



## **Migratory Victims of War: Syrians as the Homines Sacri**

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### **Abstract**

The civil war broke out on March 15, 2011 with the political tension between either domestically legitimate or illegitimate actors in Syria so that many people had impelledly or forcedly to migrate neighboring countries via crossing the land or maritime boundaries. These demographic transitions, in which many people, particularly children lost their lives, led admittedly European and Middle Eastern authorities to pursue the state of migratory exception policies. The state of exception revealing the homo sacer through including the exclusion of bodies, considering the use of Giorgio Agamben, corresponds to the temporary suspension of de facto legal norms, but the permanent state of this temporality. By problematizing the exemplary cases from European and Middle Eastern countries, this paper therefore copes not only with the exclusion of Syrians as homines sacri who are the subject of inclusionary techniques with regard to the spatial management of boats, cities and camps but the outlawry of existing juridico-political capabilities, also which may flexibly rule over the ways encompassing their lives and deaths.

**Key words:** Syrians, homo sacer, death boats, hospicide, bare life and inclusive exclusion.

### **Introduction**

The civil unrest vengeanceably boosting in Syria, had been becoming the internal turmoil and triggered the harsh response of Syrian army. A group of military officers in the army opposed to Bashar al-Assad's authority to be more organized, founded Free Syrian Army (FSA) on 29 July 2011. Other armed groups such as Al-Nusra Front and Daesh (or IS), which took advantage of the civil conflict and self-described from the government and FSA in the country, however, began to

operate illegally. As those which produce jihadist rhetoric towards the West brought about the states such as the USA, France and UK to become involved in the course of fateful events, Russia's positioning itself alongside the Syrian regime in force and support to prevention of the dissidents' commitments, dramatically increased the extent of the domestic war in the region. Aggravating these uprisings and emergence of the terrorist organizations led to many civilians lost their lives as many who survived were forced to leave their homeland. Those seeking for asylums, on the other hand, have faced the truth of tightened border controls.

The restriction and securitization of Syrian people's freedom of movement as well as searching for asylum in other countries to escape from the persecution, frankly have uncovered the failure of the sincerity put in words by the states that accede to the 13. and 14. articles documented in Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Arendt had dealt already with how these rights were suspended in the refugee problem that emerged as a result of rising of totalitarian regimes such as Nazism and Stalinism as well as World War II that left many people stateless (1951). In doing so she propounded that the conception of citizenship subjugates people to be belonged to a certain identity stemming from nationality. In other words, if not being a citizen of any state, people fall into the bare life where the laws cannot be applied. Notwithstanding her contribution to the criticism of the concentration or "death camps" in Auschwitz is a site, in which thousands of people were tortured and left to die in Nazi's extermination centers in occupied Poland during World War II, today it is hard to detach the bare life from the subjects of politics like Syrian guests who may have been included for the exclusion in and out of the legal systems of host countries. This is because prior to decree whether a person may be murdered or that her/his live is matter at least, inclusionary systems circled by the juridico-political hegemony, should be put into force for mostly exceptional cases, which the legal structures are re-regulated by not norms but exceptionality (Huysmans 2006: 136).

Considering the issues of devalorizing Syrian people's life — so to say "becoming-other-than human" (Braidotti, 2011), the fact has foregrounded the politics producing liminal spaces that deepen the asymmetry of power. Domination of indistinctive zones driving Syrians to be the potential hazards for the governances also, as Agamben highlights by utilizing a figure called homo sacer in Roman criminal law, stands for the resurrection of ultimate sovereigns who may kill a man without any accusation but this man may be not sacrificed as well (1998: 104). Although Foucault remarks a text projecting the era, in which the sovereign form of power manifesting itself

through the right to kill when its self-existent is in jeopardy (1990: 136), Agamben brings these homicidal policies as the authoritative reflection of governances to present — thanatopolitics as such, by enjoying the idea of exception developed by Schmitt and Benjamin.

To Benjamin, the laws that warrant sovereign to proclaim the exception, are the juristical implications of murderousness, as the absolute form of power has capability by nature that exacts the divinity of violence excluding the laws beforehand (1978: 287). Schmitt has deliberately expanded the degree that the exclusion of laws through the state of emergency by drawing on the example of Constitution of the Weimar Republic (1918-1929) that allowed the presidents to take exceptional measures under the certain conditions that the sovereign feels its integrity in danger (2005). Monopolizing the power on one hand and thus suspending the existing legal system, was the novel determinant of what “the emerging normals” forecast the bodies even if defined as “the first parliamentary democracy in Germany.” Despite the fact that conceptualization of state of emergency featured by modern politics, to Agamben, as obscuring the threshold between the political and natural/biological subjection of human being, the exceptionality proposed through the temporality of abolishment of laws, has assumed as the prevailing view of the contemporary politics (2005). In other words, he enwidens and herby oversteps the bounds of the understanding of “concentration camp” characterized by Arendt, since the camp is the new paradigm of today as pervading across the globe.

The state of exception as the implicit but compelling hegemony therefore includes extrajudicial facts casted by the bare life in which de-subjectifying the biopolitical borders opens the gate to the sovereign power (Agamben, 1998: 6), who has the right to be able to suspend the normative realms by making use of forceful action. Temporarily suspension is ostensibly considered as the abolishment of legal act; so to speak, suspending the set of omnipresent techniques that copes with the optimization of social bodies (Lazzarato, 2002: 104), for a length of time; however, deactivating the biopower which makes possible “to foster life or disallow it to the point of death” (Foucault, 1990: 138), comes permanently into question. By entertaining this suggestion, today the legal programs followed by the Western and Middle Eastern governments, might give us immense insight into how the Syrians are transformed from being subjects into homines sacri confronting the inclusive legislations to be excluded not only within borders but also on the migration routes. Additionally, these policies give a closer look on the inclusionary exclusive

practices entangling with the operation of indistinctive zones as a result of the disagreements among the neighboring countries where the admittance crisis of Syrians have acceleratingly mounted in the beginning of 2011 onward.

Taking a look at the number of Syrian refugee by the host country, while Turkey takes first place in ranking, it is respectively followed by Lebanon, Jordan, Germany, Iraq, Egypt, Sweden and other European and Middle Eastern countries (UNHCR, 2021). Syrian guests suffering from the coercive diplomacies in these host countries, has unfortunately been subjects of the violence. Yet, the victimization of Syrian people is not only relevant to the host countries but also transit stops that make the crisis an international issue as well. Furthermore, both the displacement of Syrians and the earlier migration flows towards Europe on account of the Arab Spring, which promises the democracy and stability in terms of socio-political and economic outcomes in the Arab countries, have set off the rise of populist parties as well as public opinion that produced the anti-immigrant discourses and preemptive policies (Nas, 2019: 62-64). In addition to securitizing policies against the irregular immigration waves, the harsh living conditions in the camps also drive the displaced to be the subject of new sovereign authorities and bio-political mechanisms within the bare life and to the death routes where the nakedness is deeply felt. This study thus will not only bring into relief how the death boats devalue the way many people, more in particular Syrians, die as well as their lives, however concisely discuss also what the maltreating and assaults they have experienced, if in the camps or in the countries they are hosted, within the scope of the naked life and biopolitics.

### **Mediterranean Basin as a Fatal Stop on Migration Route: The Death Boats**

The number of casualties since the beginning of the exceptional events in Syria, 2011, has been 207,000 and 25,000 of them have been children (Statista, 2021). The deaths on the grounds of either in the internal turmoil taking place in the region or on the roads to the host or transit countries' land or maritime frontier, could not unluckily be detained by the other Islamic countries or international organizations claiming to guarantee peace in the world. Even further, most of them

have started to pursue the stricter policies so as to keep the migrants<sup>1</sup> away from the borders. Those who cross the boundaries have nevertheless been impressed at the hands of some societal dynamics that lead them to become more precariat as well as de-subjecting them through the inclusionary practices to be excluded.

The fact that the Middle East has turned into a ring of fire and also neighboring countries have adopted rigorous border policies compels displaced people in the region to migrate by sea. When their migration routes are handled, it can be plainly seen that the flows of migratory movements are most especially directed towards Europe. The ideal destination by sea to Europe is what is more, the Mediterranean for migrants among these routes. Based on this, being more preferred of the Mediterranean by the migrants as a durable choice in comparison to the other migration routes, makes it the area with the highest number of fatalities and missings in pursuance of arriving at Europe. The latest data also proves this phenomenon since while the number of migrant fatalities recorded worldwide has reached at 1.510, the highest value contributing to this figure is the deaths in the Mediterranean basin, as its number is 823 (IOM, 2021).

**Table 1:** Top causes of death recorded in 2021

<b>Mediterranean Sea</b>	
Presumed drowning	Deaths: 690
Drowning	Deaths: 118
Unknown (presumed dehydration)	Deaths: 5
Hypothermia	Deaths: 5
Succumbed to burn injuries	Deaths: 2

Source: IOM, 2021

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout the study, the notion of im/migrant apart from its legal definition, will be employed to substitute for the concepts of both refugees, asylum seekers and sometimes foreigners. For detailed international juristic definition of these concepts, see: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), ‘‘Refugee or Migrant’’, March 2016, [https://www.unhcr.org/cy/wp-content/uploads/sites/41/2018/02/UNHCR\\_Refugee\\_or\\_Migrant\\_EN.pdf](https://www.unhcr.org/cy/wp-content/uploads/sites/41/2018/02/UNHCR_Refugee_or_Migrant_EN.pdf), accessed in 15 June 2021.

Estimated numbers in the causes of death as showed at Table 1, highly are pertaining to the drowning that elucidates why Mediterranean as a seaway is one of the deadliest destinations for migrants around the world. In this regard, why people mostly die from the drowning is related to their choice to migrate by boat as the unsafest tactic to move from one place to another. What is worse, the demonstration of how the worthlessness of people's deaths is that the way they die, is typically just guesswork. In addition to the physical conditions that have costed people's live, these deaths also have human-induced and politico-legal dimensions. The continental shelves with demarcated borders for the efficient use of the submarine parts of the countries are the most remarkable illustration of these extents so that the issue of capitalizing the natural resources offered by these shelves, is delimited by international legal adjustments and treaties. Drawing the lines of continental shelves with international legal rules and executions predetermines the legal status of those who attempt to migrate by sea within the country to which they aim at migrating or transit routes. This demarcation is by and large reflected in the international private and procedure law of countries by defining those who labelled as the refugees, asylum seekers, stateless or illegal immigrants.<sup>2</sup>

Formulating definition of the immigrants in the distinct categories is a sort of inclusionary activity based on the entanglement of juridico-political implementations with unclinking multiple sovereigns who have the power illegalizing and even pausing the migratory laws in force. That's why, as Agamben notes, the forms of life today subject bodies unprecedentedly to most violent ways as well as control them by laying the exclusion bare (1998: 114). Abandonment of bio-politics and hence implications of the violation bear the pure potentiality of suspending laws (Wall, 2005). Defining people's live only by the biological features that all people have in common, further, eases the ways of structurally inclusionary exclusive practices that sovereign is both inside and outside the exception (Agamben, 2005). On the other hand, the ubiquity of focal points where "the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute

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<sup>2</sup> For instance, the asylum and refugee law in Italy and Greece are broadly defined through Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948, UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees of 1951 and its 1967 Protocol, and European Union (EU) legislation on the Common European Asylum System. For further reading: Library of Congress, "Refugee Law and Policy: Greece", 30 December 2020, <https://www.loc.gov/law/help/refugee-law/greece.php>, accessed in 18 June 2021; Library of Congress, "Refugee Law and Policy: Italy", 30 December 2020, [https://www.loc.gov/law/help/refugee-law/italy.php#\\_ftn7](https://www.loc.gov/law/help/refugee-law/italy.php#_ftn7), accessed in 19 June 2021.

their own organisation” (Foucault, 1978: 92), tends to monopolize with the mere possession of power and legitimize itself through consolidating the subordinate actors who are able to be marked as the premodern sovereigns deciding on whether s/he is made die or let live. Notwithstanding the distinction between the bios defining as the qualification of life by using of exclusive operation as well as subjecting the bodies with politico-juridical mechanisms and zoē — natural/bare/naked life being associating with all living things in Aristotle’s political approach, Agamben basically emphasizes disappearing these fractional lines with explaining how to be brought the bare life into the bios (Finlayson, 2010: 97-98).

The fact that many people, in particular Syrians, who were despotically displaced, has today sought to migrate from the Middle East to European countries such as Cyprus, Italy, Greece, Malta, Croatia and Spain that have the continental shelf in Mediterranean basin by crossing the sea, leads them to encounter inclusionary exclusion acts in their migration routes. Their implementations braced by the international legal treaties, make Syrians restrictive and inclusive to be excluded and hence obtain the legitimacy in order for resorting to violence beforehand so that the countries as being able to be described as the sovereigns, can commit the forceful action to those who are perceived as the acute threat. Intervening in the flows of migrant populations to the southern parts of Europe by force, has therefore resulted in that not only many lose their lives but their way of death trivializes in the Mediterranean as a zone of indistinction as well. In this sense, the most prominent evidence about how people’s way of life reduced to the nakedness — devaluation of death as such, is that the forces or coast guards of destination countries sink the vessels of asylum seekers. The sovereignty of the guard officers essentially includes those who are drowned in the sea through not being sacrificed them; however, they may be murdered. The bare life of the asylum seekers’ lives in middle of the sea, as recently has thus equalled to what the principle of being a homo sacer is. Not only Syrians, of course, but also many people from African countries as well as other parts of Middle East, deliberately have been sailing towards death.<sup>3</sup> The shipwrecks in the

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<sup>3</sup> International Organization for Migration stated that at least 172 asylum seekers are thought to have drowned as 3 ships sink over last 3 days. For further info: TRT World, “At least 170 migrants found dead in Mediterranean this week”, 23 April 2021, <https://www.trtworld.com/africa/at-least-170-migrants-found-dead-in-mediterranean-this-week-46150>, accessed in 21 June 2021.

Mediterranean are one of the pivotal causes of these deaths given the unsafe conditions and what is worse, people are left to die in the Central Mediterranean.

**Image 1:** A Death Boat in the Central Mediterranean



Photo by Anadolu Agency, 2021.

Returning to Syrian people's fatal journey, the leading sovereigns that have to right to suspend the international legal regulations and norms without any declaration of emergency<sup>4</sup> in the basin, generally speaking consist of internationally recognized actors such as Frontex (European Border and Coast Guard Agency), armed forces and coast guards appointed by the countries that have the maritime boundary in Mediterranean. When it comes to the chain of non-sacrificial events that pave the novel roads to Syrians how to become a homo sacer, the first exceptional intervention come to mind that the Greek officials sink the boats of those who hope to reach at Europe as crossing the Mediterranean and Aegean seas or the coast guards leave them to the death such as drowning, hypothermia, and dehydration in the centre of these seas. For instance, according to a footage recorded by Turkish fishermen in the Mediterranean, a Greek boat capsized the refugee

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<sup>4</sup> The state of exception or emergency is the new paradigm of contemporary politics; therefore, there is no need to proclaim it again, in particular when it comes to the refugees. For further reading: Giorgio Agamben, *Means Without End. Notes on Politics*, trans. Vincenzo Binetti and Cesare Casarino, Minnea: University of Minnesota Press, 2000.



vessel and moreover, its people were left dead.<sup>5</sup> Frontex, which is ultimately responsible for European Union border security, has also supported Greece to unlawfully push Syrians back to Turkey's sea waters<sup>6</sup> (Çetin, 2020). Additionally, the silence of officials in NATO that witness this violation have offered us another example of how those who are in search of a safe place, have been ignored by the actors and institutions in the marine and coastal environment of Mediterranean basin. The exclusionary practices of the Greek police and officers against Syrians are not only limited to the seaways, but also their inhumane implementations and violence have maintained its severity on account of Turkey's opening of the border gates providing passage to Europe in February 2020 and subsequently clustering thousands of people throughout the EU-Turkey border. To put a finer point on these inclusionary exclusive fullfilments, many who have taken steps in the direction of EU borders, either are gunned down or exposed to the torment.<sup>7</sup> By including the bare life of those who take the liberty in order to cross the border, just like other Southern European countries, Greece with the cooperation of EU's agencies excludes "many illegalized immigrant groups", especially Syrians, in various and profaned ways.

Capsizing or shooting the vessels of the migrants is not just a way of exclusion but they knock up the human trafficking, abuse and exploitation. Syrians, particularly on the migration routes to EU, are trivially deceived and defenseless to the abuseful commitments by the hope mongers via

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<sup>5</sup> For the record, Aljazeera Turk, "Yunan teknesi mülteci botunu batırdı", 14 August 2015, <http://www.aljazeera.com.tr/haber/yunan-teknesi-multeci-botunu-batirdi>, accessed in 21 June 2021.

<sup>6</sup> For the record, Anadolu Agency, "AB gücü FRONTEX Yunanistan'ın sığınmacılara yönelik ihlallerine ortak oldu", 27 July 2020, <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/dunya/ab-gucu-frontex-yunanistanin-siginmacilara-yonelik-ihlallerine-ortak-oldu/1923887>, accessed in 15 June 2021.

<sup>7</sup> A Syrian were shot by a Greek police in Ipsala border gate. More detailed info: Cumhuriyet, "Yunanistan'a geçmeye çalışan Suriyeli göçmen vurularak öldürüldü", 2 March 2020, <https://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/haber/yunanistana-gecmeye-calisan-suriyeli-gocmen-vurularak-olduruldu-1724505>, accessed in 15 June 2021; Many migrants has been subjected to the violence by Greek coast guards and the Greek authorities kept their silence. For more detailed info: Emre Bal, "Yunanistan'a göçmenleri geri itme, dayak ve işkence suçlaması AIHM'e taşındı", *BBC News*, 27 April 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler-dunya-56887194>, accessed in 18 June 2021; Many Syrian who escaped from the persecution in their homeland and hope to re-build "a qualified life" in a new place have been exposed to the torture by Greek guards. For further info: En Son Haber, "Yunanistan'da mültecilere işkence", <https://www.ensonhaber.com/galeri/yunanistanda-multecilere-iskence-iddiasi#2>, accessed in 18 June 2021.

social media channels.<sup>8</sup> The challenges making displaced people more vulnerable, are regrettably one of the catastrophes that intensifies the extent of becoming a homo sacer. Those who are not “in” and “out” but on the threshold (Hussain and Ptacek, 2000), therefore do not become a subject; rather are de-subjectified on the sea as the fugacious presences of space. The permanency of this temporality, which makes the key sector human trafficking for the hope mongers, characterizes the exceptionality of dehumanised treatments towards those who cannot be sacrificed but may be killed. Although the migrant smuggling seems like based on the consent and trust (Mandić, 2017: 35-36), a presupposition of the legal normlessness in their homeland and suspension of the international laws in the seas.

After the Syrian civil war, human trafficking has become an increasingly popular market. It is seen that expressly those who are eager to pass from the camps in Syria to Turkey and Europe, appeal this unsafe route.<sup>9</sup> This option unhappily catalyzes the emergence of prerequisites that calls for the novel sovereigns and inherently incarnation of homines sacri in transit stops since they have converted into a body portrayed only by its biological characteristics, rather than being a member of a political community (Žižek, 2002: 91). Accordingly, the human smuggling with its unsecured circumstances is one of the fundamental reasons that gives cause for the migrant fatalities and herby corollary pertaining to the trivialization of lives and deaths.

The countries bordering the Mediterranean basin, have not anymore welcomed the new comers on account of exceeding the capacity of migrant population within their frontiers. That’s why, either they have forcibly sent back to their origin country or the neighboring regions. On the other side, Turkey, where the Syrian population is at the peak, cannot take more asylum seekers in as having abandoned its open door policy and taken more securitizing and confined precautions inside and outside the borders. Among these conflicts, UNHCR’s report, at least six migrants or refugees per

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<sup>8</sup> Hope mongers in İzmir, Turkey, can easily find Syrians on social media networks and exploit their hope. For detailed info: Gökmen Ulu, “İnsan kaçakçılığının bedeli 1000 dolara indi”, *Sözcü*, 6 August 2015, <https://www.sozcu.com.tr/2015/gundem/insan-kacaciliginin-bedeli-1000-dolara-indi-902263/>, accessed in 17 June 2021.

<sup>9</sup> Human trafficking has become a booming market for smugglers in Northern Syrian camps. For detailed info: Madeline Edwards, “Smugglers report booming market as people try to escape Syria to Turkey”, *The New Humanitarian*, 25 June 2019, <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/news-feature/2019/06/25/syria-idlib-smugglers-escape-turkey>, accessed in 18 June 2021.

day have been passing away in the sea (2018), due to the failure of international legal adjustments and arbitrarily their infraction as well as the instability of socio-economic and political conditions in their origin country. Frankly, the fact that the governments prioritize their own internal and border security and hereby conduce to the deaths of people directly or indirectly has contextualized an exceptionality where the biopolitics making people live through the optimal systems no longer have a function in the Mediterranean. That means the officers authorized as the sovereigns have got the right to exclude those who are predefined through preexisted categories such as illegal immigrants or terrorists associated with the international protocols and conventions going through the legal basis what bounds the profane characteristics of included bodies in the death boats.

In spite of emerging the novel patterns for the inclusionary exclusive sanctions executed by the sovereigns in the Mediterranean and Aegean seas, millions of people manage to cross into Europe. Also those who fail to cross into Europe, opt for Turkey as a second asylum or transit country given its geopolitics as well as relatively socio-cultural similarities. These demographic transitions, however, rather than preventing them from becoming homo sacer, make further them the focus of this issue and may cause to be exposed them to the naked life; so to say, run across the deprivation and precarity amidst plenty in hosted countries.

### **Hospiticide: Inclusionary Exclusion of Syrians in EU and Turkey**

Eight European countries which receive the largest population of Syrians, are in turn Germany (572.818), Sweden (113.418), Austria (51.955), Netherlands (31.694), Greece (26.696), Denmark (20.046), Switzerland (18.755), and France (18.244); based upon accessed the latest data (Statista, 2019), whilst Turkey alone hosts 3.681.531 Syrian guests under the temporary protection status (UNCHR, 2021). The primary politico-legal account for this dissymmetry of population between Turkey and European countries, hinges on the EU-Turkey deals<sup>10</sup> which most often neglect the

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<sup>10</sup> The most remarkable consensus about the migrant crisis and refoulement between the EU and Turkey is “Turkey-EU Summit” that in addition to 3 million euros, the EU has considered to deliver another 3.5 billion euros to Turkey in order to keep hosting Syrians till 2024. For the document: Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs Directorate for EU Affairs, “18 March 2016 – Turkey-EU Summit Statement”, 5 July 2019, [https://www.ab.gov.tr/files/AB\\_Iliskileri/Tur\\_En\\_Realitons/18\\_march\\_2016\\_turkey\\_eu\\_statement.pdf](https://www.ab.gov.tr/files/AB_Iliskileri/Tur_En_Realitons/18_march_2016_turkey_eu_statement.pdf), accessed in 14 June 2021.

human rights and factor principles. Even though the number of Syrians in Europe is relatively lower compared to Turkey, ascending migrant density has culminated in the rise of anti-immigrant public opinion and xenophobia. And what is worse, far-right and populist parties in some European countries<sup>11</sup> have come to the forefront position in politics with the votes they took. On the other hand, despite the fact that Syrians have been taken in Turkey with temporary protection status, this regime is extensively criticized,<sup>12</sup> now that it shows potential foundation entailing the violation of human rights and fails to yield long-term solutions as both confining and exhausting the hospitude exhibited by local and political actors (Fitzpatrick, 1999: 345).

Considering the political regulations designed by EU and Turkey for Syrians, the policies are broadly speaking organized in favour of governmental hosts and agencies' preemptible interests rather than the migrants as the guest de-subjectified through hostipitality (Derrida, 1998). Notwithstanding a small portion of them has been naturalized, the host countries predominantly submit vast amount of Syrians to the inclusionary legal status such as refugee, asylum seeker, temporary and subsidiary protection with the exception of citizenship. This case nonetheless brings Syrians along experiencing inferior treatments wherever they are inhabited, particularly towns and cities; by extension, they are excluded by being treated as criminals. As well as that the criminalization and prolonging the stay of Syrians in the residential regions, casting a veil over the crisis with equivocal regulations and provisions instead of long-reaching arrangements, therefore sparks off the tension between hosting and hosted actors.

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<sup>11</sup> See detailed info about the discriminatory discourses of some populist parties against the migrants in Europe: Jon Henley, "Anti-immigration populists surge in fragmented Dutch elections", *The Guardian*, 21 March 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/mar/21/anti-immigration-fvd-party-wins-most-votes-netherlands-election>, accessed 15 June 2021; BCC News, "Germany's AfD: How right-wing is nationalist Alternative for Germany?", 11 February 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-37274201>, accessed in 15 June 2021; ITV News, "Nigel Farage says Brexit Party would reform politics, scrap fuel bill tax and promote anti-immigration message", 22 November 2019, <https://www.itv.com/news/2019-11-22/nigel-farage-says-brexit-party-would-reform-politics-scrap-fuel-bill-tax-and-promote-anti-immigration-message>, accessed in 15 June 2021.

<sup>12</sup> For a detailed criticism, see: Umut Pamuk, "Why They Keep Risking Their Lives: Syrians Under Temporary Protection in Turkey", *Humanity in Action*, October 2016, [https://www.humanityinaction.org/knowledge\\_detail/why-they-keep-risking-their-lives-syrians-under-temporary-protection-in-turkey/](https://www.humanityinaction.org/knowledge_detail/why-they-keep-risking-their-lives-syrians-under-temporary-protection-in-turkey/), accessed in 1 July 2021.

Looking at the interplay between local people and Syrians in terms of co-existing in Europe, to a great extent, it is witnessed that they are seriously ostracized from the society. As far as legal practices, in a collective sense, Syrian people are excluded in daily life and exposed to the humiliation. For instance, on May 2018, a racist man attacked a Syrian refugee family with his dogs in Magdeburg, a district in Germany where the right wing extremist AfD party has many supporters.<sup>13</sup> Along these lines, on April 2021, a 17-year-old Syrian teenager in Erfurt, Germany, was spat on and then kicked by a German tram passenger having said “This is my homeland. Wherever you came from, go away!” Meanwhile, the other passengers in the vehicle did not intervene and just watched this atrocity, which drew reaction a lot.<sup>14</sup> Although the police and authorities response to these segregationist events and racial prejudices, the failure of *de facto* norms and non-stop racist attacks are in consequence of the *ad hoc* policies that have potency to shift at any time and therefore flexibility, but have no limit, rather than working towards durable solutions for hosted Syrians. These illustrations clearly show us that the sovereignist paradigm embodied through the violence acted volitionally by the racists, transforms into the laws in an exceptional texture (Morgan, 2007: 61); so to speak, the collapsing of distinction between bios and zoē — hence, the lives of Syrians can be ended up just like with the camps in their homeland. Together with the insignificance of their lives, they may not be also sacralize due to the exclusion from the divine and human laws fascistically projected through the societal legacy rallied around *de jure* segregation (Jackson, 2006: 90).

The Netherlands is another EU country where the racist attacks and views subjugated Syrian migrants to the bare life, largely observed. By their demographic density and socio-cultural dynamics in comparison to the other Arab diasporas, Syrians guests that have been repelled the bare life both whereby socio-politics and daily practices in the Netherlands, are one of the largest Muslim groups which cope with the covert and systematic racism. The most common discourse is

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<sup>13</sup> For detailed info and image: TRT Haber, “Almanya’da Suriyeli aileye köpeklerle ırkçı saldırı”, 21 May 2018, <https://www.trthaber.com/haber/dunya/almanya-da-suriyeli-aileye-kopeklerle-irkci-saldiri-366319.html>, accessed in 21 June 2021.

<sup>14</sup> For detailed info and image: Cüneyt Karadağ, “Almanya’da ırkçı bir Alman 17 yaşındaki Suriyeliye saldırdı”, *Anadolu Agency*, 26 April 2021, <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/dunya/almanya-da-irkci-bir-alman-17-yasindaki-suriyeliye-saldiridi/2221269>, accessed in 21 June 2021.

shaped at the hands of deporting Syrians and frequently instrumentalized under the election campaign and pledges. As Geert Wilders, chairman of PVV (Party for Freedom), known as the far-right party of the Netherlands, to exemplify, clarified his priority targets, so as to impose the given mindset, he patently pointed out the exigency that of deporting the Muslim people, more in particular Syrians.<sup>15</sup> The minatory language used against the guests in the country does not unfortunately remain at the political level, and it is also possible in everyday life to come upon the traces of this ethnocentrism that enhances the extent of nullification of Syrians' life. On December 2020, for instance, a Syrian family, who was attacked many times by their neighbor in the Dutch district, Heerlen, whose garden was thrown with explosives, and whose children were attacked by his dogs, took refuge in Belgium wherefore they could not get sufficient help from Dutch security forces.<sup>16</sup> On the other hand, Denmark has currently begun to annul the residence permits for Syrians, since according to Danish government with depending on a rambling report, it is safer now for them to return the home where the cases of missing, persecution and, arbitrary detention have dragged on.<sup>17</sup> The exempla, which can be multiplied, explicitly whether in public life or in political realms, are the implication of the camp producing Syrians as the *homines sacri* and essentially the overlapping sets of exceptionalism as a rule by some European states.

By comparison with many European countries, even though Turkish government has made some juridical initiatives like the temporary protection<sup>18</sup> offering unsustainable policies and limited social services, on including Syrians, not all social and political strata in the country assumed this inclusionary attitude. Rising hostility towards the Syrians in Turkey (Erdoğan 2020), can be very

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<sup>15</sup> For detailed info, see: Yusuf Özkan, "Hollanda'da aşırı sağcı lider Wilders'in seçim vaadi Suriyelileri sınır dışı etmek", *BCC News*, 21 January 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler-dunya-55695686>, accessed in 17 June 2021.

<sup>16</sup> For detailed info and image, see: Perspektif, "Hollanda'da Suriyeli Mülteci Aileye Komşu Eziyeti Video Kaydında", 20 December 2020, <https://perspektif.eu/2020/12/17/hollandada-suriyeli-multeci-aileye-komsu-eziyeti-video-kaydinda/>, accessed in 21 June 2021.

<sup>17</sup> For detailed info, see: Sertaç Aktan, "Mültecilerin oturumlarını iptal etmeye başlayan Danimarka: Artık Suriye'ye dönmeniz güvenli", *Euronews*, 15 April 2021, <https://tr.euronews.com/2021/04/15/multecilerin-oturumlar-n-iptal-etmeye-baslayan-danimarka-art-k-suriye-ye-donmeniz-guvenli>, accessed in 20 June 2021.

<sup>18</sup> Republic of Turkey Ministry of Interior Directorate General of Migration Management, "Temporary Protection in Law on Foreigners and International Protection", <https://en.goc.gov.tr/temporary-protection-in-law-on-foreigners-and-international-protection>, accessed in 15 June 2021.

often actualized in social media, election propaganda for the opposition parties<sup>19</sup> and sometimes daily life. It is even observed that the government officials on occasion make statements pointing that Syrians would be deported from the country through repatriation centers unless they apply to get temporary protected or other status<sup>20</sup> and further, the voter base of the ruling party as with the dissident groups, is not very satisfied with the presence of Syrians in Turkey.<sup>21</sup> Some mainstream media channels, above all, articulate Syrians as “fugitives, criminals, thieves, murderers, rebels, rapists, those with the potential to commit crimes and economic damage” and by this way, try to mold a public opinion (Erdoğan, 2018; Şen *et al.*, 2019). Despite the urgency and excessive population, in the face of this crisis, the government has relatively accomplished great things, but cannot thoroughly hinder the guests from being pushed forward the naked life. This is by reason of the prolonged stay of the Syrians, the policies not addressing enough the real circumstances, and emphasis on the Muhajareen and Ansar fraternity not receiving the same societal response and meeting the expectations for the social harmony to a certain extent.

Turkey has no longer followed the open door policy however seized on desecuritizing the responses to the humanitarian crisis (Bayır and Aksu, 2020: 326), and instantly deported those

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<sup>19</sup> For populist and discriminatory campaigns employed by the opposite party groups in Turkey, see: T24, “İyi Parti'den Suriyeliler için 3 aşamalı sınır dışı planı”, 16 December 2019, <https://t24.com.tr/video/iyi-parti-den-suriyeliler-icin-sinir-disi-plani-bayram-ziyaretine-gidenler-geri-donemeyecek-samla-ortak-komisyon-kurulacak.25102>, accessed in 17 June 2021; Turkish Forum, “Suriyeliler derhal sınır dışı edilmelidir”, <https://www.turkishnews.com/tr/content/2015/05/02/suriyeliler-derhal-sinir-disi-edilmelidir/>, accessed in 17 June 2021; Habertürk, “Gazipaşa Belediyesi Suriyelilere plajları yasakladı Belediye meclis toplantısında oy çokluğuyla alınan kararla, Suriyelilerin halk plajlarına girmesi yasaklandı”, <https://www.haberturk.com/antalya-haberleri/69688066-gazipasa-belediyesi-suriyelilere-plajlari-yasakladibelediye-meclis-toplantisinda-oy>, accessed in 10 June 2019; Hüseyin Koyuncu, “Bolu'nun yeni CHP'li Belediye Başkanı Özcan'dan ilk icraat: Suriyeli mültecilere yardım kesildi”, *Euronews*, 10 April 2019, <https://tr.euronews.com/2019/04/10/bolu-nun-yeni-chp-li-belediye-baskani-ozcan-dan-ilk-icraat-suriyeli-multecilere-yardim-yok>, accessed in 17 June 2021.

<sup>20</sup> Sertaç Bulur, “İçişleri Bakanı Soylu: İstanbul'da kayıtlı Suriyelilerle problemimiz yok”, *Anadolu Agency*, 24 July 2019, <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/turkiye/icisleri-bakani-soylu-istanbulda-kayitli-suriyelilerle-problemimiz-yok/1540154>, accessed in 17 June 2021.

<sup>21</sup> Fatma Sibel Yüksek, “Türkiye’de siyaseti kuşatan sorun: Suriyeli göçmenler”, *Euronews*, 13 September 2019, <https://tr.euronews.com/2019/09/13/turkiye-de-siyaseti-kusatan-sorun-suriyeli-gocmenler-siyasi-partilerin-tutumu-akp-mhp-chp>, accessed in 17 June 2021.

who get involved in crime regardless of its extent and magnitude. Worse still, in the eyes of society, others may also be prospective criminals and thus homo sacer. The stigma of being “ Syrian refugee”<sup>22</sup> which have been included in the temporary protection and public opinion nurturing the populist milieu in Turkey, overshadow the reciprocal continuum that purposes tranquilly the campaign of coexistence. This setting that externalizes the focal points in which Syrians’ lives are matter, encourage the local people and some officials to cast the inhumane treatments. On May 2021, Harmandalı Removal Center in İzmir, for example, came to the fore with allegations of torture and ill-treatment to the immigrants. This center has reportedly committed the violations of rights and behaved the immigrants like the criminals.<sup>23</sup> There are also accounts claiming that some who aspire to privily flee to Europe by boat via the Mediterranean sea, were caught, kept in prison cells, and their basic needs were met through the non-governmental organizations rather than the state until they were deported.<sup>24</sup> Syrians, who were welcomed with hospitality on their first arrival, have therefore become the focus of discriminatory attitudes that criminalize them, whether in digital<sup>25</sup> or daily life. In broader sense, they are being blamed and even scapegoating for any trouble in the country through hate speech and actions (Man, 2016). Privation of migration policy which is not ossified for the guests and their socio-legal status that enable to dematerialize the wall between biological and political spaces, set avowedly ground for the extention of becoming a homo sacer thereby detaining or excluding their bio-political calculations in a way. More clearly, since Syrians in Turkey are still viewed as temporary guests that may give rise to the cases of hospiticide as bearing a strong resemblance in the EU, they are subject to being kept away from biopolitics and also excluded by being kept within it.

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<sup>22</sup> When it comes to Syrians in Turkey, they are admitted as refugees in public life and commonly depicted with negative instances and images. For more info, see: Göksel Göker and Savaş Keskin, “Haber Medyası ve Mülteciler: Suriyeli Mültecilerin Türk Yazılı Basınındaki Temsili”, *İletişim Kuram ve Araştırma Dergisi*, 41, (2015): 229-256.

<sup>23</sup> Mehmet İnmez, “Göçmenlere işkence ve kötü muamele iddiasıyla Harmandalı Geri Gönderme Merkezi gündeme geldi”, *Cumhuriyet*, 18 May 2021, <https://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/haber/gocmenlere-iskence-ve-kotu-muamele-iddiasıyla-harmandali-geri-gonderme-merkezi-gundeme-geldi-1837080>, accessed in 17 June 2021.

<sup>24</sup> For detailed info: Dila Şimşek, “Mültecilere ‘suçlu’ muamelesi”, *Yenidüzen*, 18 January 2020, <https://www.yeniduzen.com/multecilere-suclu-muamelesi-122991h.htm>, 14 June 2021.

<sup>25</sup> For more detailed info about the digital hate speech against Syrians, see: Oğuz Kuş, “Dijital Nefret Söylemini Anlamak: Suriyeli Mülteci Krizi Örnek Olayı Bağlamında BCC World Service Facebook Sayfasına Gelen Yorumların Metin Madenciliği Tekniği İle Analizi”, *Istanbul University Faculty of Communication Journal*, 51 (2016): 97-121.



### **The Camps as a Site for Absolute Nakedness or (and) Novel Subjections**

According to UNHCR, the number of displaced people in Syria has been 13.4 million since the emergence of civil war and upheavals (2021). Given the fact that the humanitarian crisis has kept going after 10 years, the victimization of several people in the host countries, wherein they took refuge, and the camps, raises the concerns about their future. Many countries in the region, particularly the Middle Eastern and European ones, which are geographically close to Syria, nevertheless have been negatively influenced by the massive migration flows in social, economic and political terms. Due to the jeopardy reasonably, by which migratory forces impels the massive demographic transitions clustering round the certain part of borders, many states conducted a securitizing migrant policy paving the way for soaring the amplitude of the unjust treatments. Not securitization of the migrant policies corresponds only to the tangible threats but also their pre-existentiality through perception of the menaces (Wæver, 1995: 54-55). The enlargement of the camps is therefore essentially one of the implications that demonizes the migrants.

The Syrian refugee camps are the temporary but growing into permanent settlement areas straddling the Middle East, Southeast Europe and most especially along the borderline of Turkey-Syria. The internally or internationally displaced people living in these camps, where bare life overtly manifests itself, are struggling to survive and in jeopardy of having a close brush with death. Even though they try to hold on life with the help of NGOs and CSOs, as Agamben posits, the camps are the sites which involve the naked life in mere existence without any mediation but the withdrawal of biopolitics (2000: 40). By problematizing the totalitarianist nature of modern states and the human rights bonded to the citizenship, to this sense, Arendt denotes in her seminal work called *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, that once people left or were displaced from their home, they became stateless; so to speak, the scum of the earth (1951), just as Syrians live out as being deprived in tent cities with the perplexities of rights. The widest refugee camp where these tent camps were established is Zaatari Refugee Camp located in northern Jordan and it is now home to almost 80.000 Syrian refugees (UNHCR, 2021).

**Image 2:** Zaatari Refugee Camp in Jordan



Photo by U.S. Department of State

The camps under which the domination of multifocal sovereign powers holds an authoritative position, but where at the same time the ones displaced are subjected to varied forms of sheer subjectivation, are inexorably the zones of indistinction that the revivification of thanatopolitics has been employed as making the lives die, however allowing them live. According to the reports received by UNICEF, for instance, on March 2021, two children were killed in the al-Hol Camp<sup>26</sup> located in northern Syria where to Iraq-Syria border is the very close. Considering announced by the same report, the security conditions in the camp, also the safety of residents is on alarming levels due to the killings of 40 adults since the start of 2021. The al-Hol is not only a site, wherein unsolved homicides have been committed, but also under the occupation of some groups involved

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<sup>26</sup> For detailed info: United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), “Two children killed in Al-Hol Camp in Syria”, 24 March 2021, <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/two-children-killed-al-hol-camp-syria>, accessed in 15 June 2021.

in extremist and terrorist activities such as IS and YPG. The camp, in which the killings have surged in recent months,<sup>27</sup> gives also birth to the reproduction of radicalism and violence that is handed down from the current familial traits and political circles to the upcoming generations. Idlib is another prominent zone of indistinction that the nakedness conferring itself through the violation of cease-fire understandings by Assad regime and Russia. It has been said that as the Assad regime, Russia that bombed civilians from the air with the excuse of terrorism and costed many to become homeless and settle in tent cities since the first years of the civil war, lastly puts them into trouble by preventing humanitarian aid to the region.<sup>28</sup> Ceasing the aids which can be described as an act of massacre, declaredly strengthens the operation of pre-modern sovereignties by sizing the potentiality of those who try to survive in Idlib how to become a homo sacer.

The trail of this total destruction is not just about direct killing of displaced that deal with pre-conditioned vehemences as a consequence of ethnic cleansing; but related also to those who die from famine and contagious diseases; e.g., tuberculosis and Covid-19. Many, in particular children, who have become subjects of the fight between IS group and Kurdish-directed forces, battle against these natural conditions that caused 700 deaths in the al-Hol and Roj camps.<sup>29</sup> Those fleeing from the camps, on the other hand, are every so often criminalized and may be killed in connection with that neighboring countries stigmatize them as “the terrorists.” On June 2017, to illustrate, Jordanian border guards killed five people approaching from the area, near the Ruqban camp, in the event that the worries of Jordanian authorities about the accreving instability and terrorist attacks in the region.<sup>30</sup> Jordan, which cut off aid to the camp on the ground of terrorist actions operated by IS, furthermore, follows zero tolerance border policy that disregard the deaths

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<sup>27</sup> For more info, see: Bassem Mroue, “Killings surge in Syria camp housing Islamic State families”, *AP News*, 18 February 2021, <https://apnews.com/article/killings-surge-syria-camp-isis-families-1aef71d9c11cc4b9f77ac22fa205601b>, accessed in 20 June 2021.

<sup>28</sup> For detailed info and image: Mehmet Burak Karacaoglu and Esref Musa, “Syrians describe closure of Idlib border crossing to aid as mass murder”, *Anadolu Agency*, 4 July 2021, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/middle-east/syrians-describe-closure-of-idlib-border-crossing-to-aid-as-mass-murder/2293730>, 5 July 2021.

<sup>29</sup> For detailed info: Middle East Eye, “Syria refugee camps in northeast suffer 700 deaths, UN says”, 10 July 2020, <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/syria-northeast-people-died-refugee-camps-report>, accessed in 17 June 2021.

<sup>30</sup> For detailed info: Gardaworld, “Jordan: Five killed at Syrian border June 11”, 12 June 2017, <https://www.garda.com/fr/crisis24/alertes-de-securite/58411/jordan-five-killed-at-syrian-border-june-11>, accessed in 17 June 2021.

and lives of those who survive in much miserable condition of the tent cities. The vast swathes of the camps are hence not only sites whereupon bare life and deaths are perennially produced among the squabbles of militants, however blossom into the plants of nakedness where the innocent cannot be distinguished from the guilty as well.

**Image 3:** A Syrian Refugee Camp in Lebanon



Photo by Patrick Nicholson/Caritas

When it comes to the history of camps in Middle East, the inauguration of spatial management of displaced ones dates back to the very beginning of twentieth century. Even though Agamben underpins the idea of camp indelibly as “the hidden paradigm of the political space of modernity” (1998: 123), today the camps in Syria, have conversely reified the susceptibility to be a homo sace in an unconcealed manner and *vice versa* — may dodgily be the extent of “deep historical link of biopolitics”<sup>31</sup> (Foucault, 1991: 102), considering the novel subjectivities emerged by the coercive

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<sup>31</sup> For the detailed info about whether bare life is the biopolitical continuum or zone of indistinction, see: Thomas Lemke, “A Zone of Indistinction: A Critique of Giorgio Agamben’s Concept of Biopolitics”, *Outlines*, 1 (2005): 3-13.

humanitarian act of NGOs and governments.<sup>32</sup> For this reason, the camps are not just revealed in the visible form of bare life with its stigmas; e.g., terrorism and unlawfulness, but are addedly complexes that may come in possession of new biopolitical subjections through the humanitarian assistance offered by governmental and civil donors. In other saying, Agamben presumably mentions about the idea that “we are all virtually homines sacri” (1998: 115); but the comprehension of its pure form by the spatio-temporal differentiation<sup>33</sup> in the host countries, boats and camps, has shifted the course of how the attainment of bodies are included or excluded, given the manifolded power models like the humanitarian acts as a dire necessity that forms biopolitical parasitism and the concrete mechanisms certifying the unworthiness of migratory victims as a living death.

## **Conclusion**

Syrians deal, as the largest refugee group today, with varied spatial designs of natural life. Revealing of the nakedness through Syrians, is thus experienced by the indistinctive techniques and forms of power in boats, camps and the cities, whereabouts are they hosted. More specifically, they feel the anchoring in reality of being a prospective homo sacer in the death boats and camps, while they are repelled indirectly and sometimes directly in conjunction with flexibilized juristical acts, to the bare life in the host countries. Yet, it is also impartibly not possible to talk about the total annihilation of bio-political paths.

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<sup>32</sup> Mavelli in his article, discusses the refugee crisis and model of humanitarian government as related to the responses of the host governments such as German and British that have emerged the rationalities and meanings for hosted. On the other side, the patterns of biopolitics, can be also read through the aids supporting the economic and social life procured mostly by the international organizations and states in the camps. For further reading: Luca Mavelli, “Governing populations through the humanitarian government of refugees: Biopolitical care and racism in the European refugee crisis”, *Review of International Studies*, 43, no. 5 (2017): 809–832. And detailed info about the restoration of lives in the camps, see: OXFAM International, “Life in Za’atari, the largest Syrian refugee camp in the world”, <https://www.oxfam.org/en/life-zaatari-largest-syrian-refugee-camp-world>, accessed in 30 June 2021.

<sup>33</sup> For more detailed info about how the construction and changing nature of time and space use superimposed through the contemporary versions of coercive diplomacies, see: David Harvey, “Between Space and Time: Reflections on the Geographical Imagination”, *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 80, no. 3 (1990): 418-434.

The naked life, most obviously, has recently concretized through those who seek for better living conditions, safer place and prosperity in Europe, as their lives are devalued on the death boats and the modus they die, does not inherently have meaning to the ultimate bio-political sovereigns who have legal liability for killing them in Mediterranean basin. The death boats, in which Agamben's conceptualization of homo sacer smoothly materializes, do not only function as the relics of criminal memory occurs or meticulous definition of limits are refused; at the same time, traverses the nakedness with a processual mediation rather than a hidden one. That means the death boats as the premodern but everlasting survival instinct, are both substantive and liminal projection in that biopolitics can never exist till reaching at the self-responsibilized rationalities.

The racist attacks, discriminatory discourses and policies growing up in European countries and Turkey, consideringly the density of migrants, are the other depictions of inclusive exclusion that extend what the formulation of homo sacer has become. Notwithstanding the fact that these countries in question, perform inclusive practices and organize humanitarian aid campaigns for Syrians, inclusions can be also provoked by the criminalized patterns that are exclusionary over time and that are similar to the bareness. In the course of this exceptionality, where biopowers dominate by keeping the victims of war on the threshold, assorted sub-categories of the sovereigns such as party sympathizers, party leaders, officers and armed forces, are empowered as pathologizing being a refugee or migrant; i.e., Syrian or Muslim, particularly being in some parts of EU. In fact, the proliferation of different types of sovereigns both increases susceptibility of immigrants to becoming the homines sacri and constantly exceptionalizes its potentiality.

In the camps as the centres of bare life, this exceptionality can move in the opposite direction as the traces of novel subjectivization are encountered with the positive intervention and regulatory controls of international aid organizations and governmental bodies. Although the bare life is equipped with bio-political interventions, since the very beginning of human history, it has strictly continued to exist in disguise. Just like their premodern ancestors, furthermore, migrant children are completely born in this nakedness and subsist on the pure verge of both making live and die. The camps are therefore the offspring of spatial range of experiences in which the divergent veins of violence such as the bio-sovereign power, as well as the nakedness, are produced with all their spontaneity.

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