

## Im/Mobility, Power, and In/Visible Refugees

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To date, there have been numerous studies by academics in various fields on the current refugee crisis. However, only a few have made use of first-hand accounts by refugees as an entry point for discussing human im/mobility and in/visibility.<sup>1</sup> This paper, based on an interview with a young refugee, called I.B., and his creative work, goes beyond the day-to-day type of chronological refugee narrative and examines the research done by Hannah Arendt, Michel Foucault, Giorgio Agamben, Frantz Fanon and Natasha King around concepts of im/mobility, displacement, exile, migration, refugeeism, border crossings, power structures and resistance. This paper argues that the refugees, by occupying an in-between space, allow for their experience and accounts to shed light on the intertwined concepts of im/mobility and in/visibility.

Humans are born and remain free and equal in rights. Social distinctions may be founded only upon the general good (Article 1). The aim of any political association is the preservation of the natural and imprescriptible rights of man. These rights are liberty, property, security and resistance to oppression (Article 2). (*Declaration of the Rights of Man*, 1789)<sup>2</sup>

No one shall be subjected to arbitrary arrest, detention or exile (Article 9). Everyone has the right to freedom of movement and residence within the borders of each State. Everyone has the right to leave any country, including his own, and to return to his country (Article 13). Everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution (Article 14). (*Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, 1948)<sup>3</sup>

Freedom of movement or human mobility constitutes one of the fundamental pillars of human rights. While this basic right has been enshrined in the 1948 *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* by the United Nations General Assembly, it has often been denied to ethnic, racial and social minorities in the host country in which they are seeking protection and refuge. Fast-forward by almost seventy years and you will find that human mobility has taken centre stage in academic debates, media discourse, and even in the public sphere. In fact, the role of mainstream media in reporting this so-called unprecedented refugee<sup>4</sup> crisis that Europe has been facing since the 1990s has refashioned public opinion and compelled individual entities and the political establishment to adopt a stance to either accept or reject refugees, as illustrated by the doleful image of Aylan Kurdi, a three-year-old boy washed up dead on a

beach in Turkey in September 2015 and the report of “about 800 refugees” who drowned in the Mediterranean sea on 19<sup>th</sup> April 2015.<sup>5</sup> Not only did the two incidents galvanize public opinion and draw the interest and direct involvement of ordinary people, NGOs, and charitable organizations, they have also spurred studies, among others, Natasha King’s study entitled *No Borders: The Politics of Immigration Control and Resistance* (2016). Given my interest in the idea of human mobility and the constraints that political entities have put on the movements of refugees and migrants, I am interested first in shedding light on King’s notion of mobility with reference to the already mentioned critics and border crossings. The brief discussion I purport to present serves two purposes: firstly, to contextualize King’s notion of mobility and, secondly, to offer what I would like to call a supplemental terminology adding on to the idea of mobility. It is here that it is possible to see how notions such as immobility, resistance, power, and in/visibility pertain directly to the work I have carried out at the refugee camps in Calais, Norrent-Fontes, Grande-Synthe, and the refugee centre (Centre d’Accueil et d’Orientation) in Lille. Excerpts from the interview with one of the refugees, namely I.B.,<sup>6</sup> and from his creative works will illustrate the validity of these terms and their utility in offering a better understanding of the refugee crisis.

## 1. Im/Mobility, In/Visibility and Border Crossings

I am a refugee intent on fighting the stereotype that defines my image in the political discourse. I am able to speak for myself although I know that the occasion to speak is usually denied to me. Unlike others who cross borders in trucks or on foot, I took a series of flights and some train and coach trips that led me out of my home country, first to Turkey, then to Russia, and lastly to Spain. I also drove from Spain through France and Germany to finally end up in Denmark for a month. I strongly believe that a refugee is a normal person who is unfortunately framed by Western media and its ubiquitous discourse of mystification and deception!

At home I faced oppression and in France I suffered incarceration. When I feel oppressed, I have the urge to fight. Resistance is equal to existence. If I lose my hope to resist, I would cease to exist. But I won’t lose hope in life! (I.B., interview, 9<sup>th</sup> July 2017)

According to Collyer and King, the so-called refugee crisis points to the current political climate, or to what Jürgen Habermas referred to as the “crisis of legitimation” of capitalism and Western politics rather than as a humanitarian issue (Collyer and King 2). The absence of a clear political stance to admit refugees into Europe (except for Germany) has pushed back borders outside of Europe, erected barriers between European countries, and toughened control measures at border crossings for European and non-European citizens. In this globalized world, capitalism encourages an increasingly fast mobility of goods and capital across borders but prevents some individuals from moving freely towards certain destinations. Those in charge of capital are using means available to them

through global economics to set up frontiers between countries and hierarchical systems in order to assert power over people. New technologies, such as virtual control and the use of biometric passports and fingerprints, have become effective ways to monitor individuals and intervene to stop population movements. As *personae non gratae*, refugees are the first to feel the stinging darts of the new policies; as non-citizens stripped of basic rights, they face arbitrary arrest and detention, imprisonment, and deportation without due process. Yet, many refugees seem to have developed mechanisms of resistance to fight back against the scourge of systemic violence by burning their fingerprints, sewing their lips together in protest, going on hunger strikes, and seeking refuge in sanctuary places, such as in churches.

What lies behind this back and forth movement is identified in the two major participants involved, the refugees and the gatekeepers of a restrictive and regulating system. In this squaring off, two powers collide, that of the refugees and their desire for mobility, and that of the guardians of a system that scrutinizes and surveils refugees. Mobility and immobility are inseparable notions, as they represent the two sides of the same coin. Secondly, the interaction between the refugees and the guardians of the system creates power dynamics that reach out to civil society, the media, NGOs, states and governments, international relations, economics and, more importantly, question human rights. In assessing such power dynamics, I turn my attention to the visible and invisible agents behind the refugee crisis.

Borders prevent mobility and encourage immobility as they demarcate two distinct zones, usually those of nation-states, thus separating the 'tolerable mobile' from the 'undesirable.' To manage the 'unwanted migrant,' numerous "space[s] of surveillance" (Marquez 22) such as detention centres, camps, prisons, hot spots, refugee centres (Centres d'Accueil et d'Orientation in France) have become the norm in governing mobility. In these spaces of confinement, refugees, stripped of their citizenship, have no right and are "effect and object of power" (Foucault 1995, 192). They become what Agamben calls "homo sacer, the 'sacred man' who 'is banned and can be killed and yet not sacrificed'" (Agamben 9). Agamben's theory draws on Hannah Arendt's notion of statelessness and Foucault's concept of biopolitics to explain that these foreign spaces dehumanize individuals who become vulnerable to the use of legitimized violence:

[...] the decisive fact is that, together with the process by which the exception everywhere becomes the rule, the realm of bare life – which is originally situated at the margins of the political order – gradually begins to coincide with the political realm, and exclusion and inclusion, outside and inside, bios and zoe, right and fact, enter into a zone of irreducible indistinction. (Agamben 8-9)

Confined to this "space of surveillance" (Marquez 22), refugees are not supposed to be mobile except when they are relocated or deported. They become invisible once they find themselves locked up in one of those

“spaces of exception” (Agamben 109)<sup>7</sup> created by the host state that turns many refugees into detainees for seeking protection. The mobility of refugees targets their very anonymity; their journey in time and space is an endeavour to shed their invisibility and espouse an identity that gives access to visibility. Paradoxically, the system works diligently on policies of invisibility; it resorts to violence and intimidation to make refugees invisible by dispersing them, destroying refugee squats, burning their blankets and, in some cases, even poisoning their food and taking their shoes to try to stop them from moving. The state’s actions defeats its purpose since its use of violence that sometimes results in human tragedies, as well as its supposedly watertight borders, lead to a mass of refugees being stuck at the border. Ironically, the intention of the state to maintain the invisibility of refugees backfires and in fact makes them all the more visible.

Due to tight security and control between French and British borders, Calais has since the 1990s become a zone of immobility. The intention of the French government to hold refugees in a tolerated space outside the city centre, close to a chemical plant, encircled by barbed wires and under constant police surveillance has turned in/visibility into an instrument of control that legitimizes the use of violence. This violence is linked to a political discourse that continues to misread the term ‘Jungle’<sup>8</sup> in order to justify hostile immigration policies and the denial of rights to these refugees that are in the Calais camp.<sup>9</sup> According to Francisco Villegas, Frantz Fanon explains how “manicheanisms” such as race, class and gender are markers of difference between “the dominant,” the visible, and “the powerless,” the invisible (Villegas 154).

Villegas asserts that “these [political] discourses also often speak to a differential value being given to human lives depending on the body where the citizen’s life, whose body is constructed as white and male, is considered more valuable than that of the migrant” (Villegas 155). This racial discourse draws the attention of I.B. who argues that: “racist people think that I didn’t have any problem in my country but you, when you come to my country, you are treated as a privileged tourist and me, when I come to yours I am treated as a migrant!” (I.B., interview, 9<sup>th</sup> July 2017) These pronouncements are at the heart of power relations where dissent takes place through artistic creation, a process that enables the in/visibility of some parts of the self, such as identity, to be expressed. In the documentary produced by I.B. in the Calais camp, the refugees interviewed had to hide their face—and their identities. They were subjected to a violence that thrust them first into flight, then into anonymity. However, hiding a part of their physical appearance in front of the camera enabled them to talk more openly.

The Calais camp is at once a “space of appearance” (Arendt 199) and a “space of surveillance” (Marquez 22) where the tension between in/visibility questions the agency of refugees. The notion of the “space of appearance” stresses the common visibility of people who generate collective actions in the form of protests. In this interaction, collective

actions are possible and make refugees visible (Arendt 200). This idea of visibility recalls the actions of the no borders movement in King's study that simultaneously creates connection and separation. Power here has a transformative capacity. Through this collective visibility, refugees seek to denounce their invisibility that allows the use of violence against them. Yet, at the same time they are compelled to repress some parts of their life stories in order to be able to move and be recognized in the political, economic, and social structures. Nevertheless, in the "space of surveillance," the visibility of some participants facilitates control and regulates the human body through surveillance and organizational structures (the presence of guards, the partition of space, the timing of human activities).

In this context, relationships are vertical, they control visibility and diminish freedom. As Foucault argues:

[...] discipline fixes; it arrests or regulates movements; it clears up confusion; it dissipates compact groupings of individuals wandering about the country in unpredictable ways; it establishes calculated distributions [...] [T]he disciplines use procedures of partitioning and verticality, that they introduce, between the different elements at the same level, as solid separations as possible, that they define compact hierarchical networks, in short, that they oppose to the intrinsic, adverse multiplicity the technique of the continuous, individualizing pyramid (Foucault 1995, 219-220)

In the "space of appearance" and the "space of surveillance," visibility is the first characteristic of social spaces and interaction between people. According to Xavier Marquez, Michel Foucault stresses the fact that this space is rather a space of "strategic struggles" (Marquez 23) because people made visible develop means of resistance and counter-techniques of invisibility that open up the possibility for self-assertion. In this process, one side of the self becomes visible while the other remains or becomes invisible.

The use of social media by I.B. who created a Facebook page titled *Quest for Freedom*, enables, in David Theo Goldberg's words, "a medium for the dissemination of information but at once mediates the message. To inform is to give form to the empirical, to make visible the hidden, and audible the silent of silenced, just as it makes invisible the seen and inaudible the spoken" (Goldberg 191). The use of the Internet, social media and creative writing help refugees to (re)constitute their selves because identities are not fixed. The internet is simultaneously a virtual "space of appearance" and a "space of surveillance" (Marquez 22). Many refugees recount how during their interviews they have to justify their comments, pictures and even the fact that they have a Facebook account in a country where they are supposed to be persecuted and claim not to have any freedom. Social media represent a space where refugees can express themselves as individuals, and be watched by the state. Thus, in/visibility shapes individuality and enables forms of power. It is clearly a political tool also used by politicians to prop up their images for greater visibility in the public's eye (Green 43-44).<sup>10</sup> The metaphor used by I.B. in one of his

creative works illustrates how visibility is an instrument of control used by “God,” the politician, towards his “servants,” the media, citizens and refugees (I.B., creative work posted on his Facebook page, 21<sup>st</sup> October 2016. “God” is capitalized in original).

Avoiding, escaping or subverting the state’s control on the one hand, and, on the other hand, repressing refugees and maintaining their anonymity, cast doubt on the logic of control and clearly reveal the dynamics between the power of mobility and its opposite, immobility. As King asserts, “to focus on mobility rather than control in this way also makes it a political stance that opposes the regime of control through active participation in the regime of migration” (King 30). In the Calais camp, this “active participation” takes on various forms of activism such as political art, protests, hunger strikes and clashes with police to try to board trains or lorries. Some forms of this “active participation” succeed and allow mobility to take place at the same time as the tension between immobility/mobility and invisibility/visibility is crystallized. Both carrying uncertainty and enabling the tension between space and temporalities (past, present, future) in the lives of refugees, immobility is part of mobility, or what some scholars call “the autonomy of migration” (Nyers 23). This “autonomy” of and from migration opens up a new space to look

[...] at mobility that takes seriously the agency of people who move. It asserts that mobility is a social fact, something inevitable, and a legitimate and common strategy (Mitropoulos 2007). As such it challenges perceptions that frame people who move either only as victims of circumstance or calculating economic subjects (Anon. 2011; Bojadzijeve and Karakayali 2010; Frassanito Network 2004). To understand migration and the Refugee crisis as a social movement is to see people who move as active participants in the construction of reality, not simply as people reacting to economic or social factors (Mitropoulos 2007). (King 29)

In Mitropoulos’s view, as King points out, human movement is a contributing factor to the “construction of reality” (King 29) and, in that same process of construction, the insurgency of refugees plays a significant role in negotiating space for alterity and subjectivity.

## 2. Im/Mobility and Power Structures

The present section builds on my interest in the notions of mobility/immobility and visibility/invisibility and my desire to explore these aspects on the basis of intellectual discussions, academic research and first-hand accounts by refugees.<sup>11</sup> Even as the scope of this interest has grown, so have the questions that remain unanswered. The importance of first-hand accounts as an entry point for formulating a meaningful articulation contributes to the academic discourse on border crossings, population displacement, and the movement of refugees and migrants. In this section, what I am particularly interested in is I.B.’s first-hand account

of the experience of mobility and immobility. In I.B.'s first-hand accounts, as well as in his creative works, are embedded insurgent acts that speak to a desire to undo the power structures of the system and its cultural and social uniformity. The "active participation" (King 30) in the Calais camp and outside provides opportunities to speak, write and be visible. Those opportunities thrust refugees into the dialectics of system change and political transformation as, even if they are stateless, they become participants in the political process for cultural change and social inclusion by claiming their rights to mobility and participating in public events. It is for this particular reason that King, as pointed out above, urges a change in the perception of refugees whose lives are shaped by being on the move so as to demystify the widely held view about them as social or economic migrants. Instead refugees should be seen as active agents of social change and cultural emancipation. Their power comes from their resistance to the system and from their attempts to negotiate a space for themselves in what is otherwise a "space of exception" (Agamben 109). My intention is to reach out to a reflection on the ongoing refugee crisis in terms of a global power struggle between affluent societies and individual refugees from unstable political and economic regions and countries that restrict freedom and human rights.

I first met I.B. in January 2017 and on several other occasions during my stay with refugees in Lille. I.B. was part of a programme initiated by individuals and academics at Lille University that enrolled 80 male refugees from the Calais camp to study French for a year with the aim of reaching a satisfactory level in order to be able to pursue a university degree. To be part of this programme, they had to hold a diploma from their home country and seek asylum in France. I.B. was granted refugee status on appeal in France in February 2017. His peregrinations epitomize the overall experience of refugees whose lives are constantly on the move but also include frightening moments of immobility/invisibility. It is exactly this back and forth undertaking and its relationship to power structures that interests me. Not only does the alternation between movement and obstruction define the life of refugees, but it also shows how closely related to this experience power structures are organised, be it regionally, nationally, or globally. Forms of soft (like artistic creation, the use of social media) and hard resistance (like hunger strikes, clashes with police) by the refugees themselves and entities (citizens, activists, NGOs) stand up to those oppressive powers. These same power structures and their nemesis in forms of resistance are inextricably linked to the situation of in/visibility.

Refugee mobility ushers in an uneasy departure from the homeland to an imagined destination filled with the hope of protection and settlement. The journey is fraught with risks and uncertainties that are also compounded with moments of immobility at the border. These physical and non-physical encounters obstruct the mobility of refugees and compel them to reconsider their intentions, even after having reached their 'ideal' place and obtaining approval of their refugee status. This final moment

that supposedly was meant to bring about closure and an end to the peripatetic life of refugees sometimes becomes a stage of disillusionment, angst, and questioning, and likewise a phase of reflection conducive to intellectual explorations and artistic production, and sometimes even to an existential crisis. That is why to subvert moments of immobility at the border, Dimitris Papadopoulos and Vassilis Tsianos explain that “people on the move create a world of knowledge, of information, of tricks for survival, of mutual care, of social relations, of services exchange, of solidarity and sociability that can be shared, used and where people contribute to sustain and expand it” (Papadopoulos and Tsianos 190). According to King, this “mobile common facilitates the movement of people” through “the invisible knowledge of mobility” that circulates between people (knowledge about routes, safer spaces, border crossing and so on)” (King 34), but also, on a microcosmic level, enables underground activity, such as illegal dealings, human trafficking and informal economies by charging and exploiting people desperate to move.

I.B. refers to this “mobile common” (King 34) when he approached smugglers, purchased fake passports, asked for a short cut to reach England, which subsequently led him to contact an association while in a detention centre in France and to hear about the Calais camp as a destination. I.B. describes his four-month journey from his home country to France:

[...] the most traumatic time, especially when I had to cross the border of my home country and those [borders] of Turkey, Russia, Spain, Denmark, Germany and England. I only stayed two days in Russia. I was shaken and frightened while being interrogated by the border officer. I managed to keep calm and answer his questions. He let me go but I knew that I couldn't stay for a long time. I still don't know how I managed to go through. (I.B, interview, 9<sup>th</sup> July 2017)

Conscious of the repercussions on his family back home and the reprisals they may suffer together with other refugees should the full extent of his testimony be divulged, I.B. confesses that he has repressed elements and withheld the full disclosure of his experience at least through a scripted medium, such as writing. It should be stressed that in refugee circles interaction is mostly through verbal communication which is brief and immediate. However, in official interview situations with refugees, even if several factors come into play, such as the comfort level of the interviewer and interviewee, the psychological state of the interviewee, and the professional status of the interviewer, it is important that the level of trust in their relationship be built long before the interview takes place. I met I.B. on several occasions in Lille, he shared his creative work through email, social media and kept me updated about his publications and invitations to attend different events. The idea of this interview came a few months after our first meeting and took place for nearly two hours in the refugee centre where he lived. Moreover, the immediacy of communication and the conditions under which my interview with I.B. was conducted seem to leave no doubt that speech takes precedence over



writing; this self-censorship as far as writing is concerned guarantees anonymity but comes with a price as it can prevent refugees from controlling their image in the world of media communications and leaves them defenseless before the gross allegations coming from those inimical to the refugee cause.

This situation makes mobility and immobility transcend the physical, the inter/national borders to reach out to what I would like to call “scriptural mobility.” This supplemental terminology refers to the process through which the words and voice of refugees are allowed to be expressed. The moment that freezes refugees in space and time due to external forces trying to stop their mobility at border crossings unleashes their imagination and artistic creation. As unbearable as those long hours are in confinement cells or on the other side of the fence, those moments of absolute uncertainty and deep anxiety become the special occasion for I.B. to speak out and turn his attention to writing. This transformation happened to him while he was in detention when I.B. was able to turn to artistic endeavors as a strategy to vent his frustrations and to reverse the process of physical immobility. He affirms:

There is a game, a system of God and servants! A man came and took all the awards in 1 hour, he was appreciated, he shone and he left. It was just for few minutes of blablabla in medias. In the morning, they shut us in the residence and also closed the way to the volunteers and university staff who made this opportunity for people. They came like robbers and took everything for their own. They took my privacy, they took all thanks for themselves. In a minute, in a moment. (I.B., 21<sup>st</sup> October 2016. “God” is capitalized in original)<sup>12</sup>

I.B. is here on the path of action, seizing the occasion of his physical immobility in order to create the conditions for scriptural mobility; the fluidity of communication suddenly comes back and with it poetic retaliation against media misinformation: “...my voice and the voice of Others are one. I have an audience and I must use it. Why shouldn’t I? If I forget them, I would be forgotten” (I.B., interview, 9<sup>th</sup> July 2017).

I.B. questions the image of refugees which are often misrepresented in the media and mischaracterized by politicians: “I open my Facebook page and turn it over, I see myself burning in the news, I’m becoming homeless, displaced and with a bag on my back I’m going for an endless way!” (I.B., posted on his Facebook page, 24<sup>th</sup> October 2016).<sup>13</sup> He keeps coming back to this mischaracterization, even as he stresses his status as a “privileged refugee” (I.B., interview, 9<sup>th</sup> July 2017) not coming to seek financial benefits or take advantage of the system but only to claim his inalienable rights as an individual whose life is threatened.<sup>14</sup> As the arsenal of media mystification continues, so do the series of movements that constitute the lives of refugees.

This juxtaposition represents one of the hallmarks in the nomadic life of refugees, as they move across national borders and develop tools to subvert the obstacles of immobility. Being in and out of two different countries, at the borders that physically separate two countries, also

questions the notion of frontiers, which can be considered as “a space designed to regulate the mobility of people, where national and international laws are temporarily suspended, and buffer zones, through which people can be processed, created” (Isin and Ryziel 2). Frontiers are “spaces of exception” (Agamben 109) where refugees appeal to governments to fulfill their duty of protection and, paradoxically, by claiming their right, they become political subjects in this right-less space. The tension between immobility and mobility, invisibility and visibility is clearly linked to geographical space itself; however, refugees deal with this tension in different ways. I.B. also presents this tension as “unfair” (I.B. interview 9<sup>th</sup> July 2017) because it depends on the place of birth that allows or forbids “legal” (I.B. interview 9<sup>th</sup> July 2017) mobility. Inhabiting this in-between space, or “the interstitial passage,” to use Homi K. Bhabha’s terminology (Bhabha 4), strips refugees of their citizenship; they are vulnerable to violence but at the same time they also resist; they have succeeded in developing tools to resist oppression in order to subvert state control and power.

### 3. Im/mobility, Resistance and Power Structures

Refugees undergo physical immobility at the border. This particular space where violence, surveillance and control are exercised by a “state of exception” that creates a “space of exception” (Agamben 109), such as detention centers, camps, and shipping containers, constitute I.B.’s experience as a refugee in France. Some refugees who are applying for the refugee status or those who are in transit are stripped of citizenship and their rights are denied. They are reduced to “bare life” (Agamben 9). They are not recognised in the political and juridical order. They are “object and subject” of sovereign powers, especially if confined to the camp (Agamben 9) where they “move about in a zone of indistinction between outside and inside, exception and rule, licit and illicit” (Agamben 109). Thus, the “refugee” reflects the new forms of Western policies of domination in a post 9/11 era where “spaces of exception” have been created (Agamben 109); domination takes shape through *A World of Camps* (Michel Agier) in order to control, monitor and deport the ‘undesirable’. The dynamics that drive the new forms of domination rest on the dialectics of mobility and immobility, in which I.B. finds himself locked up, even as he is constantly on the move. In one of his texts, I.B. recalls the interminable barriers he had encountered at the border and the “injustice” (I.B., interview, 9<sup>th</sup> July 2017) that stems from their arbitrary creation, a residue of colonial policies that have been put in place in order to meet the structural demands of global economics:

We are those who know the pain of a worthless passport. We are those who carry the name of migrant and refugee for years. Those who feel lashes of strange looks on our faces. They understand me, we come from behind the borders, all these barbed wires

were made for us! ... The police and the barbed wires are here just for you, go back! We should use the smuggling way! We should pass the hardest way. Like our tough backgrounds, like all the cruelties we fled from in our countries, here again and again and again. I is [sic] *always* subjected to *hard* work. (Excerpt of one of I.B.'s texts, read during the interview, 9<sup>th</sup> July 2017, italics mine)

That is why, according to Agamben, refugees are reduced to “bare life” (Agamben 9) by sovereign powers and are the targets of different kinds of abuses legitimated and enforced by the state. The violation of the Geneva Convention of human rights treaties, the absence of child protection, police brutality and, ironically, barring access to the Calais camp since its dismantlement and until December 2017 for insecurity and insalubrity, underline the limits of democracy and the confusion of the juridical and political institutions to the point where the borderline separating democracy from totalitarianism becomes, as asserted by Agamben, almost invisible (Agamben 9-10).

Terrorist attacks, in particular, have contributed to the deterioration of refugee rights, as illustrated by the November 2015 attacks when former French President, F. Hollande, instituted an indefinite state of emergency. By signing decrees restraining civil liberties, the executive superseded the juridical. Again during the dismantlement of the Calais camp in October 2016, a decree hastily passed under the guise of ‘security reasons’ barred access to people without an authorization issued by local authorities. In these conditions, the sovereign power clearly denied the rights of refugees; the rights of citizens to freedom of movement were eroded, perhaps in a premeditated attempt, in order to cover up the abuse of the state and its unlawful infringement on the rights of citizens and refugees. Under such conditions, it becomes much easier to move refugees around and between different centres in France, confining them to a closed space under heavy (albeit invisible) surveillance and control.

These spaces, “paradoxically outside the juridical order and yet internal” (Agamben 9), further highlight their ‘exceptionality’ as spaces of creativity and resistance through the use of power not only by government institutions but also by refugees themselves when they resist. Once inside this “space of exception” (Agamben 109) such as the detention centre, I.B. experiences this condition of exception that enables him to decentre himself from the self, space and time and “write about freedom” (I.B., creative writing, Calais camp, received by email on 24<sup>th</sup> February 2017). The use of self-derision allows the author to assume agency: “Maybe it seems funny, but me, the most illegal person on earth wants to write about freedom, indeed not just write, but look for it as much as I can to show everyone what liberal freedom is” (I.B., creative writing, Calais camp, received by email on 24<sup>th</sup> February 2017).<sup>15</sup> This scriptural mobility becomes for I.B. a means to exercise power through a reflection on freedom by an individual deprived of freedom in a detention centre, a space where no right is recognized.

In this sense, according to Marquez, power is neither positive nor negative, power is a transformative ability to create change and is not automatically linked to conflict or repression. Because power is an action to limit the actions and freedom of others in order to defend its own interests, a power relation exists. Power and resistance are deeply intertwined. Resistance uses different means to limit the effects of power and as such, it contributes to the outcome of power relations (Marquez 29). I.B. does not hesitate to show different forms of resistance, such as taking photographs of the life in the Calais camp, attending debates, cultural and public events, using social media to denounce the political oppression faced by refugees, writing and producing a short documentary. In these power relations, all actors involved exercise transformative capacities. To be granted refugee status in France, asylum seekers must undergo interviews during which their stories' credibility is assessed. This important experience carries with it a trauma, the trauma of having forgotten elements of their lives, the trauma of language because in many instances a suited translator is not available, a trauma resulting from the violent system where their individuality is erased.

This interview marks the most important movement in the life of refugees: from invisibility to visibility, from an endless mobile journey to a settled place. In the detention centre, I.B. was being constantly harassed psychologically by police officers who threatened to deport him if he did not agree to be fingerprinted. Thus it becomes obvious that police officers exercise domination over refugees by limiting not only their freedom but also their rights to seek legal advice. I.B. felt "cheated" and like a "puppet," (I.B., interview, 9<sup>th</sup> of July 2017) and ironically wondered why his friend's application was also turned down. They obviously did not tell the same personal stories to the officers. Both sought asylum at the same time in the same detention centre and were rejected. Both were granted refugee status in the appeal. This parallel underlines how the process of being recognized as a refugee does not always take into account the personal circumstances of refugees. Instead, the interview becomes a "game" (I.B., interview, 9<sup>th</sup> July 2017) with techniques of story-telling to learn in advance in order to convince the State in which they seek asylum:

When I went for my second interview in appeal, I had to lie about people attacking my house. They wanted me to cheat so I did it with great pleasure. The French need to hear that my life was endangered physically with guns, so I had to lie. They do not understand that my freedom was limited. They are so stupid to ask me and others why we left our countries because I had many reasons to leave. Actually who created these countries? Who created these borders? They cannot go deeply so I gave them superficial facts. They do politics so I did it as well. I wanted them to listen to me deeply so I can convince them. (I.B., interview, 9<sup>th</sup> July 2017)

Resistance happens here through the power of language and orality. During the interview (9<sup>th</sup> July 2017) I.B. repeats the words "game" and "servants" to describe politics worldwide. His resistance to this political discourse that justifies tougher immigration measures lies in presenting

himself as the model of the “good refugee.” Resistance turns him into a spokesman for all refugees while grounding his very visibility and existence:

If I go, I will speak up and tell local authorities not to forget the other refugees. What did the government do for the refugees in the Calais Camp? I must say this otherwise I will go back to my bed, hug my pillow and feel guilty not to have say [sic] this. But I must think of refugees. Otherwise I will be absent. Resistance is equal to existence. (I.B., interview, 9<sup>th</sup> of July 2017)

Resistance empowers refugees. Power and resistance create change. For Foucault, “power relations are both intentional and non-subjective” (Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* 94), because, on the one hand, the change in social institutions is intentionally made by individuals and groups to fulfill political and economic needs. On the other hand, mechanisms of power are complex and present everywhere in society so much so that “neither the caste which govern, nor the groups which control the state apparatus, nor those who make the most important economic decisions direct the entire network of power that functions in a society (and makes it function)” (Foucault 95). In this context, resistance cannot be fully achieved because access is limited to only some mechanisms of power.

Resistance is a form of power that is facilitated by individuals and/or groups (including refugees) who occupy different positions and are, thus, not power-less but have the capacity to exercise far fewer forms of power. State institutions that feel threatened by the growing resistance involving refugees, activists, citizens, NGOs develop new forms of power to counter this resistance. European governments are seeking to criminalise acts of solidarity in different ways such as using the law. The ‘crime of solidarity’ targets not only traffickers but also individuals who help refugees. This relationship of power is moveable or adaptable, as mobility of power involves the politics of in/visibility that state institutions use to justify new forms of control, surveillance and violence. In these power-relations, in/visibility not only refers to but in actual fact represents an in-between space where refugees experience “the quest for freedom” (to refer to I.B.’s Facebook page).

To conclude, the constant and inherent movement between mobility/immobility and visibility/invisibility involves power relations and their correlative, that is resistance to the system, whose actors are hardly identifiable and refugees who use in/visibility as a political tool. Refugees, wedged in this in-between space where domination operates, use different forms of resistance that enable the expression of freedom through the multiple possibilities of the self. This particular experience defines the condition of exile, “strangely compelling to think about but terrible to experience [...] Exile is life led outside habitual order. It is nomadic, decentered, contrapuntal; but no sooner does one get accustomed to it than its unsettling force erupts anew” (Said 173). The current refugee crisis stresses a crisis of the global world; and refugees are striking back in

the heart of the guardians of a globalized world. This transformative capacity not only turns the refugee, from a victim, into a visible and active participant who has agency in this new reality, but also into a voice that should be better heard in the media, as well as in political and academic fields.

## Notes

1. D. Bigo, 2004, "Criminalisation of 'migrants': the side effect of the Will to control the frontiers and the Sovereign Illusion." In B. Bogusz, R. Cholewinski, A. Cyngnan and E. Szyszczak (Eds.), *Irregular Migration and Human Rights: Theoretical, European and International Perspectives*, Martinus Nijhof Publishers, pp. 61-92. A. Bloch, N. Sigoner and R. Zetter, 2010, *No right to Dream: The Social and Economic Lives of Young Undocumented Migrants in Britain*, Paul Hamlyn Foundation and City University.

2. [http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th\\_century/rightsof.asp](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/rightsof.asp) (Accessed on November 1, 2017).

3. This excerpt is taken from the "Universal Declaration of Human Rights" drafted by the United Nations in 1948. [http://www.ohchr.org/EN/UDHR/Documents/UDHR\\_Translations/eng.pdf](http://www.ohchr.org/EN/UDHR/Documents/UDHR_Translations/eng.pdf) (Accessed on November 1, 2017).

4. The terms "refugee" and "migrant" have often been misused by mainstream media and political leaders to dehumanize refugees and justify tougher immigration measures. I use the term "refugees" to refer to people fleeing persecution and not only to those who were granted refugee status. This term is in plural to refer to a heterogeneous group of men, women and children. The refugee refers to I.B. throughout this paper.

5. The inaccurate number of deaths in the Mediterranean shows how difficult it is to measure population movements. The frequency and number of casualties underline the diminished value given to the lives of refugees as well as the scale of this tragic situation.

6. At the request of I.B., his identity will not be disclosed for very obvious reasons. I will refer to him throughout this article using the initials I.B. I have had the chance and the permission to use all of I.B.'s creative works (his poems and a documentary produced with his friend when they were in the Calais camp) which were sent to me by email on 24<sup>th</sup> February 2017.

7. Agamben refers to the “camp as a space of exception.” He asserts that “the paradoxical status of the camp as a space of exception must be considered. The camp is a piece of land placed outside the normal juridical order, but it is nevertheless not simply an external space. What is excluded in the camp is, according to the etymological sense of the term “exception” (ex-capere), taken outside, included through its own exclusion. But what is first of all taken into the juridical order is the state of exception itself” (Agamben 109).

8. The term ‘Jungle’ was first used by the refugees. It is said that the term ‘dzhangal’ derived from the pashtu word for woods and was given by its inhabitants. It has been used by authorities to dehumanize its inhabitants and to justify the use of violence against those being in transit in the camp. As Otto Santa Ana argues, “the connotations of IMMIGRANT AS ANIMAL should be abundantly clear. In Western European culture a purported natural hierarchy has been articulated since the time of Thomas Aquinas to justify social inequity. In its full extension, it subordinates other living creatures to human beings, and ranks the inherent quality of humans from base to noble” (Villegas 156; capitalization in original).

9. Even if the Calais camp has been officially dismantled in October 2016, many refugees remain in Calais.

10. References to Arendt and Foucault are on page 21.

11. The first-hand account has been somewhat altered to fit the interpretive practice usually encountered in an academic essay, but an alteration that remains true to the intentions of the interviewee and to his wishes throughout the process of transformation and manuscript writing.

12. This excerpt of a text written by I.B. on October 21<sup>st</sup> 2016 when Bernard Cazeneuve visited the Refugee centre in Lille. On April 2014, B. Cazeneuve was appointed Minister of the Interior until December 2016 when he became Prime Minister.

13. This excerpt was written by I.B. on October 24<sup>th</sup>, the day of the demolition of the Calais camp.

14. As a “privileged” refugee, I.B. did not take the journey on foot but took a series of means of transportation from his home country to Russia and then to Spain. He travelled by car from Spain to Denmark then by train to Germany, and by coach from Germany to Calais where he got arrested for trying to reach the UK with his friend.

15. Excerpt from I.B.’s creative writing.

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