneurial capital find a way to tap into these struggles in order to make a profit?

To answer this question, I will focus on the Special Home for Temporary Accommodation of Foreigners (SHTAF) in Lyubimets. I will examine Lyubimets as a space maintaining the fantasy of the division between economic migrants and refugees, but also as a space where a struggle against that same division unfolds.

Lyubimets is a space of potentiality, which means that conflicts there unfold in the movement in-between and along the axes of potentiality and actuality – between being a “genuine refugee” and an “economic migrant.” These conflicts involve many different actors. According to the official narrative of the state, the premises serve to accommodate illegal immigrants: those foreigners who are *poten-*

tially dangerous to national security, and those who have been served deportation orders as they have turned out to be economic migrants, not genuine refugees. For the most part, however, SHTAFs detain *potential economic migrants*. Simultaneously, according to the Bulgarian NGO community, Lyubimets detains *potential refugees*, thereby violating international laws and regulations for the protection of asylum seekers. According to this perspective, those who cross borders in search of asylum must instead be accommodated at the registration and reception centers of the State Agency for Refugees (SAR). In practice, there is an overlap in the functions of the two types of institutions, SHTAFs and reception centers. However, Lyubimets is also a space of *potential for capital*. A space where the movement between potentiality and actuality as well as the struggle inherent to this movement present opportunities for profit.

To see Lyubimets as a space of potentiality, we focused first on the conflict arising from the transition from the SHTAF to the transit center in Pastrogor. This social repositioning and the literal physical transfer from one premise to another give those who have crossed the border the opportunity to convince the state technicians that their flight is worthy of protection. In other words, that they are fleeing the political violence that has been imposed on their body.

The physical transfer from migrant prisons to reception centers initiates the movement between potentiality (being an asylum seeker) and its possible actualization (receiving humanitarian or refugee status). However, this movement is also being counteracted. This counteraction

comes from the technicians, including those responsible for the architectural design of detention centers. In the following story, *the power of the architect* appears as one of the most cunning powers; one which, through the genius of its own knowledge, manages to quell the wave of protest of detainees. The following paragraphs will tell a fragmented story of action and counteraction. It has multiple characters, who follow different timelines and haven't crossed paths, but are nevertheless interlinked in the meticulous execution of the hunt for economic migrants.

Let us briefly return to Hassan's story, discussed above, and recall how it ended: "After just a few minutes, the bus turned onto a secondary road. We realized we weren't being taken to Sofia when the police told us to get off the bus and led us into a yard surrounded by high walls with barbed wire on top. We weren't happy anymore. We realized we were in prison now. Why? We are just refugees." Hassan ended up in Lyubimets. Although the building opened on March 15, 2011 – five years after the first facility for the detention of foreigners in the country, the one in Busmantsi, near Sofia – the idea of establishing such a center in this area dates back to the early 21st century and was part of Bulgaria's preparations to join the European Union, following the latter's prescriptions for European harmonization of its asylum system. The Lyubimets construction project was initiated back in 2005. I met the architect of the project, Ivaylo Petkov, in order to situate the physical location and the role of Lyubimets within the wider context of the Bulgarian migration management system. Petkov, the founder of the architectural studio DESET Architects, has worked

closely with the Migration Directorate of the Ministry of Interior since the drafting of the first projects for “accommodation” facilities in Bulgaria. The original idea behind the Lyubimets SHTAF was to revamp the buildings of the former military barracks and to restructure them in a way that would fit their new functions. Despite these original intentions, Architect Petkov managed to convince the Migration Directorate that such a project would be financially unviable and ineffective with regard to its operational purpose:

reconstruction would have entailed a 30% increase in the cost because adapting something that has never been something else [that has a different purpose] doesn’t work. In the barracks, you have some discipline; after all, you’re training them [soldiers] in something, right? You can’t aim for discipline here. You can’t compare these centers to a barracks... It’s impossible to aim for the same thing as in the barracks. Here, you should rather aim for some kind of shared tolerance, a shared tolerance of residence. (Architect Petkov, personal communication, September 2016)

In the end, only one building of the old military barracks was reconstructed, while the rest of the complex was built from scratch. And although Architect Petkov thinks that one cannot speak of discipline in accommodation centers for foreigners, it is nevertheless discernible in Lyubimets. More precisely, it is a form of disciplinary power that is described by Michel Foucault not as triumphant, but as modest and suspicious, operating through minor and simple

procedures rather than through grand rituals. This is easily discernible in Lybimets's daily schedule. According to this schedule, detainees are divided into groups, and their allotted time for walks, prayers, sports and even "personal time" depends on the assigned group. Lights are turned off at 11 p.m., and dormitories remain locked from 10.30 p.m. to 8 a.m. They are furnished with bunk beds, and the so-called "personal time" is rather a luxury.

These buildings, like those in Lyubimets and Busmant-si, also harbor a potential for profit. Like anyone with an entrepreneurial spirit, Architect Petkov is well aware that if the initial investment capital is slightly higher than permitted by the Law on Public Procurement, the return on investment would also be higher. However, the state remains blind or with its hands tied with regard to this issue:

[The state] could call for tenders, but instead someone turns up, wins the public procurement contract for BGN 4 [EUR 2], and starts their project... I've given them the know-how, and now they are asking me to give them this and that – it's turning into a vicious circle. Nothing works in such a vicious circle... Officials [from the Migration Directorate] appreciate what you do for them, but the system doesn't allow them to make the right decisions. Moreover, [Bulgarian] society doesn't allow it either, because people start complaining about the Law on Public Procurement and comparing prices – here it will be cheaper, there it will be better. Well, cheaper, but... (Petkov, personal communication, September 2016)

Building cheap migrant prisons carries risks for entrepreneurs and the state. These risks are inevitably linked to the repositioning – both social and physical – of bodies from detention to reception camps. Migrants often describe the transit center for asylum seekers in Pastrogor as the “big prison,” while Lyubimets is identified as the “small prison.”

As evidenced by Photo 5, and by an unspoken consensus, Lyubimets is a prison. But what criminal act does Lyubimets punish? According to the provisions of the law, detainees at Lyubimets are to be deported from Bulgaria. In practice, those not found guilty of economic migration are released. And since the “trial” (the decision whether one is a genuine refugee or not) occurs after detention, it is difficult to define Lyubimets as a prison. If it were one, it would aim to correct deviant behavior, presuppose rehabilitation, a change in beliefs, or the prevention of future crimes, and so on. Lyubimets does not cure souls. Everyone is aware that migrations will not stop, despite the pushbacks and deaths at the border. Lyubimets punishes the collective victim of the globalized social relations of uneven development. Moreover, Lyubimets punishes economic migrants who, according to the definition of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR, 2016), choose to move “mainly to improve their lives by finding work, or in some cases for education, family reunion, or other reasons.”

The practical punishment embedded in the liberal refugee system is implied by the discursive construction of the notion of an economic migrant. But the important point here is that Lyubimets punishes *the potential* that someone might be an economic migrant; *the potential* that

someone has escaped from their social misery caused by non-functioning markets, poverty, and unemployment. Lyubimets punishes the desire for a better life.

As shown, to free themselves from embodying this potential crime, to destroy, eliminate it and avoid prolonged punishment, to be given the opportunity to prove that they are not economic migrants, detainees at Lyubimets often resort to self-harm. We have seen how the location of the prison in Lyubimets allows an internal protest to come out. We have also seen various forms of protest inside that target not only one's own body but also the property of the Ministry of Interior (and subsequently the SAR) – striking where it hurts the most. These forms of protest seem to have turned into a specific indicator, almost a disciplinary measure for the prison guards, reflecting the detainees' desire to be relocated. Protests carry an investment risk, as noted also by Architect Petkov. The risk consists in the fact that covering the costs of a protest may turn out to be much higher than the initially estimated costs of the operation and maintenance of the prison. Protests also reveal the capacity of accommodation centers to constitute a potential for capital. They can always be improved, and investments in them can be increased.

As I mentioned earlier, there is an implicit understanding that no matter how many fences are built, the border will always be crossed. The same holds true for migrant prisons: no matter how many solitary confinement cells are built, detainees will continue to resist. During my conversation with Architect Petkov, it became evident that property damage is one of the biggest challenges for

him and his product, as migrants “will come up with anything... This needs to be accounted for in spatial planning.”

The architect is well aware that innocent people are being held in these prisons: “If the faucets are plain standard, they break them, if they don’t turn off automatically, they just let them run, because they are just people who have been forcibly brought there, they didn’t want to be there.” As he put it himself, “the innocent suffer along with the guilty.” It is absolutely clear to him that such property damage won’t stop, and that the constant purchase of washbasin faucets will raise the maintenance costs of the detention center and therefore affect the return on investment. And although “on a civilizational level, measures have been taken [medical control and two infirmaries – one for communicable diseases, and a regular one], on the level of spaces there is normality and abnormal normality. This means that every detail in the furnishing must be appropriately adjusted for normal abnormal use, as a counter-reaction to malicious intent.”

To counter the constant protests – the so-called “malicious intent” – Architect Petkov has elaborated an “abnormal normal” project for future camps. All washbasins will have push-button faucets that automatically turn the water off after approximately seven to fourteen seconds; the maximum water temperature will be limited to 38°C to prevent burns; and the new bathrooms won’t have drains. Instead, holes under the wall will channel the water to drains in other rooms where they will be supervised by staff to prevent inmates from clogging them with socks. Architect Petkov has also taken self-harm into consideration. He firmly believes that Bulgarian migrant prisons must ultimately

follow some standards that are set at the international level and that take into account the need for such spaces to be multifunctional. The architect wants to make future prisons “vandal-resistant.” Welded wire meshes will be replaced with chicken wire, and there will be no metal spring beds, because “there is a danger of their making a weapon or some kind of tool out of anything... Despite the relaxed regime of these types of prisons, [the detained migrants] will try to make a weapon out of anything.”

Deploying the weapon of innovation against the detainees’ resistance, Architect Petkov explains how the Ministry of Interior suffers financial losses because of its reluctance to invest more money in innovative solutions. If his project is implemented, Architect Petkov will save the Ministry of Interior around 77% of the current costs of running Lyubimets:

a newly-built SHTAF could cost less than BGN 12 million, while the operation of a single SHTAF housing some 600 people costs about BGN 3-4 million [a year]. This means [that the cost of building a new SHTAF is equivalent to the cost of] operation for three years. If 70% innovations are made, even if there are 50% innovations, this means that these three years will pay off from innovations alone. (Petkov, personal communication, September 2016)

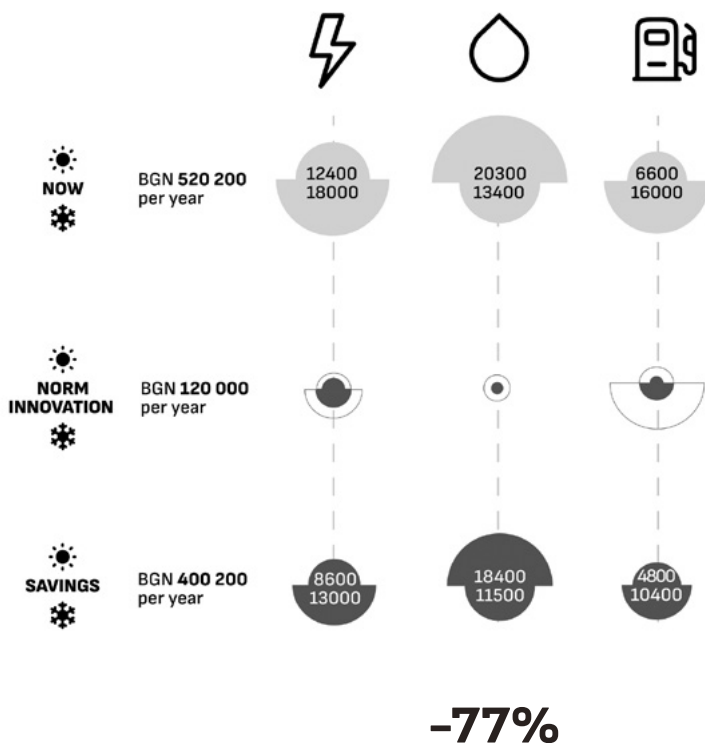
Returning to our conversation about how much water is wasted because of faucets left running, clogged drains, and other “hooliganisms,” the architect showed me the following chart:

**Figure 4. How to save money
by suppressing resistance.**

Source: Architect Petkov

How?

Realized savings in the operation of SHTAF
in the town of Lyubimets based on 600 people



In the chart above, Architect Petkov poses a simple question: How can Lyubimets save money while accommodating 600 migrants in the building? The architect shows that by implementing vandal-resistant technologies, the costs of running the center can be reduced by 77%.

The refugee system in Europe works through and on the basis of the creation of differences. Those crossing the European borders are categorized as migrants, refugees, pursuers of economic interests, and so on. By maintaining the economic/political divide and the underlying assumptions about what actually constitutes violence, the refugee system creates the conditions for hunting economic migrants: filtering the subject of authentic violence (the refugee) from the subject of inauthentic violence (the economic migrant). In places like Lyubimets, the struggle unfolds between the technicians of the *hunt* and the “tricksters” themselves. This conflict also implies a repositioning from one space of violence (such as Lyubimets) to another (like Pastrogor). Or as migrants put it: from the small prison to the big one. However, this social and physical repositioning represents the path from potential to actual, that is, the path of being recognized as a genuine refugee. Repositioning must be achieved by all means, often catalyzing physical self-harm and destruction of state-owned property. Repositioning is a conflict in itself. The unfolding of this conflict through its inherent forms of resistance does not escape the attention of entrepreneurs such as Architect Petkov. The creation of a division between economic and political migrants in turn creates the conditions for accumulation of profit through constant innovation of the technologies of suppressing the struggle of the subjects of this division.

Conclusion

In the preceding pages, I argued that if we separate migration from other political and economic processes, we risk essentializing the category of “migrant” and migration itself. In other words, we risk reducing the migrant to a standardized figure that should be examined within a separate field of inquiry – an (imagined) “purified” migration theory (encompassing topics such as border regimes, forced vs. voluntary migration, labor migration, and EU circulations of migrants). This book has questioned the reproduction of this standardized figure, offering a historical analysis of the formation of two migratory categories: the “social benefit tourist” and the “refugee/economic migrant” binary. Migratory categories cannot be viewed in isolation, as though they emerged from a natural movement of populations. They reflect historical and ideological logics that underlie specific politico-economic processes. The two categories examined here are products of historical development, shaped by the political theories and tensions that had prevailed in their making. I put forth the argument that the most effective approach to analyzing the antagonistic and tense relationship between migration and capitalism is to investigate the historical making of categories that seemingly belong solely to the former field. This historical analysis focuses on the direct relationship between those who move, and the migration, labor, and social reproduction apparatuses that capture them. By immersing ourselves in this field, we can tease out the political and economic forces that condition the making of race

and class, and that reflect struggles around differentiated forms of international movement.

One of the main arguments I presented here is that we need to transcend the legal frameworks of migration that are readily available to us, and to interrogate the very spaces (historical, ideological, socio-political) where these categories are produced. The proliferating field of “migration studies” has created an academic space where scholars select one of the existing categories and approach it as a point of departure rather than as a result. For instance, scholars in the field of “forced migration” start from the category of the refugee and examine border controls, securitization, humanitarianism, and migrants’ autonomy. Recently, social scientists have started to explore migratory patterns characteristic of EU labor movements, with a specific focus on the EU citizen as a category of examination. These approaches often concentrate on economic pull and push factors, discrimination, circular mobilities of labor, or East European imaginaries about the West. As migration became a field of study in its own right, various subfields quickly emerged: labor migration, forced migration, economic migration, border studies, and asylum mobilities. Contrary to this trend, my approach situates these forms of movement within a broader conversation, as they belong to relational processes and often reinforce each other. This allows me to transcend the points of departure chosen by other studies and, instead, to think of movement as a dialectic between historical specificity and historical process.

This dialectic lends itself well to analysis when situated within the temporality between production and social

reproduction, where the movement of labor power takes center stage. To tackle approaches that take migratory categories at face value, I juxtapose them and think of them as moving labor power. Moving labor power is a concept that transcends the constructed field of migration studies and instead offers a view that is embodied in ideological, juridical, and political forms relational to economic processes that make movement imperative for both social reproduction and processes of production. In this book, I focused on one relation between migratory categories: that of their subjects moving as labor power.

This is to say that at a certain point in any movement, one is compelled to sell their capacity to labor, simply because the spaces under examination here are pervaded by capitalist modes of production and social reproduction. The concept of moving labor power is strategically situated to explore the moments that occur between the turning of bodily power into labor power and the subsequent transformation of labor power into labor. In these processes, the transformation from potential to actual comes into play. I regard the very capacity of the body to move (and to be moved) as a potential in the relation of moving labor power. This capacity of the body is often resorted to as a possible means to escape from conditions such as war, unemployment, social misery, and poverty. These moments precede moving labor power. Once one starts moving across borders, their capacity to move turns them into moving labor power. This moving labor power is apprehended by migration apparatuses that eventually configure its relation to labor markets and welfare institutions (or their lack). I think through this process as one

that captures the potentiality of labor power and the actuality of labor. This book has also examined the reverse process: when actual labor is disposed of by various means (non-payment of wages, police violence, and expulsions from territories), only to be turned into moving labor power once again.

This approach offers three points from which we can explore the relation between migration and labor apparatuses. What state mechanisms are triggered when a moving body has to be included in, or excluded from, labor regimes? How is the very bodily capacity to move (bodily power) inserted into differentiated regimes of migration, and what relations are being produced between migration and labor regimes? What productive powers underlie the actualization of the potential of bodily power into labor power and subsequently into labor? To answer these questions, I used the notion of moving labor power and explored the relation between movement, social reproduction, and modes of production. That is, I investigated the temporal gap between the commencement of one's movement and their transformation into a subject of labor markets. Borders, visa requirements, freed movement, detention centers for immigrants are always in relation to labor apparatuses. I aimed at providing a platform for possible insights into this relation in order to delve into the heterogeneous logics of the workings of capital, state, and migration apparatuses.

Another argument presented in this book posits that capitalism has developed in a way where the reproduction of capital is dependent upon the reproduction of an exploitable class that has no alternative but to *sell its labor*

power by moving. With this view in mind, I argued that reproduction processes of labor power under capitalism have become increasingly dependent on movement across national borders. In this context, both restriction and freedom of movement have become key issues in struggles between the state, capital, and (potential) labor. Movement bridges the gap between labor power as potential and the actuality of labor, and in this sense, it becomes the key potential and the actual factor of capital. But if the above answers the question of the relation of production to movement, what about the relation of reproduction to movement?

I look at the movement between labor power and labor from a bird's eye view: I do not conceive of the possibility for reproduction only in terms of immediate processes – for example, in a factory, or as the link between housework and the working place elucidated by feminist theories of social reproduction. While these latter approaches have greatly broadened our understanding of relations within the production-reproduction nexus, I examine reproduction from a transnational dimension. This book thus addressed the following questions: How do states and capital negotiate the movement of labor power when those who are on the move are framed as non-belonging (as is the asylum seeker) or semi-belonging (as is the “social benefit tourist”)? Consequently, can the so-called “migrant struggles” be seen in a new light, manifesting in fact struggles of and for potential labor?

Whereas the above arguments addressed issues concerned with larger historical processes, I will now turn to the claims I made regarding the historical specificity

of each of the two cases presented in my book, that of the “social benefit tourist” and of the “refugee/economic migrant” divide. There is a dialectical relation between these two cases, which can be captured by examining the differentiated rhythms of movement characterizing each migratory category. In the restoration of capitalist forms in Eastern Europe that commenced in the early 1990s, we see that the international movement of labor “in bulk” and the political support for “freedom fighters” through provision of free access to means of social reproduction during the socialist period, were superseded by the liberal understanding of individualized free movement and the asylum system established in Western Europe. With this putative “end of history,” when liberalism triumphed over socialism, the regulation of the movement of labor power underwent a decisive shift towards two logics peculiar to liberal political thought and forms of control. These logics are manifestations of the ontological and epistemological place of movement in liberal social organizations (Kotef, 2015). They are to be found in the fact that the consolidation of the European Union could only take place if movement was both strictly controlled and simultaneously freed. In other words, freed movement was conditioned upon securitized movement, and vice versa. This dialectic is best illustrated by the recategorization of Eastern Europeans from asylum seekers to economic migrants, discussed earlier. The effect of this restructuring entangled class struggles with juridical reclassification of migratory categories.

While the migration between socialist and postcolonial states prior to 1989 and the historical processes accompanying the disintegration of socialism in the Eastern part

of Europe are not discussed in this book, my research in that direction (see Apostolova, 2017; 2023b) has greatly informed my work on capitalist forms of migration as well. To put it in a nutshell, “developed socialism” framed the international movement of labor power as a complementary and non-antagonistic relation between production and social reproduction. Under “developed socialism,” the two processes were guided by the principles of socialist internationalism and extensive integration. The bargaining power of laborers to come to work in socialist states (see also Alamgir, 2014) was transferred into the hands of the state, and political theories of socialist internationalism influenced a relation of moving labor power where its reproduction was organized in view of the dignity of foreign workers. Over time, this initial framing of moving labor power withered away, and migratory apparatuses (found in the inter-state labor contracts) succumbed to the debt crisis that struck the socialist world. Little by little, socialist internationalism underwent transformation in response to this politico-economic crisis. Ultimately, the surplus labor of foreign workers was socialized so as to repay previously incurred financial obligations on the part of the People’s Republic of Bulgaria’s allies.

With the final disintegration of socialism in Bulgaria, the relation between labor and migration apparatuses changed significantly. One of the most immediate ruptures to emerge after 1989 was a differentiated structure in the racialization of foreign workers, which changed their relationship to production, essentially turning them into migrant laborers who cannot depend on previously established relations of socialist internationalism. The

constitution of racial differentiations, the forced exodus of thousands of foreign workers and students, the expulsion of “third-country” nationals from production and social reproduction in the first years of the so-called transition became a condition for the primitive accumulation of capital. In this context, moving labor power *out* became a condition for the consolidation of free markets in Bulgaria. In this historical process we clearly see how migratory categories, when conceived of as a relation between production, movement, and social reproduction, absorbed the changing patterns of political, ideological, and economic forms. This absorption also concerns the forms of migration discussed in this book.

The full implementation of capitalist structures in Bulgaria and the country’s final integration into European structures required freeing the movement of its citizens. The political tune of the day insisted on a certain logic, whereby the more absent the state was from social reproduction and the organization of movement, the faster the country would move towards liberal democratic and capitalist forms of organization. In this way, the movement of labor power encountered a clear contradiction between production and reproduction. Those freed to move were denied access both to socialized means of production and to social welfare. Similarly to the Marxist understanding of labor that is twice freed – freed from the means of production and freed to sell its labor power – Eastern Europeans acquired a triple freedom: freedom from the means of production, freedom to sell their labor power, and freedom to move across national borders. Their free movement bridged the gap between the first two freedoms,

becoming their only means to reproduce themselves and their families physically and socially. I argued that whereas movement across national borders is not a substance directly sustaining bodily power (such as water or food), it generates possibilities for the reproduction of labor power, and hence, provides possible routes for the maintenance of bodily power.

One of the claims that this book sought to assert was that struggles for movement are often already struggles *against* movement. This is due to the dialectical relation between the fixing and freeing of labor power by the state and capital. It is pertinent here to recall that the so-called “social benefit tourists” resist the accelerated rhythms of their lives enabled and imposed by freedom of movement. This is best illustrated by the housing struggles they engage in, demanding (and not stealing!) the right to social housing that would allow them to remain in a particular territory. These housing struggles are entangled in labor struggles as well, as the subcontracting character of accumulation has developed in such a way that wages (one of the main guarantors of reproduction) are rarely paid, which in turn forces many to travel widely and quickly in order to find wage employment.

While the above form of moving labor power exemplifies an accelerated rhythm of movement – that is, it moves far, fast, and widely across European cities without encountering border controls – the asylum system in the EU manifests the opposite. I delved into the ideological formation of the category of the economic migrant and related its effects on the slowed speed and taming of moving labor power within European labor markets.

While the struggles of asylum seekers may appear to be primarily oriented towards the claim to the right to move, a closer examination reveals the same pattern of struggles against movement. This is best exemplified through the resistance strategies developed against the EU Dublin Regulation, which mandates the return of asylum seekers to their first country of entry into the EU. Consequently, those who were once caught by the “state hunt” at the EU’s external borders, face the prospect of being returned to these same countries upon reaching Germany or Sweden. Protests at airports, resistance during flights, legal battles against deportation orders constitute strategies against return movement. That is, what was once a struggle *for* movement, turns into a struggle *against* return movement.

This last thread is an important part of my attempt to defetishize forms of movement and categories of migration. I do so by arguing that “migrant struggles” – a concept proliferating across the social sciences – should be regarded as struggles for and of potential labor (which does not preclude the actuality of labor, because of the dual process of fixing and freeing of labor). Some may object that this approach contains the possibility of fetishizing labor and/or labor power. However, I believe that the notion of moving labor power is well-equipped to respond to such criticism. It does not exclude the making of race, gender, and class – on the contrary, it inscribes them into continua and ruptures between moments of expropriation of bodily power, moments of turning a body into labor power, and moments of actual exploitation, where movement becomes of decisive importance.

When we historicize migratory categories, we can approach them from a political perspective that de-essentializes them and allows for seeing the various tactics and strategies in struggles – that unfold in the realms of housing, construction sites, detention centers, and social welfare – not as a rift but as a possible bridge. Migratory categories and the struggles they express cannot be separated from the struggles against capital and the logics of domination. To be constructed as either an economic migrant or a political refugee is part of broader forms of historical oppression. This is why the field of migration studies must consider how these categories are made, what economic and political processes underlie their making, and finally, how the connection between past and present affects the changing symbolic and material meaning behind migratory categories.

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“At some point, a spontaneous mass removal of green wristbands took place. People tossed them in the air or angrily smashed them onto the tables, calling for action. A protest was in order. The workers destroyed their green chains.”

“Kawe showed me the self-inflicted wounds on his arm, which he had slowly carved into his flesh with a shard of glass from a window he had broken for the purpose. A doctor had carefully cleaned his wounds before the prison guards threw him in the solitary confinement of the detention center.”



In Capitalism and Migration: Freeing and Hunting Labor Power Across the European Union, Raia Apostolova argues that scholars need to transcend the legal frameworks of migration and to interrogate the very spaces (historical, ideological, socio-political) of their making. Instead of threatening migratory categories as a point of departure, Apostolova approaches them as results. Through a historical reading of the political conjunctures and processes that accompany two contemporary forms of migration in the European Union – freedom of movement and the asylum system – the author shows the formation of a class that has no other means of life revitalization but by moving internationally. Apostolova positions this formation in the temporal gap that exists between migration and labor apparatuses, that is, the moments between one’s crossing a border and the commodification of their labor power, and explores the conflictual, tense relationship between migration and capitalism.