

From Statelessness to “Placelessness”: the Emergent Challenge to Place-based Security Mechanisms

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Statelessness is both a term of art and a juridical concept. If it effectively captures the condition that emanates from the *de jure* withdrawal of citizenship that is because it both frames the withdrawal in the terms of its immediate humanitarian consequences, and isolates the “absence of state” by conceiving it as a localised and juridical issue. Accordingly, the issue could be reduced to being juridically removed from the state-based ontology. Moreover, where the availability of the benefits of citizenship defines the default experience of life, the concept foregrounds an experiential disruption (“a negative impact on many important elements of life” - Batchelor, 4) which is uniquely traceable back to the singularity of a state-based decision-making process.

This juridical focus, as it were, on the stateless-subject-of the-state is, however, only half the picture; “statelessness” is tellingly ineffective in recognising the latent political challenges to its ontological basis. At least analytically speaking, this is a significant shortcoming; any initiative to redress the exteriority of stateless people thus stands consigned to the interiority of state-based ontology. In effect, the underlying juridical epistemology has nothing to say about the ontological disruption that emanates from forms of exteriority, as it presumes the very ontology that is being disrupted.

The shift from statelessness to “placelessness”

Why statelessness lingers as an open-ended problem — or, why it boils down to the indefinite absence of “more universal means of applying national legislation” (Batchelor, 182) — is the question at hand. It is a hard question, and growing harder as the *de facto* irrelevance¹ of the territorial frame of reference forces us to look beyond the self-referential “stateless subject of the state.” If the regulation of human mobility is territorially referenced, it is possible to view the permanence of “irregular mobility” as symptomatic of the open-endedness of the reference, and of the proliferation of place-based security mechanisms.

The “built-in” (i.e. ontological) vulnerability of territorially referenced mechanisms of security does not entail the demise of “territory” but its ongoing re-invention, as a series of ever-new conceptions of “place”. An example of this conceptual recycling would be the way “nationality” has epistemically evolved to compensate for its ontological irrelevance. Thus, “persons who [are] unable to ‘act’ on their nationality” could still rely on it “because its effectiveness was denied to them” (Batchelor, 173). It is important to note that even when they are juridically declared as “*de facto* stateless” (Batchelor, 172) those “persons” are still

¹ “[W]hat we need is a politics of ‘the Terrestrial’ ... to confront the real climate crisis that will not stop at any wall or customs declaration counter.” with these words Bruno Latour exemplifies the prevailing temporal irrelevance of the territorial frame of reference. “No More EasyJet: On Bruno Latour’s ‘Où atterrir?’” in Los Angeles Review of Books (6-9-2018) <https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/no-more-easyjet-on-bruno-latours-ou-atterrir/#!>

deemed to belong to a still state-based, yet significantly re-invented ontology. In other words, their political agency is grounded not in a local state but on a “supralocal” (Malkki, 37) ontology — an overarching “world of states,” taken for granted by both the *de jure* and the *de facto* conceptions of statelessness. Nationality too, whether it is “denied” or not, has evolved to imply a taxonomical reference and, thereby, to sanction human agency under conditions of “transnational connectivity” (Marston *et al.*, 46). The ground zero of this re-invented nationality is an open-endedly evolving concept of “place,” and not the primordial “territory.” As this paper argues, the mechanisms by which the politically contingent mobility is hoped to be contained, are as much premised on such a process of ontological reconceptualisation, as they stand challenged by the very open-endedness of that referential “place.”

Statelessness, thus, is an essentially state-based concept. It belongs to the “world of states” — the “world” that the inherently exterior human mobility refuses to take for granted. This “world” has enough conceptual room for stateless-made people, but it cannot admit of any zones of statelessness; so much so that, “de facto statelessness” would constitute a contradiction in terms, if taken literally and beyond its strictly juridical context. Its pretension to totality also explains the fragility² of this “world”; the analytic limits of the state-based ontology stand demonstrated in the worldly presence of “irregular mobility.” The worn-out pathology of “state failure” used to denote a one-off state-based “threat to the foundation of the international system” (Helland & Borg, 4). By contrast, everyday forms of “irregular mobility” stand to demonstrate the systemic presence of countless zones of incongruity. As they do, systemic (or “global”) security becomes a matter of ontological congruity. In fact, the emphasis on ontology, rather than to uphold the epistemic centralisation it warrants, is geared to foreground the fragility of a “total” conception of security, precisely, in its dependence on the idea of “one central viewpoint onto multiple different objects.”³ Coming to terms with this ontological fragility, begins with acknowledging its implications. One such implication is the waning of the state-based conception of “pre-constituted” locality. Its “ontological status as ‘place,’ in opposition to a globalised ‘space,’ cannot be sustained” (Marston *et al.*, 46, 49) as long as locality’s claim to isolate the “outside forces” stands disrupted. The ensuing shift from the state-based defense to the place-based security, marks the rise of a fleeting conception of place — aptly described by Virilio, as an “omnipolitan periphery whose centre will be nowhere and circumference everywhere” (Armitage, 183). An inherently insecure “place” on which security is nevertheless grounded, such is the setting of the unruly human mobility, and such are the stakes of unpacking the place/security entanglement. To grasp that this entanglement is built on the dictum “mobility is never innocent” (Leese & Wittendorp, 6) also means that *forced displacement*, where it prevails as a “global” phenomenon,⁴ constitutes both a *raison d’être* and an emergent challenge to the place-based security mechanisms, ranging from “biometric borders” to “off-shore processing.”

An emergence becomes articulate in the terms of a “new” problematisation⁵. The place-based problematisation of *forced displacement*, to distinguish it from the “statelessness” perspective, is concerned with displaced people as *dis-placed* — *i.e.* in terms of their inherently “destabilising” mobility (Scalettaris, 59). Whereas the “statelessness” framework assumes by-default subjectivites, the disruptive reality of *forced displacement* refers to “mixed flows,” place-based restrictions, and the entanglement between “economic

² The fragility in question could also be understood from another respect: a theory of the state that does not presume the “existence of abstract juridical individuals” but is rather built around the open-ended assertion of an “immanent principle of the legitimation of power” also incorporates an “element of fragility.” See: Gane, M. and Johnson, T. eds, *Foucault’s New Domains*, London: Routledge, 1993) p. 38.

³ See: Heywood, P., “The Ontological Turn”, in *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of Anthropology*, <http://www.anthroencyclopedia.com/entry/ontological-turn>

⁴ According to UNHCR “The rate at which people are fleeing war and persecution has soared from 6 per minute in 2005 to 24 per minute in 2015” <http://www.unhcr.org/news/latest/2016/6/5763b65a4/global-forced-displacement-hits-record-high.html>

⁵ An inarticulate emergence is countered by the transformation of “the difficulties and obstacles of a practice into a general problem” — a “problematisation [which] develops the conditions in which possible responses can be given.” See: Foucault, M., “Polemics, Politics, and Problematisations,” in Rabinow, P. ed., *Essential Works of Foucault Vol. 1*, (New York: New Press, 1997), p. 118.

migration and political flight” (Ponthieu & Derderian, 37). As is the case with the subsequent “forced repatriation”⁶ of the forced-displaced Rohingya (and, their refusal to return) an ongoing state of *displacement*, or “placelessness,” is the prevailing issue. Accordingly, “boundaries and borderlands [are] at the center” of this analytical framework (Malkki, 25). The prevailing place-based focus is no longer territorially anchored. The problematisation *forced displacement* is bound to focus on the characteristically interstitial trajectory of “placelessness”: an assemblage of non-places, such as the mutinous “off-shore processing” sites, the shifty “escape routes”, and the makeshift “jungle” camps. Hence, the question: how to approach this shift towards place-based focus, in which the very sense of “place” is subject to open-ended mutation. This paper suggests to replace statelessness with “placelessness” to enable a critical insight into the interactive relationship between security mechanisms and forms of human mobility. A close at hand take, regards the self-disruptiveness of the place-based security mechanisms. These mechanisms are structured around the projected stabilisation of the “non-places,” by incorporating them into an “omnipolitan periphery,” that is, of a place-based “Centre.” In other words, their target, the interstitial trajectory of unruly mobility, is their byproduct as well; the “migrant multiplicities” that elude state-based taxonomies of capture (Tazzioli, 5) are inseparable from the “grey zones and borderlands between states and state bureaucracies” (Chatty, 3).

The permanent focus on “boundaries and borderlands” (whether actual or metaphorical) implies the mutation of the chronic mobility of people (Malkki, 24) into an acute emergence that goes beyond the place-based problematisation of *forced displacement*. This *de facto* state of emergency has a patent implication that can be observed in the mainstreaming of the hitherto illegitimate vision of “securitised” mobility — *e.g.* in the self-disruptive discourse of “an outsider coming inside, as a danger to the homogeneity of the state, the society, and the polity” (Leese & Wittendorp, 124). A similar disruption to the ontological security lies with the normalisation of the “deterrence” approach to *forced displacement* (Gammeltoft-Hansen & Tan, 29), as it runs counter to the state-based systematic of rights. In brief, the in-effect collapse of the rights-based regulation of human mobility into a place-based “power to stop and put into motion” (Cresswell, 28) now stands fully disclosed, specifically, in correlation with the increasing visibility of the “new” place-based security ecology.

The emergent challenge to place-based security mechanisms

(a) Foregrounding the challenge: “inventing homes”

Mobility is, by convention, movement: a displacement from one pre-constituted locality to another. But it is also undoing, a form of resistance in the face of a plethora of spatial hierarchies — *e.g.* mobility/territory, far/near, inside/outside, local/global, North/South, just to name a few. In effect, thinking in terms of mobility is to think about the “pre-constituted” status of locality. The fact that it is conveniently deemed “a source of insecurity” (Leese & Wittendorp, 1) should not obscure that mobility is inherently disruptive of the ontological certitudes on which those hierarchies are grounded. In fact, where the “monopolisation” of mobility is “intrinsic to the very construction of states” (Torpey, 6) the ontological disruption at hand could be better understood by comparing it to the spatial breach inherent to the proverbial agency of “escape.” This is however not to say that the underlying agency is completely determined by the local context of escape. In any case, neither could this context be assumed as delimited in space, or even in time. In brief, mobility should not entail the immobility of its state-based context. The social, economic, political conditions under

⁶ “UN criticises Rohingya deal between Myanmar and Bangladesh” in *The Guardian* (1-11-2018) <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/oct/31/un-criticises-rohingya-deal-between-myanmar-and-bangladesh>

which the trajectory of escape takes effect as a coherent and “global” force, themselves stand to be revealed as having a “hidden” historical trajectory (Leese & Wittendorp, 6).

The qualification also applies to the specific case of *forced displacement*, which needs to be analysed as an extended social process, and by taking into account the irreducible human agency at play (Leese & Wittendorp, 5; Castles, 15). As Samaddar points out, “the decision of the immigrant to escape from the clutches of social relations and of entrenched power hierarchies in his/her home village, town or country ... is his/her resistance”⁷. Especially in the case of *forced displacement*, the all-too common disregard for the political resistance implicit to mobility could be due to the transitive usage of “displacement,” as it gives the impression that the phenomenon precludes the agency of “the displaced.” More crucially, though, the reduction of agency to the conditions of departure derives from the reduction of mobility to “departure.” The insertion of the legal concept of “safe third country” (Gammeltoft-Hansen & Tan, 35) into the space of mobility as a regulatory measure, also acknowledges the futility of narrowing “displacement” down to physical movement. If space is more than the physical space, displacement does not begin (nor does it end) with the actual abandonment of the place; rather, its trajectory is coterminous with the human agency that sustains its contextual “placelessness”. Thus, rather than subordinating mobility to a world of pre-constituted localities, a more productive approach would be to understand human mobility as an open-ended trajectory of contingencies: “a movement producing change,”⁸ that is always subject to reversal (cf. n. 8). This take on mobility could even be the norm in times characterised, in Said’s words, by “a general condition of homelessness” and, concomitantly, by “an anti-essentialist” take on identity (Cresswell & Dixon, 7). The prevalence of “anti-essentialism” encapsulates the way identity is produced and reproduced literally on the go, that is, in its open-ended interaction with place-based security mechanisms. In other words, the prevalence is, rather, that of the open-ended proliferation of place-based “identity.” Meanwhile, our understanding of human mobility is still subordinated to the “paradigm of the nation-state” as the anchor of identity (Papastergiadis, 10), and “citizenship” still presumes the “inside/outside” dichotomy (McNevin, 136). As ontology abhors competition, it is of course compelling to seek to bridge this competitive coexistence between the pre-constituted “territory” and the interactive “place.” On the other hand, the very persistence of the “competition” (or, ontological incongruity) should drive home both the intransigence of the “undoing” and its co-extensiveness with the extended activity of place-making, both in space and in time.

Thinking in terms of human mobility entails coming to terms with the political reality that humans “invent homes” — “through memories and claims on places” (Malkki, 24). While territory can still be seen as the definitive expression of the “local” identity, it has ceased to claim that it can contain the ways in which locality proliferates competitively. Eventually, as an escape trajectory, “inventing homes” is what foregrounds this otherwise invisible “competition”; it is still a fact that everyone is born in a geographical location (Batchelor, 171) but the “inside/outside” dichotomy is no longer central to the epistemic domain of geography. Epistemic centralisation of spatial know-how still compels that “as a minimum, there must be a state” (*ibid.*) and yet, the ontological configuration of the state, especially of the post-colonial state, is now visibly subject to ongoing mutation.

(b) The context of the challenge: state-building

How does mobility “undo”; or, is it even possible to understand the challenge of human mobility in isolation from what we know about the “immobility” state? A tentative answer would point to the ways in which mobility discloses the epistemic instability at the heart of the seemingly “given” state. For us, mobility may

⁷ Samaddar, R., *The Marginal Nation. Transborder Migration from Bangladesh to West Bengal*, (New Delhi: Sage, 1999), p. 150.

⁸ Or, “deterritorialisation” which, as per Deleuze’s terminology, “can best be understood as a movement producing change.” Not only that it transforms the territory but also “shatters the subject.” Thus, it is inseparable from “processes of reterritorialisation, which does not mean returning to the original territory but rather the ways in which deterritorialised elements recombine and enter into new relations.” Parr, A. ed., *The Deleuze Dictionary*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh U. P., 2010) pages 69, 70, 73.

very well be an inventive mode of being, or we may even consider ourselves as “chronically mobile.” But, from the perspective of the state, it is unambiguously a problem to be solved, at best, through its regulation (Cresswell, 2010; Torpey, 6). This characteristically forever problem can be summarised as follows: human mobility discloses the state as a series of “effects” (Mitchell, 1991); the disclosure amounts to a challenge precisely where ontological closure is taken for granted. In contrast to the presumption of closure associated with the representation of “citizenship as a unified, ahistorical concept” (McNevin, 148 - n. 2), the ongoing efforts to contain the contingent forms of mobility (among others, *forced displacement*) extends indefinitely. Above all to the extent that its conceptual reference, “the territory”, “exists through the ways we have of moving around in it” (Virilio, 50), the stable conception “the state” is revealed as a perennially unfinished project. As in decolonisation or “globalisation” (Castles, 3), forms of deterritorialisation are in fact constantly “move around” the limits that state the conceptually refers to. As such, the project of building a “new” state is indefinitely geared to the containment of the more or less acute deterritorialising trends (McNevin, 136; also see: n. 8). Conversely, though, “new” state means “new” forms of mobility: the indefinite reconstruction of those limits conjoins the state-centric idea of *change* to the proliferating forms of mobility. The post-colonial conception of state is characterised by a teleologically oriented transformative agency it only struggles to monopolise. Thus, it is noted, when the underlying “faith in the state as a mechanism of reform” faltered, the *change* inspired populations went on to question “the self-evident nature of states as conceptual containers” from the vantage point of the “rising awareness of trans-state phenomena” (Wallerstein *et al.*, 83).

The “state” of state-building is marked by a precarity that can be located in its historical mutations; more exactly, in the way those mutations are neutralised through the reflexive constitution⁹ of the state as an object for itself. Reflexive state-building has indeed been instrumental in overcoming the epistemic disruption implicit to the ontological transition from the colonial to the post-colonial “world.” The sudden disappearance of the epistemically entrenched “colonised” locality could make sense but in the normative language of *change* — noticeably, in the linguistic blurring of the distinction between the transitive and the intransitive usages of “change” (cf. Sachs, 11). In effect, if state-building could still assume agential consistency in spite of the contingent history of political mutations it entails, that is basically due to its reflexive postulation, as the “harbinger and main instrument of [the] social change” (Sachs, 265). But the disruption could hardly be contained at the level of “state”; the political merger, namely, of the “Western and the non-Western areas,” also had to be formalised in spatial terms, as the epistemically identical but historically hierarchical objects of the “universalistic social sciences” (Wallerstein *et al.*, 83). Ultimately, the hitherto irreducible “colony” is transposed to the post colonial domain of Area Studies¹⁰, that is, as one object of knowledge among others. The overcoming at the political level of the “West/non-West” difference — or, of the unsustainable “coloniser/colonised” hierarchy — was thus premised on its preservation at the temporal level, as the normatively differentiated “stages of growth” (Engerman *et al.*, 36). State-building responds to the conceptual instability of transplanting “the state” to a basically stateless space (that is, the “non-West”) by clinging to the thesis that,

there exists a common modernising path of all nations/peoples/areas (hence they were the same) but that nations/peoples/areas find themselves at different stages on this path (hence they were not quite the same) (Wallerstein, 40).

⁹ A reflexive constitution whereby “the subject...recognises himself as a domain of possible knowledge” and thereby as a field of intervention. Faubion, J.D. ed., *Essential Works of Foucault - Volume 2*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2000) p. 461.

¹⁰ “[A]rea studies’ programs were a large collaborative focus between government/military interests and academic institutions, think-tanks, and commercial research foundations, designed to create massive interdisciplinary knowledge (especially in the social sciences) of particular regions—specifically as catalysts for development projects in strategic spaces.” See: Barney, T., “Diagnosing the Third World: The ‘Map Doctor’ and the Spatialised Discourses of Disease and Development in the Cold War”, *Rhetoric and Communication Studies Faculty Publications* 19:, (2014) p.8.

In other words, the precarity that marks the “state” of state-building becomes visible as the constant shifting of the ontological issues of identity and difference (Goldstein, 27; Wallerstein *et al.*, 39) from the political to the temporal level, that is, to the “path to the future.” The spatial outcome of this escape to the “future,” amounts to giving up on forms of locality as a security measure — precisely, in response to the ontological insecurity the deterritorialising trends pose. This simulated “placelessness,” in conjunction with the indefinite deferral to the “future,” is, arguably, an important feature of post-colonial state-building. In that, state-building parallels the problematisation of statelessness in its open-endedness: having started off a universalised conception of the subject of the state (e.g. “all nations/peoples/areas”), they are both bound to stay the course just to live up to that conception.

All states, and not just the “Third World states,” thus appear as ontologically “condemned to engage in state-making” (Krause, 132). As a matter of fact, the teleological optimism that the opposition “state failure vs. incomplete state-building” (Steinsdorff, 2012) conveys, and the epistemic necessity of an “universalised analysis of ‘problem states’” (Call, 305) mean that state-building, like mobility, cannot be delimited in space or time; for, they are themselves boundary-drawing, place-making activities. As Foucault notes,

while colonisation, with its techniques and its political and juridical weapons, obviously transported European models to other continents, it also had a considerable boomerang effect on the mechanisms of power in the West.¹¹

For, the territorial reference is unable to exhaust modes of deterritorialisation — an inability that is as well expressed by “placelessness” — the modalities of post-colonial state-building cannot be assumed to halt at the borders of “the West.” In fact, Modernisation Theory had emerged as both the *normalised* framework of post-colonial state-building and as a *normal* security mechanism that could “control dissent, maintain order, and ensure stability” (Engerman *et al.*, 252). As such, to restrict the postulated link between a transcendent understanding of security and a generalised theory of socio-political transformation to this-rather-than-that “place” would amount to self-disruption. A self-inflicted disruption undermines not only the epistemic effectivity of the postulation but also its normative standing. Especially this latter has a particular importance; it is thanks to its normativity that the now defunct concept of “modernisation” could leave behind its historical instrumentalisation as a political technology, to evolve into an “argument for globalisation” (Engerman *et al.*, 35-36, 74). Today, it is better known as the “security-development nexus” (Stern & Öjendal, 11) which indeed refers to a universalised perspective whose epistemic horizon sustains, among others, the “global” problematisation *forced displacement*.

Whether the genealogy of *forced displacement* could be traced back to post-colonial state-building, or in fact to decolonisation itself, is the subject of another research. On the other hand, where *forced displacement* relies on a universally comparative framework — just as “development,” relied on the “oneness” of the world (Sachs, 12) — it is worth pondering the ontological subjection this framework suggests. The discursive subjection of whole swaths of infinitely differentiated populations to a “supralocal” comparative gaze nevertheless involves an ontological determination: “On January 20, 1949 [upon Harry Truman’s ‘Four Points’ speech] two billion people became underdeveloped,”

they ceased being what they were, in all their diversity, and were transmogrified into an inverted mirror of others’ reality: a mirror that belittles them...a mirror that defines their identity...in the terms of a narrow minority (Sachs, 7).

This ontological forcefulness is a reflection of the spatial hierarchy embedded in the conceptual schema of “development.” The “developed/underdeveloped” taxonomy is one thing, its politico-spatial correlate, the “North/South” hierarchy, quite another. It is the latter that imposes the spatial imagery “the South

¹¹ Foucault, M., *Society Must be Defended: Lectures at the College de France*, (London: Allen Lane, 2003) p. 103.

connect[ing] with the North.” But the subjection is never complete; it is constantly challenged by “new” forms of mobility. It is then unsurprising that the “connection” takes the form of a myriad of informal networks of “irregular mobility” (Castles, 6). The deterritorialisation operating at the heart of state-building does not amount to a linear unfolding. While some embark on the perils and the benefits of the “North-South” trajectory, others ride still another trajectory to become “agents of change” (Goldstein, 38) or “political actors in the decolonising world” — having found a political resource in the discourse of development to effectively challenge the “national authorities” (Cooper, 33).

It is not enough to say that the state suffers a conceptual instability from which it is “condemned” to secure itself. After all, we make sense of the world through concepts, even as these concepts are themselves at the mercy of the essentially problematic “world,” and of the ever-failing “solutions” they imply.¹² The challenge of human mobility is enabled by the indefiniteness of the post-colonial state-building. And yet, at the interstices of state-building, equally indefinite forms of mobility are invented. Those “new” mobilities “sub- and supra-national” territorialities (Brenner, 52). To move from decolonisation to “immobilisation,” an insight this reconstruction of the historical experience of state-building would instil is the interactive relationship between forms of mobility and means of immobilisation.

(c) The challenge to place-based security mechanisms: competitive place-making

In more than one respect, *passport* is the prototypical place-based security mechanism. It rests on the idea that the functionality of the state depends on its ability to distinguish citizens from “non-citizens.” It is however important to note that the ability takes effect “in a difference-generating manner” (Torpey, xii). The ability to “filter” the desirable form of mobility from the non-desirable one is inseparable from the effectivity to “smooth” the one at the expense of the other (Torpey, xiii). While those who benefit the speed and comfort of the infrastructure of mobility are automatically subjected to documentary controls, these controls are ineffective for the pedestrians crossing the borders, or for those who take the perilous “sea routes.” Likewise, the difference-generation obtains not only as per the technical binary “citizenship/non-citizenship,” but in a continuum of gradations which consists of such politically-charged attributes as nationality, ethnicity, religion, employment. In this sense, the difference that a typical passport regime generates appears as infinite. A static conception of human mobility, such as “migration,” is unable to foreground this permanently enforced imposition of identity that in fact simulates the particular form of mobility it responds to. The concept of “migration”, especially that of “forced migration,” presumes above all a static geography of place-based identities such as the “stateless or the indigeneous people...displaced from their traditional territories” (Papastergiadis, 55) which also obscures the way place-based security mechanisms interact with (or even parallel) forms of mobility.

An implication of reducing human mobility to breach of territorial borders, or to billiard balls that are at the mercy of a spatial gradient — such as the “zones of peace/zones of turmoil” hierarchy (Krause, 133) — is to turn a blind eye to the place/security entanglement implicit to the teleology of containment. Even though its essential claim is the spatial pre-existence of the “container,” containment mechanisms are oriented towards the making of the “containing” place, the basis of the political act of containment — a nominal “place” which may even correspond to a manipulated form of mobility (Tazzioli, 2018). This open-ended (albeit reactive) inventiveness which is immanent to place-based containment is exemplified, among others, by the so-called “Hotspot” approach, as it suggests the enforcement of a trajectory that diverges from the territorial convention of containment. The suggested “containment through mobility” is geared not to the blockage of mobility but to its modulation by acting upon the “migrants’ geographies” as well as the “speed” of mobility (Tazzioli, 2018; Pallister-Wilkins, 2016). It is important to realise the significance of this basically open-

¹² After Deleuze & Guattari: “All concepts are connected to problems without which they would have no meaning and which can themselves only be isolated or understood as their solution emerges.” *What is Philosophy?*, (London: Verso, 1999) p. 16, and “concepts cannot be thought apart from the circumstances of their production” See: Parr, A., ed., *The Deleuze Dictionary, Revised Edition*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh U. P., 2010) p. 53.

ended divergence from the territorial moorings of place-making, as it is where the emergent challenge to place-based security mechanisms takes its toll. While the challenge originates from human mobility, it takes effect in the very making of place, which is otherwise presumed as “already-there” and presumably non-ambiguous. As in the euphemistic “refugee camp,” there is no doubt a tension between the regulatory places and the unruly “invented homes,” but it cannot be considered as an emergent challenge. On the other hand, to the extent that the trail of failed “places” emerge to demonstrate the futility of regulating human mobility, a certain challenge could be discerned. And that is only the beginning; “in a world which is spatially connected” (Witteborn, 1143), the coexistence of “failed” enclosures, more than a sign of ineffectiveness, discloses the impossibility of enclosure. This disclosure hurts where it takes effect: in those supposedly “already there” places. In those government-designated enclosures for “asylum-seekers,” the re-configuration of the physical place “as a place of impermanence” (Witteborn, 1155), points to the characteristic association of temporality and locality in the production of place. The temporality of place allows for the transferring the burden of mobility from the state to the “asylum-seeker.” But at the same time it irrevocably “disassociates the state from the individual” (Witteborn, 1151), by positing the “place of impermanence” as the direct competitor of the territorial place. Further, ways of producing place, as strategies of containment, are not just means of arresting the mobile body as “marked location of difference” (Witteborn, 1154). They also disclose, inadvertently, the impossibility of arresting the mobile body, that is, insofar as the locations of difference proliferate to unmark their difference.

In view of the inventiveness of place-making, the seemingly transactional relationship between people and place should be reconsidered. Just as it constitutes the paradigmatic object of belonging, a place also serves to incarcerate (Malkki, 26, 29; Mountz & Loyd, 392). The elusiveness of “place” suggests ontological indeterminacy, foregrounding its almost immanent entanglement with “security.” Obviously, to give up on locality as a place-based security measure (as already discussed in the context of post-colonial state-building) had failed to preclude a struggle over the ontological status of “place.” A war-like interaction between the formation of mobile subjectivities and the spatial reconfigurations that are geared to their containment, becomes increasingly visible particularly in *forced displacement*. Whether it is a “self-chosen” path or not (Witteborn, 1151), the open-ended trajectory that effects the dissociation of the individual from the state instigates a flurry of place-based security measures. But the trajectory is also a trail of “failed” attempts to place-making that now compete among themselves for ontological status. “Extraterritorial border controls” respond to the “responsibility to protect” (Vandvik, 32), but the instigated virtual place (of jurisdiction) stands in ontological competition with the spatial taxonomy that consists of “non-overlapping, juridically autonomous spaces” (Jones, 376). The proliferation of extraterritorial, place-based mechanisms entails not just the “de-territorialisation” of the EU borders (Vandvik, 27); the ensuing “virtual borders” are in effect open-endedly contesting the conventions of bordering. Territorial jurisdiction now competes with a supralocal, “*de facto* jurisdiction” (Vandvik, 29) — a place of jurisdiction that is not pre-constituted but premised on the mobile presence “of a refugee,” whether it is in “international waters as well as in the territorial waters and the territory of another state” (*ibid.*). In such instances of blatantly competitive place-making (or place-claiming), an ontological struggle materialises to exceed both the humanitarian, and the state-building frameworks of *forced displacement*.

The disconcerting struggle for ontological status, far from invoking the pre-constituted opposition between “movement and settlement” (Papastergiadis, 10), points to an understanding of the challenge to regulatory place-making as a self-inflicted challenge. Arguably, the challenge emerges from the ontological competition (or incongruity) between countless “old” and “new places”; as engendered by the place-based response to the contingent forms of mobility, they share the same epistemic universe. The otherwise abstract “competition” becomes material precisely in the blurring of epistemically vital oppositions as the “domestic and foreign, spatial and juridical” (Mountz & Loyd, 392). No longer the external “irregular mobility” presents a “security threat” to its internal, “regulated” counterpart, as the all-too comfortable binary logic goes. Rather, the disconcert follows from the vanishing binaries, not least in view of the ontological multilateralism that the political reality of competing places dictates. The “regulated” and the “irregular” forms of mobility are not

identical to each other; still, neither their non-identity could be reduced to the binary logic. The opposition regularity/irregularity in fact emerges as an unsustainable by-product of the “diverse set of practices that function to mark [mobile] bodies as legitimate/illegitimate” (Gorman, 2). The self-inflicted challenge, in other words, is not just a technical issue. Place-based security, as an unsustainable machinery of “places,” upends the political comfort that takes the “production of remoteness” (Mountz & Loyd, 396) for granted; the near or far “security threat” is now an idiom — or, rather, it is “placeless.”

d) A political implication of the challenge: “placeless” subjectivities

Beyond the technicalities of competitive place-making, there is also a political work implicit to the place-based security mechanisms. It consists not so much in digging-in against the “external” irregularity but in constantly striving to establish the regularity of what nominally lies “inside” the ontologically bordered place. In fact, the constant work of re-drawing the borders that separate regulatory place-making from the placeless “claims to place” is emphatically oriented to the security of the ontological borders. As such, the work in question amounts to the “policing of borders,” inasmuch as it “provides a demonstration of loyalty” (McNevin, 141). Policing process, according to Foucault, is to “establish boundaries between regulated and unregulated domains of human activity” (Martin et al., 126); not so much does it deal with “disloyalty” at the territorial borderline than it actually “makes” a non-territorial borderline that would define the extent of “loyalty.” The operating principle of policing borders could indeed be understood as the epistemological imposition of a “spatial difference,” whereby “a wide range of potential ontological effects” are produced (Agnew, 142). The particular subjectivity that a non-territorial “loyalty” suggests, could be one such ontological effect. This political effectivity of “policing of borders” points to the enforced incorporation of forms of mobility into a policeable totality, specifically, to constitute a biopolitical horizon. In more practical terms, it has “less to do with “policing” than with enabling the “perception that citizens are being protected against outsiders” (McNevin, 141). Still, having to deal with the political reality that those “citizens” cannot depend on a pre-existing interiority — in view of the relativisation of territoriality that the “deterritorialization of social relations” dictates (Brenner, 62) — is much more than a matter of perception. It is the beleaguered status of the state-based subjectivity that is at stake. Just as the waning of the pre-constituted conception of locality is accompanied by a proliferation of places, the *de facto* re-configuration of “citizenship” as a matter of non-territorial “loyalty” is associated with a multiplication of “placeless” subjectivities.

Conclusion

Problems of displacement are inseparable from conceptions of place, and in fact from place-making. Place-based security mechanisms can be seen as the historically contingent extensions of the “placeless” state-building, that is particularly in the way they propound a spatial security which involves the open-ended re making of spatiality. But there is more: precisely in view of this circularity, their understanding of “security” could look past ontological incertitudes, to stand as oriented to the levelling of such biopolitical gradients as “the North/South divide” and the “protection gap” (Ponthieu & Derderian, 2013). Further, the place-based competence of the security mechanisms should not obscure their political dependence on the epistemic paradigm of “universalised analysis.” Just as the crisis-ridden Area Studies had to presume the uniformity of “all nations/peoples/areas” in order to deem expertise in any one “area,” place-based competency assumes the scope of “the large-scale management of life and death” (Elden and Crampton, 293). The assumed scope is disclosed as equally crisis-ridden; the “waiting zones” (Balzacq *et al.*, 2010), the “offshore carceral regime” (Mountz & Loyd, 2014), the Smart Borders initiative (Amoore, 345), and countless other place-based mechanisms operate on the basis of a “normalising judgement” (Elden & Crampton, 247) whose unsustainable reference is to the “normal/abnormal” dichotomy. This is to say, in view of the unsustainability of their references, those mechanisms are disclosed as critically dependent on the conjunction of “bio-politics

and thanato-politics.”¹³ Even when their professed focus is on the specific problematique of *forced displacement*, biopolitically informed security mechanisms ineluctably cast an overarching epistemic net. That is above all the case with the biopolitical problematisation of human mobility which is inextricably conjoined to “placeless” place-making — *i.e.* not just the implementation of “worldwide techniques for uniquely and unambiguously identifying each and every [human] on the face of the earth” but also the attending bureaucratic structures “to implement this regime of identification” (Torpey, 7). And yet, it increasingly becomes clear that this epistemic net has its political limits, and that its limitedness as such poses a challenge to the very possibility of its open-ended casting. Thus, the identification regimes’ symptomatic addiction to re-define the categories of identification, discloses “redefining the refugee category,” basically, as a means towards the “production of illegality” (Gorman, 5). A pervasive “transcarcerality” (Mountz & Loyd, 395) then becomes visible as the unacceptable underside of the acceptable “transnationality.” The biopolitical orientation of the regulation of mobility ensures that the “ongoing political struggles about who or what constitutes desirable or undesirable movement” (Leese & Wittendorp, 6) remain as endemic to “zones of turmoil.” This epistemic strength however has a political weakness; with the proliferation of “zone”-making it becomes all the more difficult to turn a blind eye to the underlying “placelessness” of those struggles. The emergent visibility of “placelessness” is in this sense more than a regulatory hurdle; it challenges the “zones”-based machinery of spatial hierarchies that sustains the regulatory containment of human mobility.

To sum up: human mobility, it is claimed, is a “regulated challenge”; on the other hand, that it constantly escapes regulation, emerges to contradict this claim — as it reveals the unsustainable assumptions by which place-based security mechanisms sustain themselves. Whereas the ineffectiveness of place-based security mechanisms are evaluated with respect to their obvious claim to “security”, their justification lies, less obviously, in their assumptions to spatial and temporal transcendence. And it is these justificatory assumptions that are revealed as unsustainable, precisely, as they entail more than one form (or “place”) of transcendence. However paradoxical it may appear, a supralocal conception of “power of the state” has emerged but only to be challenged by its own emergence. The resulting disruption, if not the paradox, is marked not by “statelessness” but by “placelessness.” In order to translate this seemingly abstract challenge into the idiom of everyday experience, a passage from Guy Debord may be helpful:

"The vague feeling that there has been a rapid invasion which has forced people to lead their lives in an entirely different way is now widespread; but this is experienced rather like some inexplicable change in the climate, or in some other natural equilibrium..”¹⁴

With “rapid invasion,” Debord has been referring to the increasing visibility of the competitive relationship between the real and the “spectacle.” The societal dislocation ensuing this disconcerting visibility is almost comparable to the ontological disruption that the emergent challenge to place-based security unleashes.

¹³ As noted by Mitchell Dean, “Bio-politics and thanato-politics are played out in war, in torture, and in biological, chemical and atomic weapons of mass destruction as much as in declarations of human rights and United Nations’ peacekeeping operations.” “Four Theses on the Powers of Life and Death,” *Contretemps*, 5 (2004) p.17.

¹⁴ Debord, G., *Comments on the Society of the Spectacle*, (London: Verso, 1990), p. 4.

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