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Papel, cartões com chip, varreduras da íris: tecnologias de mídia e o regime de asilo[1]

Paper, chipcards, iris scans: media technologies and the asylum regime

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Keywords: forced migration; media history; infrastructures.

This paper provides a historical and genealogical perspective on media technologies in refugee administration, and the mediation of the asylum regime. Modern global refugee governance heavily relies on media technologies in order to facilitate modes of disciplining forced migrants in time and space. Refugee camps today run on Bitcoins, use iris scans for payment. Border control, asylum registration and decision making are highly digitized and often based on AI technologies (Leurs, 2020; Mácias, 2020). Yet, while digital technologies are sold to authorities as highly innovative and brand new, practices of media-based refugee governance have historical roots and trajectories. Tracing some of these roots in the context of German refugee governance after 1945 up until today, this paper argues for a historicizing perspective to critically

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understand the role of media technologies in building asylum regimes, foregrounding the experiences of individuals subjected to these technological infrastructures. Technologies, such as paper slips or card indexes in the 1940s and 1950s, or digital chip cards emerging in the 1990s are predecessors to digital refugee governance, laying the groundwork for practices of control, disciplining, ranking and rating, as continued today.

This paper thinks together and explores historical and contemporary incidents of media technologies imbued in the creation of refugee governance. Carving out various examples of how refugee administration and asylum regimes were and are built in and through media technologies and practices, the paper draws on an *infrastructuralist* (Peters, 2015; Parks & Starosielski, 2015) take on media technologies. Examples, such as paper-based registries, refugee passports, chip cards, or iris scans are the basis for a discussion of media technologies' "leverage" (Peters, 2015, p.18) as socio-material artifacts for subjugating and managing refugee individuals in time and space. Historically, this process finds expression in various media environments, leading into the present situation, which has been described as "deep mediatization" (Couldry & Hepp, 2017), also of refugee governance. So, exploring historical trajectories of media technologies and their entanglement with migration and asylum regimes opens up a discussion of how media are, and have always been, made part of political projects of administrating the "Other" as an outcast of the nation-state-based systems – and, vice versa, if and how technologies mediatize and affect these processes.

Today, ever more elaborate, violent border infrastructures are erected to suppress irregular migration, e.g. at Europe's lethal borders in the Mediterranean. While we can here observe an infrastructural build-up, for forced migrants this instead results in an experienced infrastructural tear-down, of lacking rescue operations and safe ways of travel, while being more and more surveilled. Yet, historically, probably the

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technological and financial opportunities for refugee support have never been more, and refugee numbers have been much higher in the past. Instead, political will to provide relief and safe alternatives seems to be reaching a low point. Ultimately, evaluating different historical contexts and moments of mediatization in refugee governance helps to critically understand and nuance the role of media in building such asylum regimes.

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