

4. Sarco-scopic Border: Flesh in Unsanctioned Migration

Ana Vişan, PhD candidate, Balsillie School of International Affairs

This paper develops the concept of sarco-scopic governance to describe how European border surveillance governs life through vitality rather than identity. In spaces of unsanctioned migration, technologies such as drones, thermal cameras, and heartbeat sensors render life perceptible as heat, motion, and breath—signal rather than subject. Drawing on Hortense Spillers’s distinction between body and flesh, the paper conceptualizes flesh as a condition of exposure prior to recognition. It distinguishes vitality-based detection from identity-based verification to show how governance operates through the perceptibility of life itself, tracing three registers: flesh as deviation, flesh as military vision, and flesh as postcolonial logic. Situated across critical migration studies, surveillance studies, and Black feminist theory, the paper theorizes non-recognition as a political outcome of technological governance.