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The Migrant and Marginalized Body in Connection with Digital Technologies as a Prosthesis of the Monstrous

Keywords

migrant, marginalized, digital technologies, prosthesis, systematic violence, carceral archipelago

Abstract

This article situates the (human) body as a signifier for society at large, arguing that developments in many societies of structural and systematic violence that targets minorities such as refugees and first nation peoples, points to a failure of democratic values. Using two examples, we elaborate technology and digital devices as prosthesis of the body, that are also acting as proxy for state violence. The first example is from the carceral archipelago of Manus Island as a site of remote detention of refugees carried out by the Australian government. Refugees held on Manus Island describe the treatment they experience as torture. The second example is drawn from the Australian mainland, telling the stories of First Nations children subjected to abuse and violence in juvenile detention centers. A judicial inquiry (Royal Commission) found that a systematic approach aimed at punishing children constituted torture. The concepts developed in this article are those of bordering and racialization, while the intertwining of human and “more than human life” helps to understand and challenge the necropolitical power evident in (liberal) capitalism.

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Migrantsko in marginalizirano telo v povezavi z digitalnimi tehnologijami kot protezami pošastnega

Ključne besede

migrant, marginaliziran, digitalne tehnologije, proteza, sistematično nasilje, jetnišnični arhipelag

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Povzetek

Članek obravnava (človeško) telo kot označevalec širše družbe in trdi, da razvoj struktur-nega in sistematičnega nasilja v številnih družbah, ki je usmerjeno proti manjšinam, kot so begunci in staroselci, kaže na spodletelost demokratičnih vrednot. Na podlagi dveh primerov razvijamo argumentacijo o tehnologiji in digitalnih napravah kot protezah telesa, ki obenem delujejo tudi kot posredniki državnega nasilja. Prvi primer se nanaša na jetnišnični arhipelag Manus kot mesto odmaknjenega pridržanja beguncev, ki ga izvaja avstralska vlada. Begunci, pridržani na otoku Manus, opisujejo jetnišnično obravnavo, ki jo doživljajo, kot mučenje. Drugi primer izhaja z avstralske celine in govori o zgodbah staroselskih otrok, ki so v centrih za pridržanje mladoletnikov podvrženi zlorabi in nasilju. Sodna preiskava (Kraljeve komisije) je ugotovila, da sistematično kaznovanje otrok predstavlja mučenje. Koncepta, ki ju razvijamo v tem članku, sta koncepta meje in rasi-zacije, prepletanje človeškega in »več kot človeškega življenja« pa pomaga razumeti in izpodbijati nekropolitično moč, ki je očitna v (liberalnem) kapitalizmu.



Introduction

In this paper I develop the idea of the (human) body as a signifier of society, while the current necropolitical order observed in many parts of the world points to a diseased version of democracy. Indeed, democracy as necro-democracy is horrific in its materiality. Drawing on ideas from racial capitalism,¹ abolitionism, and carceral geography,² as well as feminist and queer studies,³ this paper tells the story of the Australian government's incarceration and medieval punishment of refugees and First Nations children. These are not isolated cases, but systematic abuses applied to abject bodies on the Australian mainland and in the Exile Islands archipelago, where refugees' bodies are tortured and treated as flesh. But the elaboration of the body as a prosthesis for other potentialities reveals not only a politics of resistance, but also possibilities for new imaginaries of other futures. Here, new technologies and digitality are not just the usual

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¹ Cedric J. Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000).

² Ruth Wilson Gilmore, *Abolition Geography: Essays Towards Liberation*, ed. Brenna Bhandar and Alberto Toscano (London: Verso, 2022).

³ Rosi Braidotti, *The Posthuman* (Cambridge: Polity, 2013); Jack Halberstam, *Skin Shows: Gothic Horror and the Technology of Monsters* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995).

means of state surveillance of excluded and minoritized populations, but rather technologies are an affective prosthesis of the vulnerable body.

The skin of the body is a barrier or membrane that protects the organism from intruders, just as society can be visualized as a barrier commonly asserted in terms of a territorial border, that contains those inside as a cohesive body, with processes that sift and filter movement across the membrane.⁴ In today's world, the body is subject to more far-reaching threats than disease, injury, and other bodily assaults that first come to mind when we defend ourselves and our bodies. Rather, the endpoints of the established and deeply entrenched biopolitical systems of power and governance, manifest in a necropolitical order today are scattered throughout the world in racialized hierarchies that categorize bodies as worthy/unworthy as human/flesh in cycles of violence and destruction.⁵ It is this vicious extension of biopolitics to structured considerations of annihilation of targeted populations/bodies that frames the thinking of this paper. How can the human body be rethought from decolonial, radical feminist, abolitionist and queer perspectives to develop a radical vision of liberation? The work to dismantle the cartographies of domination, criminalization, and racialization that Ruth Wilson Gilmore's research and advocacy represents⁶ revolves around the question of whether radical labor and militancy produce not only resistance and opposition, but also new values.

A prosthesis is an artificial body part that must be replaced due to trauma, disease, or other fractures. In this discussion, I would like to take up the idea of the prosthesis as a bodily appendage to augment that which is missing in the form of a digital capability. A smartphone becomes an extension of the human body, and in the example of refugees in remote places of incarceration (immigration detention), a prosthesis that truly leads to a form of sociability, connection, and relation, as the conditions of remoteness, exclusion, and deportation of refugees to places of invisibility and silence mean that sociability and connectivity are intentionally removed—by the sovereign.

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⁴ Rainer Bauböck, "Rethinking Borders as Membranes," in *Rethinking Border Control for a Globalizing World: A Preferred Future*, ed. Leanne Weber (London: Routledge, 2015), 169–78.

⁵ Achille Mbembe, "Necropolitics," trans. Libby Meintjes, *Public Culture* 15, no. 1 (Winter 2003): 11–40, <https://doi.org/10.1215/08992363-15-1-11>; Achille Mbembe, *Necropolitics*, trans. Steven Corcoran (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019).

⁶ Gilmore, *Abolition Geography*.

The Covid-19 pandemic highlighted the global risks that all living things face and are implicated in. These risks are always already in relation with each other and to contagion. Ultimately, these risks are unable to be controlled, meaning the permeability of borders of all kinds is a constant, especially the invisible and microscopic borders through which pathogens pass. I take this vision of permeability and consider its usefulness for the immigration border as well as for internal borders of marginalization and minoritization, such as the “borders of disappearance” in what is done by sovereign states.

I also reflect on Sara Ahmed’s writings on race and categorization through phenomenological and affective registers of concepts, which she applies to everyday life in her recent work on “use.”⁷ How can technological devices be thought of as prostheses for bodies that are isolated and captured in space and time? By building an argument and inquiry around the use and utility of an object, Ahmed’s intertwining with inanimate and biological life is apparent. That is, “use,” use-value and utility, and life itself are entangled⁸ and already (always) in relation with each other. And here, the entanglement of human and nonhuman, as well as more-than-human life, to be discussed later, proves important in shaking the dominant discourses and imaginaries of body/human and the neologism liberal/capitalism, deeply implicated in colonial racialization.

Borders, Barriers, Membranes

I understand border as a heterodox concept, conceived and used in various geopolitical contexts as metaphysics and finally, as necropolitics. The heterodox aspect of borders and bordering is at once a potential for transformation and a limitation in a world dominated by an orthodox application of borders. The orthodox and dominant paradigm, discourses, and policy contexts of borders take shape as the territorial sovereignty of states, an order of exceptionalism rather than global justice.⁹ The geopolitics of migration borders impose penalties on the most vulnerable populations, while global capital continues to find new ways to obliterate borders to theft and wealth transfer, including the theft

⁷ Sara Ahmed, *What’s the Use? On the Uses of Use* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019).

⁸ Ahmed, 69.

⁹ See Wendy Brown, *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism’s Stealth Revolution* (New York: Zone Books, 2015); Achille Mbembe, *Critique of Black Reason*, trans. Laurent Dubois (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017); Mbembe, *Necropolitics*.

of land, resources, and intellectual property from local peoples such as Indigenous groups in many parts of the world.¹⁰

The polysemic border is malleable and hybrid, a conceptualization that runs counter to an orthodox application of borders and migrants as subject to sovereign power and to exceptionalism. While the border refers to markets and human subjectivities, it also refers to differentiated ways of “being in the world” and marks values and histories that are carried through temporal and spatial domains—through mobile bodies and other entities.¹¹ Importantly, the polysemy of border also resonates in forms of human and nonhuman subjectivity, hybridity, and multi-species experience as conceptualized and empirically discussed by writers, philosophers, and scientists who question the ultimate boundaries between humans and all other lifeforms.¹² The articulations of posthuman and more-than-human are instructive in codifying the forms of life that are enhanced or altered by new technologies, as well as the important nexus of motives and sightlines that connect past, present, and future. In addition, human and non-human actor networks are interrelated and thus require thought and consideration to identify connections and alignments. Science in the forms of technology and in social “uses”¹³ are the fields of human and non-human materiality that are always already in association with each other.¹⁴ The connection I want to draw is that the body and the digital prosthesis are coextensive with each other.

¹⁰ Aileen Moreton-Robinson, *The White Possessive: Property, Power, and Indigenous Sovereignty* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015); Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, *The Relative Native: Essays on Indigenous Conceptual Worlds* (Chicago: Hau Books, 2015).

¹¹ Kate Coddington and Alison Mountz, “Countering Isolation with the Use of Technology How Asylum-Seeking Detainees on Islands in the Indian Ocean Use Social Media to Transcend Their Confinement,” *Journal of the Indian Ocean Region* 10, no. 1 (2014): 97–112, <https://doi.org/10.1080/19480881.2014.896104>; Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson, *Border as Method: Or, the Multiplication of Labor* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013).

¹² Braidotti, *Posthuman*; Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007); Donna J. Haraway, *When Species Meet* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008); Joseph Pugliese, *Biopolitics of the More-than-Human: Forensic Ecologies of Violence* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2020).

¹³ Ahmed, *What’s the Use?*

¹⁴ Andrew Pickering, *The Mangle of Practice: Time, Agency, and Science* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 11.

The more-than-human frontier approach conceptualizes the impact of human society, economy, and technology on all of life. Moreover, the vitality of all other living things continues, despite the impact of the human-created systems of the dominant figure of homo economicus in capitalist production. Posthumanism emerges across a number of disciplines and has its roots in Anglo-European political philosophy, which questions the centrality of humans as ontologically given, privileged, and separate from the rest of nature and nonhuman animals.¹⁵ Many scholars articulating posthuman thought also call for the decolonization of research disciplines in which other worldviews and geopolitical histories, such as that of Latin America, contribute to unique decolonial theorization.¹⁶ While many epistemic traditions have historically naturalized the metanarratives of progress, expansion, and growth with humans at the forefront and the endless extraction of all kinds of resources and “things” from nature,¹⁷ others have more recently drawn attention to categories, narratives, and knowledge systems that eschew such orthodoxy. Joseph Pugliese, for example, explains the categories more-than-human and other-than-human as distinct from non-human and post-human.¹⁸ This distinction is important to emphasize the opposition to anthropocentrism that is presupposed in any use of the descriptor, human. Pugliese emphasizes his rejection in this regard and challenges human exceptionalism.

The explanation of racialization in human and nonhuman life is elaborated in necropolitics as the extraction of profit from the flesh of living entities.¹⁹ In this politics, death is not just an unintended by-product of the values that drive economic production and consumption, but a deliberative nihilism in creating suffering and death. The advocacy and artistic creations of Behrouz Boochani—a Kurdish-Iranian journalist who was detained on Manus Island in Papua New Guinea (PNG) for the next seven years beginning in July 2013—exemplifies digital resistance, but also much more. Boochani became known worldwide during the many years of his imprisonment, but his digital counter-life, using a cell phone as a prosthetic, is mapped across other refugees in the carceral archipel-

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¹⁵ Braidotti, *Posthuman*.

¹⁶ Walter D. Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011).

¹⁷ Sven Lütticken, “Posthuman Prehistory,” *Third Text* 29, no. 6 (2015): 498–510, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09528822.2016.1235861>.

¹⁸ Pugliese, *Biopolitics of the More-than-Human*.

¹⁹ Mbembe, *Necropolitics*.

ago of Manus Island and the small island state of Nauru. Both locations have been contracted and paid by the Australian government to act as Australian prison guards for refugees in locations intentionally removed from the Australian mainland. This paper examines the prison where refugees are held on Manus Island in Papua New Guinea in relation to the body and its digital prosthesis as a “more-than-human” relation, one that is a politics of resistance on the one hand and a new imagining on the other.

Manus Island is an example of how the geopolitics of borders can be used to abdicate responsibility for refugees. It shows what can occur when policies, laws, and everyday practices turn human life into flesh in cycles of dehumanization and cruelty.²⁰ Far from making life “disappear” through sovereign exceptionalism,²¹ these remote prisons have produced new forms of resistance as detainees create new life, coexistence, and collaboration with far-flung people in many parts of the world. This coexistence has a spectral presence, both felt and audible. A presence that reverberates in local life, in the lapping of the sea, and in the persistence of resistance and transgression by refugees and their supporters. The role of new digital technologies in this coexistence and collaboration is perhaps surprising when one transposes the hard metal objects and their associated possibilities for connectivity and storytelling to the soft bodies of the refugees.

For three decades, Australia’s carceral-border archipelago has produced numerous sites of subjugation and death for displaced and exiled peoples. Australia’s relationship with PNG and Nauru demonstrates a neo-colonial dynamic as aid and development are part of the equation while developing nations remain dependent on richer nations to recover from the continuing legacies of colonialism. A key feature of Australia’s border industrial complex of incarceration and violence is the multinational companies contracted to build, maintain, and

²⁰ Alexander G. Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014).

²¹ See Claudia Tazreiter, “The Unlucky in the ‘Lucky Country’: Asylum Seekers, Irregular Migrants and Refugees and Australia’s Politics of Disappearance,” *Australian Journal of Human Rights* 23, no. 2 (2017): 242–60, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1323238X.2017.1372039>; Claudia Tazreiter, “Race, Migration and Visual Culture: The Activist Artist Challenging the Ever-Present Colonial Imagination,” in *Art and Migration: Revisioning the Borders of Community*, ed. Bénédicte Miyamoto and Marie Ruiz (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020), 113–32.

manage the carceral sites. These companies include Transfield/Broadspectrum, G4S, Serco, IHMS, Paladin, and PIH. They have all secured remarkably lucrative contracts without any oversight or accountability for the way they manage and care for the already traumatized people. In Paladin's case, the contract was not made available for public tender. The privatization of immigration detention centers in Australia mirrors similar developments in other Western countries²² and is being challenged by new abolitionist demands and movements.²³

Manus Prison and Digital Prosthesis of Resistance and Collaboration

As a writer, university teacher, and feminist activist, I spend a lot of time thinking about the various impacts of intellectual work and the importance of being present, engaged, and collaborating with the people (and other living entities) most impacted by violence and regimes of power. In mid-2019, I travelled to Manus Island, Papua New Guinea. I had been thinking about this trip for a long time, to visit and speak with the men and boys detained there. I wanted to bear witness to the lived experience of what politicians and much of the mainstream media have reported and normalized under the label of "off-shore processing." The visit to Manus Island was prompted by conversations with journalist, writer, and refugee Behrouz Boochani, who was imprisoned on Manus Island, and his long-time collaborator Omid Tofighian. The trip to Manus Island was a sensory overload. Manus Island is geographically remote, of great natural beauty, with a small population and unrelenting tropical heat. On the flight to this remote island, the many stories of refugee suffering and abuse ran through my mind and triggered shame. My anticipation and excitement of meeting the refugees and also the locals, the Manusians, eclipsed any hesitation. The sights, sounds, physicality of this visit, as well as the recurring memories of the threads that draw lines between Australia and Papua New Guinea, between Australians and the refugees imprisoned for years, between Australians and Manusians, frame the motivation for this paper.

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During the years Boochani was incarcerated in Manus Prison, he regularly published in international media, gave speeches, posted and engaged in social me-

²² Alison Mountz, *The Death of Asylum: Hidden Geographies of the Enforcement Archipelago* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2020).

²³ Gilmore, *Abolition Geography*.

dia, participated in interviews, shot and co-directed a feature film, and wrote a book. These forms of intellectual and cultural production were written, prepared and created using a mobile phone, with all texts typed, saved and sent via WhatsApp text messages. Together with his translator Omid Tofighian, they worked across the seas on the book *No Friend but the Mountains*, which was written and translated simultaneously, through the digital screen.²⁴ The philosophical vision and intellectual framework captured in this collaboration continue to take shape and have benefited from various working relationships and networks.²⁵

In 2017, Boochani and his collaborator and co-director Arash Kamali Sarvestani released the film *Chauka, Please Tell Us the Time*, which documents life in detention over time and is pieced together with hundreds of mobile phone clips and written texts. Along with other forms of visual and material culture and communication, this has given the Australian public access to counter-narratives to the dominant government narratives that generate fear, mistrust, and hatred of refugees and asylum seekers. In the film, the story of the men and boys living in the prison-like immigration detention center is presented in narrative form. The film is a meditation on the way everyday life is like in the detention center on a remote island like Manus and gives Australians a glimpse into the physical and psychological stresses and traumas of the detainees. The film is particularly powerful in the context of Australian policies that have made asylum seekers and refugees invisible to the Australian public—they have essentially “disappeared” through media and information blackouts, which include visa restrictions on lawyers and human rights organizations. *Chauka* is the name of a solitary confinement cell in the detention center and also the name of a bird that is unique to the island and is the symbol of the island that adorns its flag.

²⁴ Behrouz Boochani, *No Friend But the Mountains: Writing from Manus Prison*, trans. Omid Tofighian (Sydney: Picador, 2018).

²⁵ See Behrouz Boochani, Claudia Tazreiter, and Omid Tofighian, “The Multiple Faces of the People Smuggler,” in *Smuggled: An Illegal History of Journeys to Australia*, ed. Ruth Balint and Julie Kalman (Sydney: NewSouth, 2021), 176–90; Claudia Tazreiter and Omid Tofighian, with Behrouz Boochani, “Spectres of Subjugation/Inter-Subjugation/Resubjugation of People Seeking Asylum: The Kyriarchal System in Australia’s Necropoleis,” in *Regulating Refugee Protection through Social Welfare: Law, Policy and Praxis*, ed. Peter Billings (London: Routledge, 2023), 68–90; Behrouz Boochani and Claudia Tazreiter, “Notes on Exile: Behrouz Boochani in Conversation with Claudia Tazreiter,” *Australian Journal of Human Rights* 25, no. 3 (2019): 370–75, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1323238X.2019.1685768>.

The singing of the Chauka bird is a constant aural presence that is regularly interwoven into the film, as is the regular singing of a Kurdish folk song by one of the Kurdish detainees. *Chauka, Please Tell Us the Time* is a film that defies easy categorization. It is neither a documentary nor a feature film. Rather, it is a poetic intervention that uses the visual medium of time to take the viewer in the unimaginable pain of separation experienced in incarceration. Ongoing conversations between Manus Island locals reveal the deep significance of the Chauka bird and the persistence of colonial history on the island. As with other works, *Chauka* was possible on through many micro-visual and textual pieces transmitted to collaborators via the prosthetic, smartphone.

With the release of the film *Chauka*, Boochani received numerous invitations to international film festivals for the premiere. However, the Australian government denied him a visa to enter the country. Nevertheless, with the help of his translator, friend, and collaborator Omid Tofghian and his prosthesis, Boochani appeared for interviews at numerous public events and at the screening of his film on social media. In this way, the Australian public and an international audience have come to know the work, the face, and the voice of Boochani and his fellow refugee detainees. Boochani has also collaborated with a number of artists, including Hoda Afshar, to produce photographic and video works that comment on life in off-shore detention.

One work that illustrates this collaboration across distance and through digital means is the video *Remain*. It is a collaboration with refugees who have been detained on Manus Island since 2013. It is a multi-layered work that addresses absence and invisibility. The work depicts the ongoing mistreatment of refugees, including the memory evoked by the refugees themselves of their murdered comrade Reza Barati, who was beaten to death by the guards of the detention center. Nevertheless, the work brings the viewer into the natural beauty of the island and evokes its own form of resistance.

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Other refugees detained in Manus Island prison who have written and addressed the public about the twenty-three-day siege of Manus prison in 2017 include Hass Hassaballa and Mohamed Adam, whose posts detail the deliberate deprivation in which Australian authorities cut off food, water, medical supplies, and electricity as the refugees protested the conditions of their ongoing detention. Shaminda Kanipathi also published regularly while detained on Manus Island.

Now that he has resettled as a refugee in Finland, he continues to write about his experiences of incarceration.

The Imprisonment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children

In what follows, I will discuss and describe the detention and mistreatment of First Nations (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander) children on mainland Australia. These examples are distinct from the refugee stories described above, but the mistreatment by the colonial settler state of Australia is a common thread running through them, as is the potential of technologized means of resistance and documentation.

A young male body, clad only in long white pants, is in a bare white room, slumped and restrained on a large adjustable roller seat, shackled at the wrists, ankles and shoulders. A white spit hood covers the entire head of the young person, wrapped around his neck with a thick black ribbon. The detail that identifies this image as modern rather than medieval is the metal nature of the restraint chair. It is July 2016, and the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, the national broadcaster, is showing an hour-long documentary *Australia's Shame*,²⁶ exposing the practices at the Dondale Youth Detention Centre in the Northern Territory. The documentary reveals the systematic mistreatment of children, predominantly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. The story of one boy, Dylan Voller, the 17-year-old boy mentioned above, is central to the story, although many other cases of abuse were shown, including the regular tear gassing of teenagers. The airing of the documentary sparked worldwide outrage and the government initiated a Royal Commission, an independent panel to investigate the circumstances and make recommendations. While the carceral archipelago, Manus Island and Nauru are invisible zones for journalists and the scrutiny that comes with it, in the case of the Dondale Youth Detention Centre, it was CCTV footage from inside the facility that allowed journalists to reveal the monstrosities and horrors to the public. It turns out that the technologized securitization of prisons also enables digital scrutiny of practices of harm and violence.

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²⁶ "Video: Australia's Shame," Four Corners, ABC News, July 25, 2016, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-07-25/australias-shame-promo/7649462>.

The Royal Commission recently presented its findings and uncovered a systematic approach to the punishment of children in Juvenile Detention Centres and also in adult prisons that constitutes torture. It has emerged that the Northern Territory is not alone in this practice. The states of Western Australia and Queensland were also found to be isolating and excessively punishing children, particularly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, in detention centers and prisons.

Banksia Hill Youth Detention Centre, the only youth detention center in Western Australia, detains up to 600 children each year, sixty-three percent of them are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and many of them have severe neurological impairments. This detention center has been found to regularly hold children in solitary confinement and uses the practice of restraining bodies of children called folding-up. In a documentary from 2022, such restraint involves guards forcing a handcuffed child onto their stomach, crossing their legs behind them and sitting on them.²⁷ This practice is banned in other juvenile prisons because of the risk of suffocation and death. In Australia, children as young as ten are incarcerated in juvenile detention centers.

In the state of Queensland, it was found that boys as young as thirteen are systematically isolated in their cells for up to twenty-four hours a day at the Cleveland Youth Detention Centre. A thirteen-year-old Aboriginal boy, referred to as Jack in a Human Rights Commission report, spent a total of forty-five days in a cell while awaiting trial. The boy's mother said her son claims he was not given water for extended periods in solitary confinement.²⁸

In examining the experiences of refugees imprisoned in remote islands and the mistreatment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in Australian prisons, the transformation of the body as flesh in racialization into a body as digital prosthesis of resistance becomes clear. Death, injury, and torture at the border occur at, across, and because of the sovereign, territorial border out-

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²⁷ "Video: Locking Up Kids: Australia's Failure to Protect Children in Detention," Four Corners, ABC News, November 14, 2022, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2022-11-14/locking-up-kids-australias-failure-to-protect/101652954>.

²⁸ Ellen Fanning, "Queensland Government May Have Broken Own Laws by Locking 13yo in Detention Cell for Up to 24 Hours a Day," ABC News, March 15, 2023, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2023-03-15/qld-youth-crime-human-rights-watch-house-detention/102093378>.

lined earlier, imposed is a deliberately limited application of responsibility for life and death. Yet forms of resistance continue to exist.

The body in pain and the causes of that pain are the focus, which brings the threads together. Reflecting on the body's response to pain and torture, as seen in the sites of refugee detention and also the detention of First Nations children in Australia, show how the world is made and unmade by the body in pain.²⁹

The object relation, here to digital devices and other technologies such as CCTV cameras as bodily prostheses, becomes an expression of connection and storytelling. The use value of things³⁰ are a relation that connects, telling stories but also recording abuses of the body. Refugees in remote sites of incarceration use mobile devices as an extension of the human hand. This digital device they hold reaches to all corners of the world, transmitting the affective register from son to mother. It sends textual and visual content produced in places of torture and detention to collaborators in countless locations.

The Racial State and Contemporary Bordering Practices

I now return to the concepts of border and race by reflecting on the examples discussed above and the relation to body and digital prosthesis. The deeply racialized histories of colony and empire, and the connections between these histories and modernity, liberalism, and capitalism, demand attention to unpick contemporary bordering practices and logics that manifest in punitive borders.³¹ State racialization of minoritized populations is evident in institutions such as hospitals, schools, and churches, which have been normalized over time as le-

²⁹ Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985).

³⁰ Ahmed, *What's the Use?*

³¹ See Michael Grewcock, "Australia's Ongoing Border Wars," *Race and Class* 54, no. 3 (January–March 2013): 10–32, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0306396812464010>; Michael Grewcock, "'Our Lives Is in Danger': Manus Island and the End of Asylum," *Race and Class* 59, no. 2 (October–December 2017): 1–20, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0306396817717860>; Satvinder S. Juss, "Detention and Delusion in Australia's Kafkaesque Refugee Law," *Refugee Survey Quarterly* 36, no. 1 (March 2017): 146–67, <https://doi.org/10.1093/rsq/hdw020>; Claudia Tazreiter, *Asylum Seekers and the State: The Politics of Protection in a Security-Conscious World* (London: Routledge, 2004); Tazreiter and Tofighian, with Boochani, "Spectres of Subjugation."

gitimate practices in governing populations.³² In the Australian context, colonial settlers' systems and practices of governance directed against Indigenous populations since violent colonization in 1788 demonstrate systematic violence and annihilation of minoritized populations premised on racial hierarchies assigned to human life.³³ Nursing facilities have often been the sites of such systematic practices carried out on Indigenous Australians.

Racial capitalism commodifies life itself, with the legacies of colonialism deferring or indeed masking responsibility for crimes (slavery, land theft, cultural genocide, etc.), perpetuating gross violations of the fundamental rights of humans and other living entities—as “human flesh” and other life forms are treated merely as resources.³⁴ Racialization occurs when discrimination creates artificial hierarchies according to entirely arbitrary categories or identities: skin color, sexual preference, etc. Over time, the systematized ways in which some living beings are treated as expendable “thing” or as waste become imprinted in systems of power and dominance, as well as in social attitudes and mentalities. Racialization, then, refers to the myriad discriminations that create hierarchies of values that do real harm to the living entities devalued in these neocolonial processes, as well as the contemporary manifestations of these processes and values. The exploitation of resources and the unlimited use of living entities as “flesh” rather than precious life occurs in myriad material and immaterial ways. The transformation of humans into flesh is perhaps most clearly seen in slavery.³⁵ Robinson estimates the dollar value of “lost lives” and “theft” in enslavement—a value that is enormous using the liberal actuarial logic of compounding time on money. Looking at Achille Mbembe’s theory of necropolitics, we see that the multi-generational, and indeed, multi-species impacts of colonial practices of theft of living beings and resources through cycles of colonial expansion over

³² Braidotti, *Posthuman*; Donna J. Haraway, “The Biopolitics of Postmodern Bodies: Constitutions of Self in Immune System Discourse,” *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 1, no. 1 (Winter 1989): 3–43, <https://doi.org/10.1215/10407391-1-1-3>; Mbembe, *Critique of Black Reason*.

³³ See Moreton-Robinson, *White Possessive*; Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus*; Jasbir K. Puar, *The Right to Maim: Debility, Capacity, Disability* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017); Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds, *Drawing the Global Colour Line: White Men’s Countries and the International Challenge of Racial Equality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

³⁴ Mbembe, *Critique of Black Reason*; Mbembe, *Necropolitics*; Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus*.

³⁵ Robinson, *Black Marxism*.

the past centuries are still felt today in the form of contemporary inequalities, poverty, and violence in many parts of the world.

Conclusion

It is noteworthy that the descriptions of debordering, post-border worlds, and “more-than-human” borders described in this paper, point to the persistence of the colonial imaginary in contemporary life and geopolitics. This geopolitics manifests itself in forms of racism, discrimination, and erasure that can be observed in the systematic devaluation of certain categories of humans and many other forms of life and ecological systems. The migrant body, as well as the Indigenous body, are particular targets of state control, restraint, and separation, subject to punitive sanctions by the state. The historical treatment of Indigenous population in Australia and elsewhere continues today in cycles of violent subjugation.

The activists and theorists I refer to in this paper collectively offer a powerful critique of the racial capitalist necropolitics that cause the pain I describe. A key aspect of the nihilism of the systems of domination and violence is aptly characterized by Wendy Brown’s assessment of the end-stage of neoliberalism, which she summarizes as follows: “Free, stupid, manipulable, absorbed by if not addicted to trivial stimuli and gratifications, the subject of repressive de-sublimation in advanced capitalist society is not just libidinally unbound, released to enjoy more pleasure, but released from more general expectations of social conscience and social comprehension.”³⁶

The harms and pains described in this paper are profound. They undo the world. The forms of resistance, often in creative forms, simultaneously point to new ways of making the world.

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