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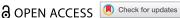
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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses biometric borders in Europe, focusing on the Eurodac database and practises of fingerprinting people on the move in Greece as a politicised attempt to control and limit secondary movement as set out in the Dublin Regulation. The paper presents empirical research to explore one way in which migrants in Athens negotiate Eurodac; where alternative imaginaries informed ideas of 'big' and 'small' fingerprints, shaping interactions with the asylum service as well as secondary movement. I use Autonomy of Migration (AoM) theories to depict borders as places of ongoing conflict, subjectivity and transformation and introduce the work of Castoriadis' social imaginaries and the radical imagination to explore migrants' alternative imaginaries. I argue that these occur at points of friction, within the constraints of, and alongside, a dominant socio-technical imaginary driving the proliferation of biometric border controls. I believe this enables a deeper understanding of the autonomy with AoM theories. Here, autonomy is presented as instances of self-creation, spurred on through the radical imagination and shaping moments of uncontrollability, where the subjective dimension of migration informs both meanings of autonomy as well as alternative imaginaries. Ultimately, I argue that these practices seek to disrupt and challenge the dominance of biometrics as a signifier of control, identity and truth.

Introduction

It is April 2019 and I am sitting with H, a young Syrian man, in the living room of the apartment he is staying in with friends. We are discussing his future plans and the options open to him:

> H: We have the ID people, and the white cards, and the new arrivals who didn't do anything yet. So, every category of these people have their own plans for the future. So, if I have an ID, I have different plans than the one who have a white card who didn't do anything yet.[1]

Like many I met with during fieldwork, H originally planned to leave Greece to claim asylum elsewhere. Having arrived in Greece in 2018, three years after the

so-called migration crisis, H tells me of his multiple attempts to cross the Northern border, to leave and to move elsewhere in Europe. H had been successful in avoiding border guards when crossing into Greece; however, after spending his savings on failed attempts to leave, he chose to register for asylum, needing the asylum card ('white card') to access healthcare and avoid detention while he decided on his next move.

In mainland Greece, at the time of my fieldwork, waiting times remained long for registration and substantive ('big') interviews for asylum, often taking years to gain refugee status ('the ID people'). Individuals without an asylum card were unable to access basic support and lived in constant risk of being picked up by the police and detained. To gain an asylum card, a person had to give their fingerprints, marking the person's entry into Europe's biometric asylum regime. The framework of this regime includes the European Dactyloscopy database (Eurodac) (Council Regulation 2013a) alongside the Schengen Information System (SIS) (Council Regulation 2006) and Visa Information System (VIS) (Council Regulation 2008) (see also Nedelcu and Soysüren 2020). Important for this paper is Eurodac, which is used to enforce the Dublin regulation (Council Regulation 2013b), a mechanism to determine where a person should have their asylum claim examined. The underlying principle of the Dublin Regulation is that a person should apply for asylum in the first Member State (MS) they arrive in. This system is reliant upon fingerprinting travellers and storing their biometric data in Eurodac, where fingerprints are used to search for 'hits' to verify a person's identity and check eligibility for an asylum application (Tsianos and Kuster 2016, 256). If a person has been registered in Greece and subsequently moves to another country, a Eurodac search will show this and the asylum claim could be deemed inadmissible (Soysüren and Nedelcu 2019). If this happens, a 'take charge' request is sent to the Greek Asylum Service (GAS) in an attempt to facilitate a 'Dublin transfer' – i.e., a deportation back to Greece (AIDA 2020). However, given the disparity of conditions across MS and the notably poor conditions for both people seeking asylum and recognised refugees in Greece (RSA 2020) many people understandably try to move on to another MS to settle.

Both in EU case law as well as in everyday decision-making in migration administrations across Europe, fingerprints are regarded as an infallible proof of identity and truth. Many migrants I met in Greece had different imaginaries and heard rumours surrounding fingerprints. For example, H, despite registering for his asylum card, told me that giving his fingerprints was not enough to define his future plans, a comment which was echoed in other conversations during fieldwork. Instead, people I spoke with had inscribed their own meanings onto fingerprints, as a means of accessing temporary safety from police harassment or detention, refusing to relinquish freedom over future movement in spite of biometric controls. My conversation with H speaks to the core puzzle of this article, which seeks to deconstruct the socio-technical imaginary

of omnipotent biometric migration controls. Here I ask, how do migrants' alternative imaginaries come to animate and inform practices of contestation and subversion in the context of a highly disputed European biometric border and asylum regime?

In this paper, I present empirical research to explore one way in which migrants in Athens negotiate Eurodac; where alternative imaginaries informed ideas of 'big' and 'small' fingerprints, shaping interactions with the asylum service as well as secondary movement. I use an Autonomy of Migration (AoM) framework to theorise borders as places of ongoing conflict, of subjectivity and of transformation, that are constantly re-negotiated, and contingent upon the moves of all actors involved (Bojadžijev and Karakayalı 2010; Mezzadra 2004). To better study the subjective dimension of AoM theories, I introduce the work of Castoriadis' social imaginaries, wherein imaginaries allow for an ordering of society through inscribing meaning onto societal values and structure (1994, 330). Here, I frame migrants' alternative imaginaries as an example of the radical imagination (Castoriadis 1994), a new creative force that animates self-inscribed meanings and rules. Through exploring how migrants' knowledge and alternative imaginaries inform practices of contestation, I draw attention to an aspect of AoM that has yet to be explored in detail, further elucidating the subjective dimension of migration. This builds upon previous empirical work carried out in Greece which shows the harsh reality of militarised and securitised technologically enhanced borders (Karyotis 2012; Karyotis and Skleparis 2013; Pallister-Wilkins 2015; Topak 2014),the existence of strong solidarity networks across the country (Rozakou 2016; Skleparis 2017), and the ways in which knowledge production shapes the asylum journey (Cabot 2014; Trimikliniotis et al 2015).

I begin by outlining my methodology, before moving on to introduce the theoretical framework for the paper. The third section frames Eurodac and Dublin III as a part of the dominant socio-technical imaginary which depicts biometrics as an infallible form of identification and truth, becoming an important source of tension fuelling migrants' alternative imaginaries. The fourth section draws on ethnographic accounts to explore the alternative imaginary of 'big/small' fingerprints. Finally, I argue that this is an example of the radical imagination and plays a crucial role in animating practices of subversion and contestation, challenging the dominance of biometrics as omnipotent migration controls.

Methodology

The findings presented here draw on ethnographic research carried out in Athens from October 2018 – May 2019 for the project DATAJUSTICE.[2] During this time, I volunteered with a self-organised community centre in

the city, which worked in solidarity with people on the move, offering practical support and information on the asylum system in Greece.

Working with this collective was important for addressing the extractive elements and power dynamics of conducting research on migration as a white, EU citizen, though of course this can never be fully negated. As well, the friendships and trust this work gave way to was crucial when listening to people's experiences of the European asylum system. The exploration of people's experiences below does not aim to speak for anyone, as all people have their own voice, but instead hopes to emphasise the knowledge and strength implicit within migration, where there exists an ongoing refusal to submit to controls. As a female researcher, the issue of gender was of course something to be aware of, but through speaking with people via friends and solidarity networks, my role as researcher was clear from the outset.

The data included below come largely from 14 in depth interviews with people at various stages of the asylum process in Greece. Twelve of these interviews were with men and two with women, who were all young adults (below the age of 40). The majority of migrant participants were from either Syria or Afghanistan, though I also spoke with people from Kurdistan, Iraq, Iran, and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). I have included these details as they shed light on the demographic and nature of the information I include in the following pages, and though I endeavoured to include a variety of voices, it is important to recognise the dynamics of the data presented below as being skewed towards the experiences of single young men which may have impacted on the results. Alongside interviews, I have included details from participant and ethnographic observations, which were used as a technique to capture conversations as they happened in the field. These field work reports meant I was able to capture insights into people's outlook on dominant themes without the need of a more formal interview setting, which was not always possible or desirable (Fontanari 2018, 13). I have also included contextual information and insights from interviews with civil society actors and immigration administration workers, the total number of interviews conducted was 32.

Interviews were carried out with regard for confidentiality, and I have adopted pseudonyms to ensure the anonymity of participants. Where needed, I used a translator to carry out interviews – here I was assisted by members of the collective who often acted as interpreters and were adept to be sensitive, confidential and trustworthy. Interviews were transcribed Verbatim and thematically analysed.

Autonomy of Migration and Social Imaginaries

The increasing datafication of borders has become a much-researched area in recent years as the advent of border technologies has become far reaching

(Broeders 2011; Schuster 2011b; Sontowski 2018; see also the contributions to this special issue, in particular Bellanova and Glouftsios 2020; Leese 2020). Haggerty and Ericson (2000) have termed the advancement of border technologies as resulting in a Europe wide 'surveillant assemblage', whereby a person's data are abstracted from their physical self, separating them from landed territories and reassembling them into flows of information that make up 'data doubles' (Bigo 2014). Pötzsch (2015) speaks of the need to examine the day-to-day practices and negotiations surrounding the implementation of technology (p, 112).

I adopt an AoM approach to address the fissures and tensions within Eurodac and biometrically enhanced European borders. This dispels what Scheel has termed a 'control bias', which depicts migrants as 'passive targets' and borders as technical problems to be 'solved' (Scheel 2013a, 584). Scheel contends that a control biased approach inherently fails to recognise biometrics borders, and borderzones more generally, as 'contested sites of intensified political struggles over mobility' (see also Kuster and Tsianos 2016; Squire 2011). Likewise, Tsianos and Kuster 2016) note that if we focus on Eurodac only as part of the 'technological zone', we see it only within its most ideal, dystopian state (p.239), ignoring the uncertainties and inconsistencies within the system (see also Walters 2011). Just as placing emphasis on a functioning 'Fortress Europe' runs the risk of perpetuating the political imaginary of a fully secure border, we must be careful not to naturalise the image of an all-powerful biometric border (Kasparek 2016; Mezzadra 2011; Scheel 2018). That is not to say we should underestimate the power and violence inherent within biometric borders, where technologically enhanced borders are a powerful entity which entrench violent power imbalances between those who have freedom to move and those who do not. However, we must not inadvertently strengthen claims that biometrics are able to fulfil contentious political goals of complete control over mobility.

AoM offers an alternative to taking the technology itself as the starting point for analysis, instead interrogating borders through exploring ongoing struggles over mobility. There is a need to recognise what Mezzadra and Neilson (2013) term 'border as method', which sees the border as an 'epistemological viewpoint' (p.66) from which to critically analyse power relations that seek to further exclude migrants. This, they argue, leads to a focus on the subjective, relational and embodied elements of border regimes and the ways in which they are challenged (p.60). Importantly for this discussion, they stress how this allows for analysis of the way in which social worlds are made and unmade, the different forms of knowledge and subjectivities involved in these meaning-making practices and the 'border struggles' involved in this (Nyers 2015, 28; Mezzadra and Neilson 2013, 18; see also Casas-Cortes et al 2015; Kuster and Tsianos 2016; Mezzadra 2011; Scheel 2013b). Here, borders are recognised as

'a site of constant encounter, tension, conflict, and contestation due to the strength and wisdom of the movements of migration' (Hess 2017, 89).

I argue that it becomes possible to develop a deeper understanding of the autonomy within AoM theories through introducing the work of Castoriadis' social imaginaries. Castoriadis posits that social imaginaries give answers to basic questions of existence, order and meaning relating to both societies and individuals' existence, and accounts for coherence and unity within nations and societies (Castoriadis 1987, cf Kavoulakos 2006, 203). He argues there are 'primary' and 'second order' significations, the former which are created *ex nihilo*, out of nothing, and hold within them the core values or institutions of society, and the latter as resulting from and transforming primary significations. The radical imagination, which is also created ex nihilo, not in nihilo or cum nihilo[3] (Castoriadis 1994, 321, 333), marks instances of self-creation, which remain 'creations under constraint', both shaped by the society in which they exist and a desire to break continuity with this society. Castoriadis distinguishes here between 'heteronomous societies' and 'autonomous societies' (1983, 314–316), where heteronomous societies must be sustained and reproduced across generations and onto newcomers to maintain political and social structures and institutions (Klooger 2009, 7). The 'ontological opening' of autonomy resists these structures through self-creation to inform 'one's own laws' (Castoriadis 1983, 310).

Here, Castoriadis' theories serve as a useful tool when trying to understand how practices of contestation within and across borders come to exist through self-legislation. Within this, autonomy is presented as instances of self-creation, spurred on through the radical imagination, shaping moments of uncontrollability where the subjective dimension of migration informs both meanings of autonomy and alternative imaginaries. Important to note is that these acts of self-legislation encounter continued attempts to maintain the established social order that upholds restrictive border regimes, thus perpetuating the border as a site of intense conflict. Through an in-depth discussion of the radical imagination, I explore how migrants' alternative imaginaries, which in turn inform subversive practices, further illuminate the subjective and autonomous nature of migration. This allows for a deeper understanding of the knowledge that animates struggles within migration, exploring the forces and desires that animate migrants' subversive acts across borders, and works to address prevailing gaps in existing AoM literature.

It is imperative to refer to the meaning of autonomy within AoM, where it is the autonomy of *migration* itself. Autonomy is not the power of complete self-determination or freedom from control but rather represents the inherent uncontrollability of individuals within borders as a result of conflict within oppressive migration controls. Thus, autonomy represents a relational concept between efforts to control and efforts (successful or not) to contest and subvert this control (Scheel 2019). Without these

attempts to challenge power within (biometric) border regimes there would be no autonomy within migration, but only effective migration controls. For Castoriadis too, autonomy is relational and offers an 'ontological opening', moving beyond existing organisational systems and allowing individuals to constitute one's own world and laws, represented through self-legislation and self-creation (Castoriadis 1983, 310). This is not to say that it is possible to fully self-legislate, but rather that this self-creation is a reactive and relational force occurring at points of frictions and attempting to undermine established social orders – in this case, the exclusion and oppression of migrants. This signals a link with AoM theories of ongoing struggles, tension, resistance and reconfiguration of borders and migration (Nyers 2015, 28), informing the creation of knowledge and meaning driving these struggles.

Important for this discussion is the 'moment of discontinuity', the break away from core significations due to exclusion and otherness, where radical imagination shapes transformation within societies, and where individuals have the ability for self-creation and self-transformation within their own social worlds (Klooger 2009, 34). It is here that I put forward migrants' alternative imaginaries as a form of radical imagination, as practices of self-legislation that challenge the dominant socio-technical imaginary of the datafied biometric border as omnipotent. I argue that this discontinuity occurs because of exclusionary elements within a socio-technical biometric border that seeks to implement harsh and restrictive border policies through identification and tracking of people on the move.

Biometrics as Truth and Identity

To explore alternative imaginaries, we must investigate different understandings of what a fingerprint means. As the radical imagination occurs at points of friction, within the constraints of, and alongside, a dominant imaginary, it is important to analyse both the dominant social imaginary at play here as well migrants' alternative imaginaries. As such, I frame the biometric border enacted through Eurodac and Dublin III as a powerful socio-technical imaginary which gives meaning to biometrics as an irrefutable means of identification within the European asylum regime.

Within the socio-technical imaginary that sees the proliferation of a biometric border, biometrics actively shape subjectivities and the very lives they aim to identify (Pötzsch 2015; Amoore 2006; Ajana 2015; Allen and Volmer 2019; Bigo 2014;), containing powerful performative features that shape both agency and opportunities (Deluze 1992; Kuster and Tsianos 2016). As such, fingerprints within Eurodac become a second-order signifier of control within a world where technology, borders and nation states hold power as core, institutional signifiers.

Some notable points come to light when considering biometrics as a form of governance in regard to the importance of meaning-making within a socio-technical imaginary. Namely, the belief that biometrics are able to create an indisputable identity, linked to a physical self (Aas 2011; Ajana 2013; Broeders 2011; Dijstelbloem and Broeders 2015; Muller 2010; Van Der Ploeg 2005), creating a means of both accusing and condemning people if they dispute what their biometric data state. Through checking if a person has multiple 'hits', Eurodac is able to reconstruct a timeline of movement across Europe and thus MS are able to track movement (Bonditti 2004; Tazzioli 2019a) which can then be used to verify a person's story in their substantive interview. The infallibility of biometrics as juridical evidence for a person's true identity is enshrined in case law, where fingerprint matches are used to establish not only identity but also credibility. This is evident in, for example, the case of RZ(United Kingdom: Asylum and Immigration Tribunal 2008)) where a Eurodac match was used to disprove the appellant's story and refuse them protection.

This approach was echoed in an interview with an asylum caseworker in Greece, who, when telling me about credibility findings in substantive asylum interviews, stated that 'fingerprints don't lie . . . you know that this applicant is lying to you, you know that for a fact'.[4] Here, fingerprints work to sustain European border and asylum regimes through animating and guiding the practices and decisions of border workers. Furthermore, fingerprints hold a permanent and important meaning for control as was made clear by Th, a Greek lawyer:

> Th: From the moment you have given fingerprints then you enter to a different space . . .
> a small black box, and everything, all the ideology and technology of control is inside this
> box. Because, from the moment you put your fingers, then you belong to another zone –
> it's a grey zone of course . . . You can be monitored, and from this moment you are
> registered in another system. A system of control.[5]

However, this socio-technical imaginary is limited, and never achieves ultimate control over mobility. For example, a Eurodac hit is not always the cause of deportation, neither does it always result in deportation. Due to domestic political structures in MS or specific circumstances of an asylum case (vulnerabilities, family connections, trafficking or torture etc), it will not be the only deciding factor in controlling movement, highlighting cracks in Dublin III. Indeed in 2018, 37% (202 806) of asylum applications across Europe were cases where the applicant had applied in more than one country (eu-Lisa 2019), whilst, for example, there were only 33 deportations to Greece under Dublin in 2019 despite 12 718 return requests being sent to Greece (AIDA 2020). This is likely because Greece often refuses to accept return requests from other MS, citing the inability of the state to give suitable support for anyone returned under the Reception Directive (Alper 2019). Between 2011 and 2017 returns to Greece were suspended following the case of M.S.

S. v. Belgium and Greece, when the European Court of Human Rights found the conditions in Greece to be in breach of Article 3 of the European Convention of Human Rights due to conditions of detention (Council of Europe: European Court of Human Rights 2011). Despite this, biometrics remain a key tool for identifying, tracking, assessing and controlling migrants in Europe, and are capable of condemning an individual as not credible, or earmarking them for deportation.

Furthermore, a fingerprint forms a one-dimensional portrayal of a person based on simple extraction of biometric data. Thus, it does not, and cannot, include details on a person's story, history, experience, etc. (Scheel 2013b). This disassociation between the fingerprint given and the complexity of a person's self-identity, coupled with the inconsistent enforcement of Dublin deportations leaves spaces of contestation and allows for self-inscribed meanings. It therefore becomes important to examine what the reality of being fingerprinted means, deconstructing the epistemological belief in the sanctity of a fingerprint to identify and control. If we do so, it is possible to see how points of friction and fissures result in a moment of discontinuity and offer an ontological opening for alternative imaginaries to form.

Alternative Imaginaries in Greece

During fieldwork, I met people who purposefully avoided their substantive asylum interview (their 'big' interview), or people who kept their file 'small' as it were. I also came across the notion of the ink fingerprints seeming less permanent, or 'weaker' than laser fingerprints, something evident in both alternative and mainstream narratives. These meanings highlight alternative imaginaries of fingerprints, where there seemed to be four distinctions made by migrants I met in Athens, shown from 'strong/big' to 'weak/small', respectively: resident ID gained after receiving refugee status; a negative asylum decision; only an asylum card; no asylum card but police or ink fingerprints. Here it is worth noting that being fingerprinted at the Greek border does not necessarily equate to an asylum claim. If individuals crossing the border in Northern Greece were not taken to the Fylakio registration centre, they had to apply for asylum via Skype – seemingly presenting migrants with a choice of getting properly registered in Greece (analysed by Aradau 2020 in this special issue).

To introduce these alternative imaginaries, I reflect on a conversation with a man at the gates of a camp on the outskirts of Athens where we were chatting with a few people at the end of the day. He told me he had previously lived in Holland, 'I just want to go back there',[6] he said. He was asking for information on how to prove the time he had spent there, where his asylum was eventually rejected and where he was forced to leave. The only proof he had were copies of old photos on his phone; the fingerprints he had given there had since

expired, as Eurodac holds fingerprints for a maximum of 10 years. He showed me his Greek asylum card, which had an interview date over a year in the future despite being registered in Greece for many months already. Sadly, there seemed to be no legal route for him. He did not have family he could reunite with through Dublin, and besides, the time window for that had passed. He could not prove he had previously been in Holland, and even if he could, his claim there had been rejected. We talked about the consequence of giving his fingerprint in Greece, and how, legally, he should now stay here for the rest of his asylum claim. His answer was defiant, 'no, the fingerprints I gave here are only temporary, I still have to go back later to give permanent ones. They did not take my whole hand, just the tips of the finger, this means it is temporary', he described, 'in Holland they took the whole handprint'.[7]

This view offered hope when subjected to a biometric border that denied him his wish to return to Holland and demonstrates one way in which an alternative imaginary emerged. A few days later, I met another person who had their own imaginary of what giving their fingerprint meant. We were back at the gates of the camp and one man who we had spoken with a few times before came over to talk about the date of his interview. He said he planned to leave Greece before this date, that if he stayed and went to the interview then, 'they [Germany] will know I've been in Greece'.[8] I asked him what he meant, as he had already been registered and fingerprinted in Greece. He explained his belief that the initial fingerprints he gave were 'weaker', that they would not be present across Europe and so decrease the chance of deportation back to Greece. But if he was to engage further, for example during his substantive interview, they would become 'stronger' and more powerful. This highlights that though a person may have no choice over initial police fingerprints, they retain the power to refuse full registration and thus exist spaces of uncontroll-ability. This is something that spoke to other conversations I had during fieldwork where practices of gaining a card but missing the substantive interview were highlighted in relation to keeping fingerprints 'weak' and acted as a safety precaution against detention. This demonstrates one way in which the alternative imaginary of fingerprints gave rise to practices and plans of sub-version, appropriation or escape, giving hope to both immediate safety and future plans of leaving Greece. This was brought up in an interview with a Kurdish man, Rs, who discussed attending the substantive interview:

> Rs: Yes, 100% . . . the more information you give, the more problem you will have . . . [My friend] went and took his white card but he didn't go to his big interview because he was afraid they would check it in another country and send him back. If he went to the interview his problem would become much bigger . . . The less is better.[9]

Another method to keep one's fingerprint 'weak' was to intentionally try to gain a negative decision, the idea being to avoid gaining residency, the 'strongest' fingerprint. Here, H outlined to me that negative decisions were

seen as a contributing factor to strengthening an individuals' case in another EU country, the argument being that Greece can never be a safe place as they will not offer protection. Again, the alternative imaginary of 'strong' fingerprints animated practices of subversion through intentionally avoiding Greek residency. Another interviewee, O, a young man from Afghanistan, explained to me how these practices would play out differently according to the future destination. For example, he explained, it was sometimes believed that it would be easier to claim asylum in Belgium despite having an asylum card in Greece, whereas in Sweden, it would prove much more difficult. O, who has previously lived as an asylum seeker in Sweden for some years as a child, told me that when he had been fingerprinted at the asylum office in Athens his fingerprints from Sweden had shown up. They had asked him if he wished to return to Sweden. He declined. It was an offer that would have meant separation from his wife and child. So, he said, if they can ignore Eurodac once, they can do it again. He told me there were other things that counted, it was not only fingerprints, though he believed this would be different if he received refugee status in Greece, or different again if he had a negative decision. O emphasised that the length of stay was also meaningful alongside the negative decision, 'because why you stay all that time in Greece if it is not good for you and you can't live there?'.[10]

O's view highlights the importance of the political decisions made by each EU country regarding their implementation of strict adherence to Dublin III. This is clearly apparent in the UK's decision not to send anybody back to Greece through Dublin due to poor conditions and lack of support available (Alper 2019). This also demonstrates an important element of the alternative imaginary of 'strong/weak' fingerprints. It is not necessarily a belief that fingerprints will not show up in another country, but rather they will not be effective in facilitating deportation to Greece, highlighting how these practices of appropriation and subversion inform plans of escape and of avoiding future deportations. This speaks to an important point of friction, where Eurodac is unable to accomplish what it is meant to achieve.

Importantly, as with H's account at the beginning of the paper, this alternative imaginary showed that a fingerprint alone was not enough to change a person's plan if they wanted to leave. As A, who was fingerprinted by police and yet chose not to register for asylum, explained to me:

> A: No, I would not say it's the reason people stay in Greece. I tried to leave the country a couple of times, but I failed. But this is not because I gave my fingerprints, and this is not because I changed my mind to stay here. No, this is because I couldn't fly. So, the other option is to stay and follow the fingerprint [asylum] process. So, it's not a reason why people stay, but it's the reason most probably that they couldn't leave.[11]

Thus, a fingerprint, for many reasons, is not seen as a strong enough reason to stay in Greece. Throughout my fieldwork, when speaking with people on the

move about how they understood fingerprints and how it affected their move-ments, these types of distinctions repeatedly cropped up, shedding light on resulting practices of subversion described above.

Alongside this, an interesting example of the multiplicity of meanings came to light. Numerous migrants spoken with during fieldwork also proclaimed there to be a difference between being fingerprinted by the police, in ink, and being fingerprinted for asylum, with laser – a claim denied by police and asylum case workers interviewed. This could stem from ideas over both accuracy and ability to quickly share the biometric data with other MS. However, the claim that ink fingerprints are less likely to show up finds strength in previous empirical work in Greece. Tsianos and Kuster (2016, 56) show how fingerprint data in 2013 faced a delay peaking at 148.97 days before being uploaded into Eurodac due to a lack of laser fingerprint scanners, meaning ink fingerprints had to be manually uploaded into the database. This meant a person may make it to another MS and apply for asylum before being registered in Greece, and thus could not become the responsibility of periph-eral states who have the largest number of people passing through their borders. The EC has also noted that inked fingerprints could sometimes miss parts of the print due to the amount of ink or pressure applied (European Commission 2015, 82).

Important to note here is that the Greek Asylum Service (GAS) was only created in 2013, with the first fingerprints taken with laser in June 2013.[12] Moreover, it was only in 2015, due to political and financial pressure that the number of people fingerprinted shot up from 8% in September 2015 to 78% in January 2016 (Library of Congress 2016). This historical slowness and incon-sistency in registering fingerprints into Eurodac could be read as a deliberate instrumentalisation of fingerprints, where Greece allowed migrants to leave in response to high numbers of asylum applications due to Dublin, although of course this is difficult to substantiate. Alternatively, this could be read as a shortcoming of the securitised logics behind biometric and militarised border controls, which often imposes unfeasible expectations onto states in regard to controlling mobility, undermining legitimacy and creating friction (Karyotis 2012, 403). Either way, this example of the slowness or inaccuracy of ink fingerprints demonstrates that the 'weaker' nature of ink fingerprints finds strength in both dominant *and* alternative imaginaries, showing it is possible for an idea to belong to both simultaneously. It also shows another possible example of contestation within a biometric border regime, this time by officials working in immigration administration. The focus of this article is just one example amongst many which demonstrates the ongoing struggles over move-ment that happen alongside and against each other.

The alternative imaginary of 'big/small', 'strong/weak' fingerprints demon-strates that there is a lack of clear official information given about what a fingerprint means or what is done with the biometric data. This lack of

information creates a disparity between a person's view of themselves and the legally defined identity which shapes interactions with, and outcomes of, European borders, giving rise to rumours and ultimately shaping the alternative imaginaries this article focuses on. As other authors have noted, rumours play a large part in the creation of knowledge and consequently come to inform meanings and practices (Moulin 2010; see also Borelli 2018). This speaks to the imaginary of 'big/small' fingerprints, where rumours exist over how someone managed to successfully travel out of Greece and claim asylum in another MS, with information becoming obfuscated as it is passed from one person to another. Sitting at the core of, and animating, these rumours are the practices informed by the alternative imaginary described here, such as gaining a negative decision before leaving or withholding as much information as possible through avoiding full registration or the 'big' interview. It thus demonstrates the creative power of migrants' actions, shaping systems of knowledge, informing practices of subversion and animating the autonomy of migration.

The Radical Imagination

The alternative imaginary explored above animates various tactics of escape and subversion within and against Europe's biometric border regime alongside, for example, mutilating fingerprints, as well as highlighting important sources of information and knowledge. As with other forms of resistance noted by Hess (2017, 88–89), although practices are done on an individual level, they become 'embedded in the social networks ... and draw on the wisdom and collective knowledge' of migrant populations and communities, leading to their own codes, symbols, practices and logics which remain almost indiscernible (Papadopoulos and Tsianos 2013, 188, cf Nyers 2015, 29). This emphasises the role of migrants' social networks as both a source of information, and the creation of alternative ontologies surrounding migration, informing what Papadopoulos and Tsianos (2013) term the 'mobile commons of migration' (see also Trimikliniotis et al 2015). This, the authors argue, sees the multiplicity of lives and ordinary movements of migrants as informing a 'world of knowledge' (p.190), becoming key to organisational practices that move within and around border policies and practices (p.179).

The subversion tactics presented above shape the social worlds of young male migrants I spoke with in Athens, where people made decisions informed by an alternative imaginary of 'big/small' fingerprints. This, in turn, creates new forms of meaning-making that I argue constitute a radical imagination and a break away from the dominant view of biometrics as a signifier of control. Importantly, it highlights key points of discontinuity that Castoriadis noted as pivotal in breaking away from core significations and shaping future transformations of society. As such, we see that autonomy as

self-creation becomes a key tool for analysing the autonomy of migration, where migrants' alternative imaginaries of 'big/small' fingerprints form worlds of knowledge, shape rumours and future movement, and stem from efforts to evade biometric controls and Dublin deportations that occur within complex (biometric) border struggles.

The radical imagination, Castoriadis proposes, offers an alternative to the 'secondary imagination', and seeks to form a moment of discontinuity, opposed to reproducing the overarching 'primary imagination' of heteronomous societies (1994, 320–321). It is this transformative meaning-making that becomes the driving force of social change (Klooger 2009, 316). For this discussion, the idea of 'otherness' that is present in Castoriadis' work is also important to this ontological opening. Castoriadis notes that imaginaries and meanings remain 'radically contingent for anyone who stands on the outside' (1983, 315). Thus, for individuals excluded or only partially included within a society, their understanding of another society's core signifiers becomes contingent upon their interaction with the dominant imaginary, the heteronomous force within society. In short, the more someone is excluded from the society they are in, the more they are likely to create their own meanings, spurring on the radical imagination. Within the exclusionary border and migration politics of Europe (Squire 2011), specifically within a biometric border which exists to deny freedom of movement and enforce Dublin deportations, we see an opening for the radical imagination to animate practices of resistance, where migrants' practices of self-legislation challenge the dominant socio-technical imaginary that values biometrics as powerful techniques of control. These acts, in a similar way to practices of appropriation Scheel (2019) witnessed in relation to VIS, do not aim to disrupt or openly challenge border regimes, but rather carve out spaces from within. Here, it is the ability to appear to be complying with the rules that becomes a key factor in successful practices of subversion.

Though the alternative imaginary of 'big/small' fingerprints may not create a reality separate from the European biometric border, it becomes an example of the radical imagination; a moment of self-legislation that manages to find space within the cracks of the system, successfully contesting the idea of the fingerprint as a concrete marker of definite control and shaping future transformations of the Dublin system. The social worlds explored here are shaped through these practices of meaning-making in as much as interactions with the Greek state are governed by a choice to maintain control over the 'size' of fingerprint. This, in turn, speaks to, and takes advantage of, fissures in the Dublin system. For example, the ability of one state to return to another MS relies on individual assurances that the returnee will be suitably cared for (European Council for Human Rights 2016). However, legally, in line with the Reception Directive (Council Directive 2013), there is no requirement for a MS to provide assistance to recognised refugees, only to asylum seekers,[13]

therefore returns become easier and the idea of a 'strong' fingerprint of a recognised refugee finds strength. The imaginary of 'weak' fingerprints also relates to returns to Greece based on a Eurodac hit, where, as shown above, returns of asylum seekers to Greece remain low.

Though this competing imaginary may exploit cracks within Dublin III and Eurodac, it also remains ambivalent; simultaneously furthering exclusionary elements of borders, where precarity occurs as a result of keeping one's fingerprints 'small'. If a person chooses to keep their fingerprint 'small' by not registering for asylum, it encompasses an inability to access healthcare or education, and places someone at risk of being detained. That a person may purposefully seek a negative asylum decision as an act of subversion could in reality lead to deportation out of Europe, as opposed to allowing for asylum in another EU country. This ambivalence of migrants' practices of appropriation and subversion has already been noted by Scheel (2019) and McNevin (2013). Consequently, we see a 'disenfranchisement' of migrants (Kasparek 2016, 68), wherein social exclusion, 'illegality' and border politics are furthered, becoming internalised and embodied practices affecting lived experience (Picozza 2017a, 237). The ambivalent aspects of keeping fingerprints 'weak' become justified through the belief that the long-term outcome would be beneficial, in that it would enable a successful asylum application in another MS. Though a 'small' fingerprint may mean precarity, it enables agency that the biometric border aims to restrict, the freedom to make self-determined future plans, and a refusal to submit to the Dublin System. Here we see that advocating autonomy is not the belief that one can be free from all controls, but rather that 'one would prefer it if these limitations were self-imposed' Klooger (2012, 86), i.e., through your own set of values and meanings opposed to the dominant rules of society.

As efforts grow in Athens to crack down on unregistered migrants through raids and evictions of squats (Speed 2019),[14] we see the recognition and response of the state to the fact that people are purposefully avoiding interactions with the asylum system. Consequently, whilst the example of an imaginary and responding social world explored in this article carve out moments for self-determination, they also become a constituent force in the formation of further control. Here we see that due to the 'parasitic apparatus of capture' (Scheel 2019) inherent within border controls, policy responds to incorporate practices of subversion. Indeed, as many AoM scholars note, state tactics for bordering and mobility control are 'responding always to the primacy of the sheer autonomy of migration' (De Genova 2017, 11), where change is a result of the 'refusal of people to live as the system of power requires them to' (Sharma 2009, 470, see also Bojadžijev and Karakayalı 2010; Mezzadra 2011; Papadopoulos et al 2008; Stierl 2017). This fits with Castoriadis (1987) view wherein individuals can simultaneously embody, perpetuate and transform society, as society comes to inform and shape the manifestations of the radical

imagination. Importantly, these practices become transformative in terms of border policy. Indeed, Kasparek (2016) believes that everyday forms of resistance to migration controls in Europe are in part responsible for shaking the foundations of the Dublin System (p.60) – evident now in the drastic reforms of the Dublin System in the proposed European 'New Pact on Migration and Asylum' (European Commission 2020).

As with the 'Dubliners' in Picozza's (2017a) research, who gain some agency over their movement yet pay the price of continued precarity, the imaginary presented here simultaneously includes moments of creativity, freedom and further control. Consequently, this leads to a further internalisation of the border, and an intensification of the 'Border Spectacle' whereby borders take centre stage in EU policy and the 'illegality' of migrants becomes 'spectacularly visible' which in turn spurs on an ever-expanding response to, and investment in, migration and borders (De Genova 2013, 1181). Also, as with 'Dubliners', individuals who live by the imaginary of 'big/small' fingerprints face the risk of becoming 'stuck in transit' or 'caught in mobility' (Picozza 2017b, 71–72, see also, 2017a; Kasparek 2016; Tazzioli 2019b; Schuster 2011b), continuously moving, being deported, and moving again. This is what Kasparek (2016) terms a refusal of migrants to 'submit to Dublin' (p.68). Arguably, it is the disparity of reception conditions, the different recognition rates, the varying length of time an asylum application takes, and the inconsistency of returns that gives cause and hope to 'Dubliners'.

The ambivalent nature of these practices is offset by drawing on the strong solidarity networks of migrant communities and those who stand in solidarity with them. For example, Skleparis (2017), in reference to a 300 strong hunger strike organised by migrants as a form of resistance, talks of the 'tricks for survival, mutual care . . . solidarity, and sociability' which come to inform an 'alternative way of life' as well as offering support through pre-existing relationships and networks (p.126; see Rozakou 2016 on the socialities of solidarity networks in Greece). For those who kept their fingerprints 'small' and thus were unable to access vital services, these 'tricks for survival' became key. Here, it is significant to note that the majority of voices included in this example come from young men, who may be more easily able to survive through informal support networks inherent in keeping one's fingerprint 'small'. Accordingly, the imaginary presented in this article is not dogmatic of all migrants' views, but rather shows one of many experiences and imaginaries that come to shape and be shaped by a complex and ever-changing 'borderscape' (Brambilla 2015). The key point being that there are multiple and co-existing imaginaries on what a (biometric) border means for control and mobility. I suggest that this example of the radical imagination gives an ontological opening for instigating social change from below, as it inspires and drives new actions that navigate and contest dominant socio-technical structures and imaginaries that seek to maintain dominance over mobility.

Whether or not these efforts to reclaim freedom over movement are successful is not the focus here, but rather it shows that fingerprints alone will not be permitted by migrants to shape their future movements or confine them within countries which they feel are unsafe. Moreover, it is the continued attempt be free of control within the European biometric border regime that perpetuates (biometric) borders as spaces of ongoing struggle over mobility, rights and futures.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have explored migrants' alternative imaginaries of 'big/small', 'strong/weak' fingerprints that I encountered when working with, and speaking to, people on the move in Athens. I have built upon AoM theories to offer ways of better illuminating the subjectivity that is central to AoM research. Through analysing practices of meaning-making, of self-creation and self-legislation within an oppressive biometric asylum and border regime, it becomes possible to see how practices of subversion and contestation are born, for example gaining an asylum card but missing the substantive interview to keep one's fingerprint 'small' and avoid deportation back to Greece. The framework of social imaginaries deconstructs systems of knowledge created within, shaping, and shaped by, the 'mobile commons' (Papadopoulos and Tsianos 2013; Trimikliniotis et al 2015), allowing for a deeper understanding of the autonomy within AoM research.

At the heart of these practices of meaning-making is the refusal of people on the move to submit to border controls such as the Dublin system and Eurodac. Ultimately, these practices seek to disrupt and challenge the dominance of biometrics as a signifier of control, identity and truth. The imaginary of 'big/small' fingerprints demonstrates that agency must be reclaimed in order to avoid becoming trapped in Greece, which sees migrants forced into precarious, degrading and often hopeless living situations in camps or on the street, often without jobs or access to fundamental rights. That the level of exclusion in EU asylum and border policy is high enough to constitute breaking free from dominant systems of knowledge and meaning making is telling of the reality of EU attitudes towards migrants.

The New Pact on Migration and Asylum will see huge changes, with people held at borderzones whilst their asylum claims are rushed through; the expansion of Eurodac to include more detailed demographic data; the lowering of the age fingerprints are taken; and the storing of fingerprints for longer amounts of time. Though the word 'burden' seems to have been replaced with a 'solidarity mechanism' between states, the ideology remains the same; to reduce the number of asylum claims in any one state (European Commission 2020). This notion of solidarity is far removed from that which Rozakou (2016) writes of. We must recognise

these proposed changes will further entrench violent practices and ideologies, resulting in greater precarity, in real and sustained harm to people on the move in Europe. The Dublin system is not broken only because people refuse to succumb to the limits on freedom of movement, or because MS do not implement it uniformly, but because it problematises something for a political goal that is not a realistic possibility. It is not possible to gain complete control over movement, no matter the technology adopted, the number of border guards enlisted, the number of drones used, or walls built. There exists, and will always exist, an autonomy of migration. As explored in this paper, when excluded and denied choice by border and asylum policy, people find ways to create their own futures, to exploit failures of states, and to reclaim the power to choose their next move.

Notes

1. Quote taken from interview with H, a male Syrian asylum seeker, on 19th April 2019, interview carried out in English
2. DATAJUSTICE is a large 5-year project funded by a Starting Grant from the European Research Council entitled 'Data Justice: Understanding datafication in relation to social justice' ERC Starting Grant no. 759,903
3. This distinction between ex nihilo, rather than in nihilo (in nothing) and cum nihilo (with nothing) is important. Criticisms of Castoriadis' have argued that he ignores the complex contextual aspects of creativity, that it is not possible to invent something fundamentally out of nothing or nowhere at all (Klooger 2011). And so, for new creations to be ex nihilo, new creations remain under external (physical or environmental), internal (socialisation, actions, values, roles), historical (traditions, influence), and intrinsic constraints (a level of coherence with societies and roles and institutions etc) (Castoriadis 1994, 333– 336).
4. Quote taken from an interview with a Greek asylum caseworker carried out in Athens via Skype on 16th March 2019
5. Quote taken from an interview with a Greek immigration lawyer carried out in Athens on 22nd February 2019
6. Quote taken from ethnographic field notes outside a camp in North Attika, 20th March 2019, translator used.
7. Quote taken from ethnographic field notes outside a camp in North Attika, 20th March 2019, translator used.
8. Quote taken from ethnographic field notes outside a camp in North Attika, 27th March 2019, translator used.
9. Quote taken from an interview with a Kurdish illegalised migrant at a camp in South Attika, 10th April 2019, translator used.
10. Quote taken from an interview with a young Afghani asylum seeker carried out in Athens on 15th March 2019, interview conducted in English.
11. Quote taken from an interview with a Syrian illegalised migrant carried out in Athens on 23rd April 2019, interview conducted in English.
12. Information taken from interview with INGO worker who was seconded to GAS for the set-up of the asylum service, carried out in Athens 29th January 2019

13. a requirement reflected in the changes implemented by the Ministry of Migration in Greece to restrict aid under the UNHCR ESTIA programme to asylum seekers and recently recognised refugees, with a time limit of 6 months after recognition as of 31st March 2019 (RSA 2019)
14. Since the election of the right-wing New Democracy party in Greece in July 2019, promises to crack down on migrants, especially those living in squats surround the Exarcheia neighbourhood inn Athens, have resulted in evictions of over 5 squats and increased police checks for asylum cards across the city.

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