

# MATERIAL ON IMMIGRATION POLICIES & ONLINE INITIATIVES RELATED TO THEM

TRAVELOGUE



## IS THIS THE WAY TO GO? HANDLING IMMIGRATION IN A GLOBAL ERA

Saskia Sassen

Over the last decade it is estimated that more than 2,500 would-be immigrants died trying to get into Europe. That is many dead, but not many immigrants for a continent of over 350 million people. Whom is it we are determined to keep out to the point that they risk their lives to get in? An equally determined but tiny minority of men, women and children from mostly poor countries who will come no matter what in search of work or refuge. They are not criminals. Yet the result of our determination is that we are feeding a criminal trade. There has been a sharp growth in illegal trafficking of people as receiving countries have clamped down on entries and semi-militarized more and more borders.

These developments raise two issues. One concerns the old trade-off between policies that criminalize what may not intrinsically be a criminal act in the name of controlling a somewhat untenable situation; this in turn raises the incentives for genuinely criminal actors to promote the forbidden activity. A familiar instance of this trade-off concerns marijuana control policy. Does the criminalizing of marijuana in the US — and the UK — really work better as a policy to control its use than the controlled legality of marijuana in the Netherlands which leaves very little room for profit making by drug dealers and hence no incentive aggressively to promote expanded use.

The second policy issue raised by these developments is that the deaths of these hundreds of people attempting to enter Europe affect us all, not only those directly concerned. The fact that these people lack the proper documents for entry is easily represented in policy and media circles as exempting us — as societies — from any responsibility for these deaths. The lack of proper documents somehow seems to make these deaths less human and reduce whatever might be our responsibility contributing to these deaths.

I want to argue that the direction we are taking in our immigration policies towards greater police and military control and growing disregard for international human rights codes as well as our own civil liberties laws is promoting illegal trafficking and weakening our rule of law and thereby our democracies. These policies are adding to an already growing mix of what I would describe as negative incentives, or incentives with negative outcomes for significant sectors of our societies. Illegal trafficking and the deaths of men, women and children who are not criminals, and who die on our 'soil' eventually touches the fabric of our societies and distorts or weakens the rule of law. In the long run it will affect us all. Yes, the central victims are the men and women who are trafficked and especially those who die. But we would be foolish to think that we can allow these abuses and deaths to happen in the name of maintaining control, and remain untouched by the growing police powers and policing options of our governments. The growth in illegal trafficking and the sharpening of extreme anti-immigrant politics willing to sacrifice some civil liberties in the name of control are indications of this broader negative effect.

### INTERCONNECTED FORMS OF VIOLENCE

Part of the challenge is to recognize the interconnectedness of forms of violence that we do not always recognize as being connected or for that matter, as being forms of violence. The sharp growth of government debt, poverty, unemployment, closing of traditional economic sectors in the global south, partly due to neoliberal economic globalization has created whole new migrations as well as fed an exploding illegal trade in people. We now have growing evidence that IMF policy has sharpened these conditions even as it has brought great prosperity to about 20% of residents in many countries in the global south.

By supporting IMF policies, our governments are partly contributing to those conditions that are going to stimulate emigration and illegal trafficking in people. Further, as the rich economies become richer partly because of these same IMF policies, they also become more desirable destinations. Emigrants remittances are becoming a major source of hard currency for the governments of the sending countries in a context where they face mounting debt and declines in national revenues as neoliberal globalization

weakens and often destroys many of the national economic sectors in these countries. Thus these governments are not interested particularly in regulating emigration either. Finally, as these same policies have also raised inequality and unemployment inside the rich economies, the disadvantaged in the rich countries have become radicalized, often taking on extreme right wing politics, including anti-immigrant politics.

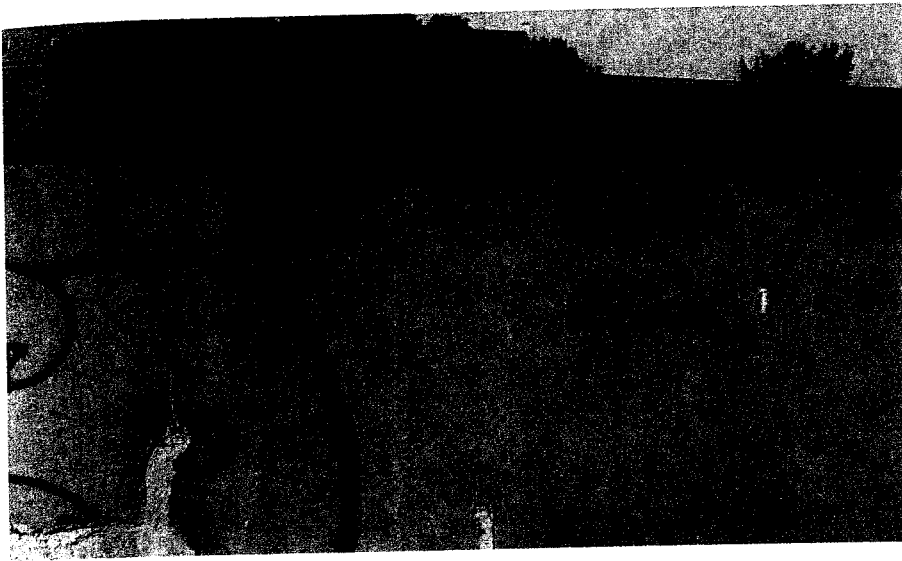
The tragedy is that those most affected negatively, those to whom violence has been done both in the global south and those in the global north who have paid a high price for the globalization of major firms, now confront each other as enemies inside our countries. Anti-immigrant sentiment probably runs highest among those who have been hurt by the same policies that have hurt the poor and the middle classes (though not the upper 20%) in countries where the immigrants and would-be immigrants originate. And as the rich countries raise their walls to keep immigrants and refugees out, they feed the illegal trade in people and raise the profits to be made as despair rises in the global south and fear in the global north. This is not sound policy. This is a vicious policy cycle.

The same infrastructure, both technical and institutional that has enabled global flows of capital and goods, of services and the new transnational managerial and professional class, also enables migrations and illegal trafficking. And it facilitates the flow of remittances back to sending countries, a major incentive for these governments not to do anything. These various entanglements raise the complexity of the challenge of how to regulate immigration. But these entanglements and this type of complexity are going in the wrong direction. We need to reverse this dynamic.

When globalization policies go wrong they really go very wrong for countries in the global south. Thereby these policies sharpen the incentives for emigration, for traffickers, and for governments in the global south. Growing government indebtedness and lack of opportunity for workers and would be entrepreneurs in much of the global south is a key factor here, and one sharply magnified by globalization and its devastating consequences in the global south.

Emigrants enter the macro-level of development strategies for sending countries through their remittances. In many countries these represent a major source of foreign exchange reserves for the government. While the flows of remittances may be minor compared to the massive daily capital flows in various financial markets, they are often very significant for developing or struggling economies.

In 1998 — the last year for which comprehensive data are available — global remittances sent by immigrants to their home countries reached over US\$70 billion. To understand the significance of this figure, it should be related to the GDP and foreign currency reserves in the specific countries involved, rather than compared to the global flow of capital. For instance, in the Philippines, a key



⌚ Far left: Road in France, near Saarbrücken.  
Photo by Armin Smitalovic <armin@smailovic.com>  
⌚ Left: Graffiti. Photo by Drew Hement

sender of migrants generally and of women for the entertainment industry in several countries, remittances were the third largest source of foreign exchange over the last several years. In Bangladesh, another country with significant numbers of its workers in the Middle East, Japan, and the UK, remittances represent about a third of foreign exchange. Exporting workers and remittances helps governments cope with unemployment and foreign debt.

This would also seem to be the case given the growing interdependencies brought on by globalization which also enable illegal trafficking, cross-border business travel, global tourism, the Internet, and other conditions integral to globalization enable multiple global flows not foreseen by the framers and developers of economic globalization. This creates a difficult trade-off in a context where September 11 has further sharpened the will to control immigration and resident immigrants. Increased illegal trafficking and the reduction in civil liberties will not facilitate the need to learn how to accommodate more immigration to respond to the future demographic turn.

## THE PRICE WE PAY FOR A MORE OR (CONTINUED) IMPLEMENTATION POLICY

The large and looming issue confronting societies under the rule of law is whether policies that brutalize people — no matter what their nationality — and promote criminalized profit-making through the trade in people, are desirable and indeed sustainable if we are to keep up our systems based on the rule of law for which our forebears fought so hard and spilled so much blood.

Allowing this sort of brutalization and criminality is a very high price to pay for maintaining border control, and sooner or later it begins to tear at the fabric of the lawful state and of civil society.

The risks to our societies and to us fully documented citizens, are well illustrated by what is happening today in the US. The events of September 11 and the subsequent restrictions on the civil liberties of particular immigration groups in the US are tearing at, and some would say weakening the rule of law as it affects all US residents. The government in the US is granting itself more and more authority to deal directly, in an extrajudicial way, with matters that used to run through judiciaries or that would not be considered a matter for the government to get involved with. In so doing, the US government is violating basic rights not only of those it has profiled as possibly dangerous but also of its citizens, all citizens, not just those who might be suspect.

Are there ways of regulating the flow of people into our societies that could strengthen, rather than weaken, its civic fabric? The repeated incidents of would-be immigrants dying at the hands of illegal traffickers risks producing indifference when it happens over and over again. And they risk promoting acceptance of these deaths among ourselves and our children, all in the name of maintaining control over entry.

We are not only paying a price for those who die on our soil; we are also paying a price for those who are smuggled into our countries alive. The price we pay for allowing the abuse that is human smuggling is much higher than the price we pay for accommodating these people who just want a chance to work — and work they do. Indeed, much research suggests that we actually gain from the presence of these immigrants. For instance, 17 percent of entrepreneurs in London belong to ethnic communities, a far higher share than their population share.

Continuing to use policies that make possible the brutalization of would-be migrants and the profit-making of criminal smugglers is a cancer deep inside our states and societies. It is the price we pay for criminalizing undocumented immigrants and, more generally, for resorting to policing and militarization as the way of regulating immigration. The US illustrates this to some extent. In the name of effective control, the new US 1996 Immigration Act strengthened policing by reducing judiciary review of immigration police actions. A crucial issue here is the object of the expanded policing. It is not known criminals or firms suspected of violating environmental regulations or drug dealers. It is a population sector, not even select

individuals, but a fairly broad spectrum of men, women and children.

There are consequences to this tension between, on the one hand, the strengthening of police approaches to immigrant regulation and, on the other, the strengthening of civil and human rights and the civic empowerment associated with a stronger sense of civil society. Sooner or later this policing will get caught in the expanding web of civil and human rights. And these rights will include those of citizens. Policing, when unchecked by civil review, can easily violate such rights and interfere with the functioning of civil society.

If my son decided to go write the great American novel by spending time with farm workers or in a garment sweatshop, and there was an INS police raid he could well be considered a suspect — because I know he would not be carrying his US passport with him. Or worse, if he was among the farm workers in California running away from the INS police and he was pushed towards jumping into one of the water levies (as has happened a number of times over the last few years) he could even have been drowned. The most dramatic account of these incidents has it that the turbulent waters seemed less threatening than the INS police with their guns and shouting, and that, indeed, these farm workers may have been terrorised into jumping into the waters and drowning. After the new 1996 law, many of these INS actions can escape review and accountability in front of a judge if the persecuted were merely suspected of being undocumented. Sooner or later abusive or excess policing and the weakening of judicial review of such police actions will interfere with the aspiration towards the rule of law that is such a deep part of our inheritance and our lived reality. Sooner or later, this type of police action will touch us, the documented. We need to find another way of regulating entry now that we are strengthening modes of regulation that carry a high cost not only in immigrant deaths but also to the rule of law.

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⌚ For evidence see the author's *The Global City* (2001). See also her 'Governance Hotspots in the Post-September 11 World' in Booth and Dunne, *Worlds In Collision* (2002).

⌚ There are two ways in which governments have secured benefits through these strategies. One of these is highly formalized and the other is simply a by-product of the migration process itself. Among the strongest examples of a formal labor export program today is the Philippines.

## UNDER THE SHADE OF THE BANYAN TREE

Shahidul Alam

Friend Kajol Bhromora

*When will you return*

*O tell me*

*If you must leave my friend*

*Leave behind the gamcha on your shoulder*

*Your love my friend*

*Is like the shade of the banyan tree*

*When will you return*

*O tell me*

Old Bangla Folk Song

They all had numbers. Jeans tucked into their high ankle sneakers. They strutted through the airport lounge, moving en-masse. As we worked our way up the corridors leading to the airplane, many stopped at the small gap just before the entrance. The gait had gone. The sad faces looked out longingly at the small figures silhouetted on the rooftops. They waved and they waved and they waved. The stewardesses had seen it all before, and rounded them up, herding them into the aircraft. One by one they disengaged themselves from that opening, probably realising for the first time just what they were leaving behind. Inside the aircraft it was different. They looked around at the metallic finish of the interior, tried on the headphones, drank lemonade. They had seats together, and they whispered to each other at each new thing they saw. Abdul Malek sitting opposite me would have been in his early 20s. He was from a small village not far from Goolondo town. This was his second attempt. He had been conned the first time round. This time his family had sold their remaining land and the small shop that they were part owners of. This time he was going to make it.

The child had died in a fire in a garment factory. Molly knew of the fire, of the factory exit being locked once the workers were inside, of the children working, of the bodies dumped in the drain at night, of no one challenging the owner. 'If I had a camera, I would take his picture and put the guy in jail.' Perhaps it was naive of this ten-year-old girl to think she could, with a camera, right a wrong where a whole community had failed. But it was her belief that got me fired up. We could use images from a pin-hole camera made out of a milk powder tin. Images that had a voice. Images that would change things.

We then talked. Of what images we could make, of why we were making them, of how they might be used. I was curious to find out what Molly wanted to photograph. Her first list – people selling vegetables in the market, slum dwellers being evicted, boatmen singing as they sailed down the river, an accident in the street, hungry people in the streets, beautiful plants in the garden, kids bathing – was a curious mixture of what a 10-year-old had left behind and what she faced. Those then were the icons. Lost and new found ones. We set forth to make pictures. Some stuck to what they had wanted to do, some strayed, some invented. Their stories and images, for me, were the most poignant portrayal of what it meant to be exiled. To be so distant from the shade of the banyan tree. Ironically today, Molly, now 12, works in a garment factory. She tried taking pictures inside, but the supervisor had objected. I received a small parcel she sent through her brother. A little instamatic that she had hoped would take her back to her banyan tree.

Much is made of free choice. 'Free societies' beckon us. Telling us that we may live the way we want, where we want and as we want. Provided we have the money. That little proviso, wealth, qualifies our sense of freedom. What a wealthy person is free to do, a poor one is not. What is for the wealthy industrialist, free movement, may well be for the worker, exile. The 'free market' economy encourages the mobility of goods, but the flow of people works only in certain directions. Power, lines of race and class, separate adventure from ordeal, and escape from exile. A UK citizen, at Zia airport in Bangladesh is given a visa on entry. A visa extendible virtually at will. The absence of a valid visa is not seen as a problem. Entry into the UK for a Bangladeshi, is a mammoth task. There are numerous tests. For solvency, for integrity, sometimes for virginity. Without papers she is illegal, hunted and in exile. With papers she is only marginally safer. These selective barriers create the gradients in social balance between and within societies. For some the barriers are an effective shield against erosion. The high citadels of wealth and power, protected against the gnawing demands of poverty. For others they are osmotic barriers. Unidirectional valves that allow one to serve, but to never enjoy the fruit of one's labour. And never perhaps to return to the shade of the banyan tree.

Exile. The word is more romantic than it deserves to be. A sense of grandeur surrounds it. A sense of having been wronged. A feeling of fighting for what one has been denied. In a sense it is often so. Behind the uprooting however, there is a strong bondage, that strengthens the more taut it becomes. Even if only in dreams, the exiled always returns. And in between, the need to preserve a pristine image of what those roots were, creates a wall, a sanctity, an altar, where all that is foreign is excluded. It is this cocoon that shields the harshness of the foreign climes. The microspore that endures the brutality, the injustice and the scorn, meted out by those who consider them to be trespassers. And as with all sporan, the seeds remain intact. To grow anew when conditions are right, genes preserved.

Letters written to friends back home, describing the imagined and the predicted. Myths told by those who had been there before. The newcomers write enacting in detail how they too have been through the same experiences. Initiation rites, so the new know what to tell. Perhaps those back home also know, but it is important all the same. Having made the trip, one must give meaning to it. The disillusionment, the reality, the inevitability has to be faced through a personal struggle.

Old songs, familiar smells, unfinished conversations. The touch of bare feet on freshly coated clay. The shade of the banyan tree.

The power to exclude – physically, emotionally, socially, intellectually – creates selective forms of displacement. Those with power can glide over these barriers, touching down as necessary, for business, for pleasure or even out of guilt. For those without power, the displacement is much more final, and each barrier crossed, like the ferry ghats of the big rivers, broadens the distance one has to travel to reach back. The displacement of the powerful may be qualified in terms of their motives. They are travellers across the zones they themselves have built, and as they travel, they leave behind the golden threads that they use to knit the patchwork quilt of territories of thought, space and culture. The others become numbers. People without names in a matrix of statistics. Superfluous collectives with no human form. That fragile path back, for the exile, becomes the most difficult bridge to cross. To return from being a statistic to a person. And even for the few who make it back, the label remains. Having been subsumed by a dominant aesthetic – forever scarred by the misconceptions, the characterisations, the prejudices, the exclusions – the exiled does eventually get absorbed into the fabric, but returns only as a foreigner. It is a story about journeys, displacement, crossings of borders, of accepting unequal rights, of less claim to land and citizenship. The shade of the banyan tree remains as elusive as ever.

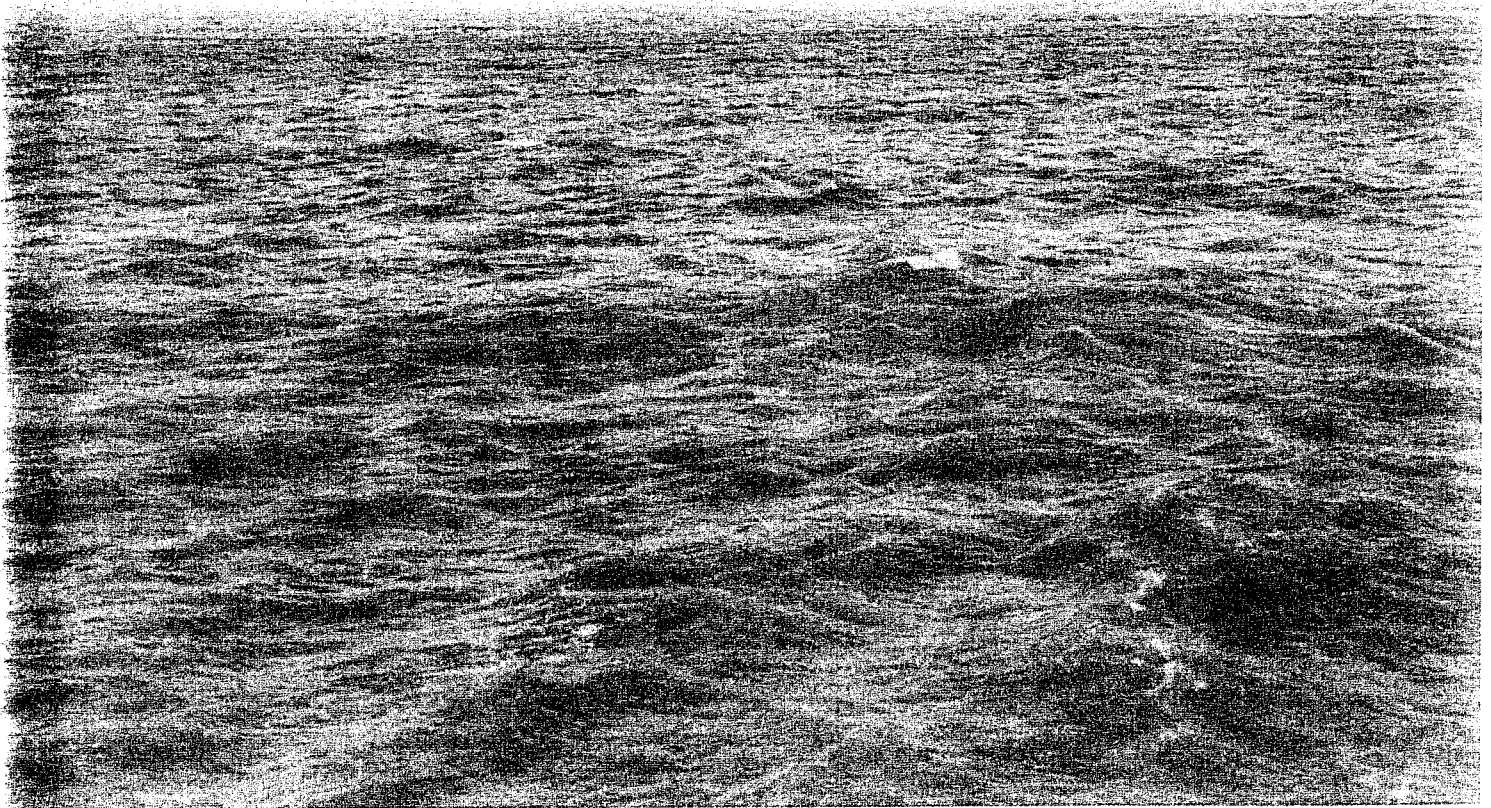
Like the banyan tree we send down roots as we spread, until the real roots look the same as the secondary ones. That is the fear, that burden of identity that we have always cherished as a virtue, feelings that essentially exclude. Those within and those without, each exiled by the other. All searching for the banyan tree. Branches, a mass of green, spread as a canopy on stilts. Shade for the weary traveller. Perhaps also for the exiled.

Shahidul Alam is Founder and Director of the DRIK Project in Bangladesh, Honorary Fellow of the Royal Photographic Society, and Chair of the International Jury for the World Press Photo Contest for 2003. His regular practice involves working with migrant workers in Bangladesh and the sub-continent [www.drik.net](http://www.drik.net)

Right: Banyan tree. Photo courtesy Drik Picture Library

'The inefficiencies in the system are our freedoms'  
Steve Wright, Omega Foundation

Tales of new state and security technologies often serve only as propaganda for the State, an advert for the futility of resistance. A precision focus is required to identify the faultlines that can be exploited as well as the points that can be exposed or opposed



## OMEGA FOUNDATION

Steve Wright

A major factor driving international migrations is the instability in developing nations fuelled by the arms trade of developed nations such as the UK and US. A particularly disturbing trend is the use of weapons designed for war on civilian populations. If the economists of the military-industrial complex play war games too, then their tactics are more cynical than a napalm attack, intricate webs connect major defence contracts and research into the means to mop up their effects.

Here Steve Wright, Director of the Omega Foundation, looks over the horizon at how a new generation of so-called 'non-lethal' weapons are being created to circumvent international treaties on land mines.

### ELECTRONIC FRONTIERS AND ZONES OF FUTURE PARALYSIS

What does the future hold for refugees fleeing wars and human rights abuse post September 11? Many governments are currently erecting massive razor wired intelligent border fences which can detect and police intrusion. Increasingly, however, there is the desire to incorporate both muscle and teeth to automatically punish those who illegally cross state boundaries. Already companies are making electrostun and kill fences. Future victim activated technologies being researched by the US Joint Non-Lethal Weapons Directorate include taser mines which pulse 50,000 volts through multiple fishhooks; UV lasers which ionise the air and can project electroshocks over long distances; modular crowd control munitions which act as a claymore filled with rubber bullets; high powered microwaves which heat the body up to an unbearable degree; caltivate chemicals and club drugs in tiny membraneous capsules broken by border crossing feet and robotised gangs armed with sub-lethal pepper guns and more. Unbelievable? See the websites below for statewatch, sunshine project and landmine action.

<http://www.statewatch.org>

<http://www.sunshine-project.org>

<http://www.landmineaction.org>

➤ Above: Crossing between Calais and Dover. Photo by Armin Smailovic

➤ Right: EuroTunnel, France. Photo by Armin Smailovic



## STATEWATCH

Ben Hayes

While it is the human face that is most often missing from debates around refugees and asylum, the frontline is increasingly located in the violence of data-systems and the interface of law, surveillance and information technologies. Ben Hayes at Statewatch explains...

### EURODAC

**Eurodac is a central database that will hold the fingerprints of every applicant for asylum in the EU. It was devised along with the Dublin Convention, under which refugees and asylum-seekers are prevented from making applications to more than one member state and must apply to the first EU state in which they set foot.**

During the negotiations, it was decided to extend Eurodac from asylum applicants to allow every undocumented or irregular migrant (the text uses the term 'aliens') apprehended in the member states to be checked against the system. It was also decided to lower the age limit for inclusion in Eurodac from 18 years to 14 years - in direct contravention of the UN Convention on the rights of the child. The claim that the database is merely an 'administrative tool' for asylum procedures was then further corrupted when a raft of 'anti-terrorism' proposals made after 11 September called for EU law enforcement authorities to have access to the data - despite the original agreement restricting access to employees of the central unit.

Eurodac was agreed in an EC Regulation in 2000, creating a central database and fingerprint recognition system in the EC to which all member states must digitally transmit the fingerprints of every applicant for asylum. These will be stored in the database for ten years, though access 'should' be blocked if an individual is given refugee status by a member state. Every asylum applicant will be checked against the database, along with any undocumented migrants apprehended in the member states. All EU countries (and accession states) must comply with the Eurodac Regulation and this has encouraged several member states - Italy in particular - to adopt repressive national laws on the fingerprinting of immigrants that go further than the EC requirements.

Typically, EU decision-making took place away from public scrutiny and media interest. The European and national parliaments were 'consulted', though many of their views were ignored. The final decision was taken by governments acting in the Council of the EU. Although Eurodac is not yet 'live', the long-term implications of the database are quite clear - a central fingerprint database of all the 'illegals', geared to their identification and removal from the EU.

### SCHENGEN

The 1985 Schengen Agreement is known for the removal of internal border controls among participating states, but it also created an elaborate security framework to 'compensate'. It covers immigration, asylum and visa policy as well as police and judicial cooperation. The Amsterdam Treaty integrated the Schengen framework into that of the EU producing a hugely complex legal system.

An extensive database, the Schengen Information System (SIS), has been operational since 1995 and now covers 13 of the 15 EU countries, plus Norway and Iceland - the UK and Ireland are the only member states not yet participating, though plans to incorporate them and the accession states are well underway. Member states contribute data to the SIS on people wanted for arrest; people to be placed under surveillance or subject to specific checks; people to be refused entry at external borders (on either national security or immigration grounds); and lost or stolen items. It currently contains over 11 million records, 3 million of which relate to people (mostly rejected immigrants and asylum applicants) and there are some 55,000 access points across the EU (though agencies can only access relevant categories of data).

Secretive EU working parties have been developing plans for SIS II for four years. The new system will cater for the enlargement of the EU but will also introduce a range of new functions. Where immigration policy is concerned, it is proposed to register all third-country nationals entering and exiting the EU on visas. The system would then automatically issue alerts to the authorities on individuals whose departure has not been verified. Two further databases are proposed, though it is not yet clear whether they will be part of SIS II or separate systems. The first will contain every visa application made to EU countries, whether accepted or refused. The second proposal is for a central register of every non-EU national legally resident in the member states (over 14 million people).

Together, the various EU immigration and asylum databases are putting in place a highly sophisticated technological administration to register and monitor the movement of all 'non-citizens' in order to facilitate the detection and expulsion those who are not wanted.

## VIRTUAL MIGRANTS

*Terminal Frontiers: Virinder S. Kalra reports on a multilayered digital art exhibition by Virtual Migrants*

Is blood dripping from a pen different from that dripping from a bayonet?

This question punctuates the screen in the presentation 'Destination' which is one of the five pieces on display in Virtual Migrants' Terminal Frontiers Exhibition. The exhibition answers the question in the potent installation *What If I'm Not Real* a three screen multi-dimensional display which plays out the interaction between a bureaucrat and a woman with child seeking asylum. The video images provide a stunning interplay at the moment the bureaucrat stabs his pen into the paper and blood begins to pour from the asylum seeker's body. Indeed, it is the potency of symbolic violence and its material implications that unites these five varying pieces of digital art. Above all there is a commitment to engaging the viewer and challenging them to think politically about the charged issues of migration and asylum. Against the mundane, soporific works of art produced by Brit-Art, in the words of one of the artists: 'what has a rumpled bed got to do with genocide, each of the artists involved is provoked from personal experience of migration or marginality and this is well expressed in the installations.

The politics of the group are most immediately at play in *Desti.Nation*, the line 'Who is George Bush without Bin Laden' vividly portrayed against a shimmering backdrop that could be the reflection from oil. In contrast Keith Piper provides a starkly literal vision of migration, complicated by the dislocation between place and time, a visual journey between different cities layered with continually recurring entries in a personal diary and repeating time frames on the screen; alienation and the weight of a predetermined fate entering in the contradiction between the two.

According to Kooj Chuhan, founder of Virtual Migrants and director of this particular work, 'We are continually moved to deflect the terrifying realities of global politics from our everyday human concerns, assisted by sinister yet convenient ways to imagine that neither perpetrators nor victims are actually real people, further added to by media distortions of who the perpetrators are. Despite this there remains a widespread suspicion of the official line and a keen interest in understanding the hidden nature of global events, such as the fact that most global conflict is created or fertilised by western interests which then demonise the asylum-seeking products of that conflict: perhaps we need to be guarded from the arrival on our doorsteps of the human reality of western policies?'

These works have been shown in various localities in the Manchester area and involve work by disadvantaged school children alongside the established artists. Virtual Migrants describe their practice in terms of crossing borders and divides, and this includes the contexts in which they work, drawing on parallels with the mobile cinema setups used by communists in India.



*Terminal Frontiers* will be shown in Manchester and London this autumn and is due to tour next year accompanied by a CDrom.  
<http://virtualmigrants.com> <http://www.virtualmigrants.com>

➤ Above: *What If I'm Not Real*, v02 Collective, dir. by Koojit 'Kooj' Chuhan

➤ Right: Photos courtesy Drik Picture Library, made for Eurodac Express

## EURODAC EXPRESS

<http://www.eurodac.net/>

*Eurodac Express* is a personal journey through the hard shell of Fortress Europe and an intervention into the violence of data-systems by Shahidul Alam (DRIK Project/Bangladesh) and Elliot Perkins (phenom/Morr Music).

Together they travel overland to and through the frontiers of Fortress Europe – travelling through the forests of Russian, across Poland, entering Europe and crossing its internal borders – tracing the route that migrants and refugees take. During this journey they work with the refugees they meet on their way to explore the context that led them to leave their homes and that they find upon arrival in Europe, in order to challenge some of the stereotypes that have emerged of 'bogus' asylum seekers and facilitate a re-examination of notions of belonging, citizenship and displacement amongst the diverse communities in Europe.

In the context of a drift in European policy towards increasing insularity and hostility towards immigrant communities, refugees and cultural diversity as such, the project is simultaneously an intervention into the insidious, invasive and possibly illegal measures being adopted by the European Union and member states that target and disadvantage ethnic minorities in general, and people fleeing hunger and persecution in particular. The project will seek to 'trip the wire' of the Eurodac and Schengen systems that have been introduced – with no democratic scrutiny – to monitor and control the movement of asylum seekers and 'illegal immigrants' respectively.

The title of the project, *Eurodac Express*, both refers to the way in which this combination of new technology and new legislative powers has been rushed into service without proper assessment or checks, and aims to subvert the commonplace view that the journeys of migrants and refugees to Europe are an 'express' route to an easy life aided and abetted by the supposedly 'soft' policies and policing of European member states.

*Eurodac Express* will involve both artists developing their existing practice in interesting and new directions. Shahidul Alam will work in digital video as well as in still images, and will collaborate – with Elliot Perkins – on the production of an integrated audiovisual film and installation for the first time. Elliot Perkins has gained a reputation for his electronic music with recordings on Morr Music, but was becoming frustrated with the genre and has ceased production of his previous work in order to undertake more politically engaged projects, of which this is the first.

The project will culminate in a residency with school children and asylum seeker families in Oldham and other towns in the North of England that have been the scene of horrific racist violence, leading to work produced in partnership with Virtual Migrants into an installation premiered at Gallery Oldham and then toured to towns in UK, Europe and Bangladesh retracing the overland journey with new work contributed by school children along the way.

*Eurodac Express* is a Migrations project commissioned for futuresonic by Drew Hemment. Preview, 9 November 2002, futuresonic-02> festival, Manchester, UK (<http://www.futuresonic.com/>)