

imre işmen

Running *stuck* in time

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Glossary

Asylum seeker: Someone seeking asylum, and the right to be a recognized refugee.

Refugee: A refugee, according to the Convention, is someone who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion. (1951 Refugee Convention, p3)

Migrant: Anyone, who has moved to another country to form a life within. For this paper, migrants will refer to those who don't have EU nationality.

Nation-state: "A nation-state is a form of polity which derives its political legitimacy from the claims that it represents a particular nation. This social organization is characterized by clearly demarcated territory, centralized political authority, and the propensity to legitimately monopolize the use of violence, taxation, education, and legislation over the territory it controls" (Malešević and Trošt, 2018, p. 1)

Bureaucracy: "In his classical conception, Max Weber (2009, p. 245) defined a bureaucracy as a 'permanent structure with a system of rational rules ... fashioned to meet calculable and recurrent needs by means of normal routine' (Abdelhady et al, 2020, p4), however, "In reality, bureaucracies are rarely neutral; they are almost always dominated by or favor certain privileged groups (often racial groups) over others; and they invariably end up giving administrators enormous individual personal power by producing rules so complex and contradictory that they cannot possibly be followed as they stand. Yet in the real world, all these departures from bureaucratic principle are experienced as abuses." (Graeber, 2015, p107)

Integration: Integration in sociological research is understood as 'socio-cultural integration' and 'socio-economic integration', and is a colonial knowledge production tool in which migrants and ethnic others are problematized with the assumption that they are not integrated because they don't individually fit the norms of Dutch culture, while such expectations are never set on Dutch individuals. (Schinkel, 2018)

EU: European Union

Frontex: Frontex, the European Border and Coast Guard Agency, supports EU Member States and Schengen-associated countries in the management of the EU's external borders and the fight against cross-border crime. (taken from website, <https://www.frontex.europa.eu/>)

COA: Centraal Orgaan Opvang Asielzoekers, Central Agency for Asylum Seekers

IND: Immigration and Naturalisation Department

MECS: Ministry of Education, Culture, and Science

Introduction:

This thesis aims to answer two broad questions, why and how.

I ~~am~~ was writing about the intricacies of combining social science theory with game design using my graduation project *Running Stuck in Time* as a case study.

Running Stuck in Time is a browser game on how to attain residency/refuge/asylum in the Netherlands.

The game aims to focus specifically on the countless bureaucratic obstacles, time-constraints and everlasting decision-making periods of emigration processes. Through different levels that players need to pass in order to stay in this country, it will offer a glimpse of how migration feels for nonimmigrants (or NonEU) while providing a witness for those who have been/going through migration. The prototypes for the levels are currently in the making.

An example of the levels is a dropbox that keeps running away from the cursor as you try to upload your passport. It is frustrating and relatable.

Although when I first started the project I wanted my thesis to function as a manual on how to combine academic research, (auto)ethnography and design. As the process went further, the route diverted.

Research Question: ~~How to form a methodology for a speculative design project? Case Study of non-EU migration simulation game?~~

Right now I find myself, not combining theory and prototyping as I had initially hoped I would. Instead, I am recording translations, interchangeable moments, actions, two different phrases to describe the same situation. I am doing this so I can keep on moving because the alternative is getting stuck running out of time.

The more I remain with this project, the more I try to remain here in this land, the more they get mixed up with one another. I can no longer tell whether my efforts are focused on making the project or keeping the life I built here. I read books on migration, then I talk to my friends about their experiences, and when I lay my head on my pillow, I don't know if the quote that got stuck in my brain was from the text or from my interactions. I try learning coding languages, I am learning Dutch.

```
console.log(whichIsHarder());
```

Ik weet het niet.

New Research Question: How to migrate/ how to design a game of migration? Can you even tell them apart anymore? If not, why is that?

This thesis will follow my journey. A journey filled with questioning, trying to make sense, trying to understand. I will start by trying to answer “why”. Why is it so hard to find a way to remain here? Why is the bureaucracy of migration a game with unknown rules? Do the rules even apply to those without citizenship? Do the same rules apply to everyone? Why do I want to make this game? Why do I want others to understand what everyone around me has been living?

The first chapter is structured as an auto-ethnographic anthropology paper. I answer the questions through literature review and through the interviews I had with my community.

The second part will focus on “how”. How to communicate the *why* so it resonates. Now that we know why we want to stay here, why it is intentionally difficult and why I want to make this game, I need to figure out the “how”. How to actually remain in this country? How to turn it into a game? How to ask for help, for feedback, for support and how to implement the ideas? How to keep it

engaging, educational and critical at the same time? How to stay honest and respect the privacy of my respondents? And maybe most importantly, how to keep on moving?

The second chapter is a set of instructions I have prepared for myself, these questions have action points as their answers, I need guidelines and direction¹.

¹ I use footnotes as a mode of talking to you directly, this is an artistic choice and preference. My language is more colloquial, tone more demanding, angry or tired. This is the tiny space in which I ask you to hold my emotions through this journey. This is my way of saying, “the author never left”.

Why?

What threatens our sense of safety, of security? What systems do we have in place to protect us from harm? Who would we reach out to in moments of danger, and do we have faith in such persons or organizations to protect our rights? Do we trust the structures set in place with the sole purpose of our protection, and what can we do if those systems turn against us? What can we do if we are not a part of the structures to begin with?

Within this chapter, to answer the aforementioned “why” questions, I will talk about migration bureaucracy as enacted by nation-states to deter migration, and its effects on refugees and migrants through the personal stories of my friends, responders, and the co-creators of the game.

This chapter will start with the different mechanisms of the nation-states and how they interact in ensuring rights and protection. I will proceed to discuss how borders are a series of practices to let *certain* individuals in, and leave others out through bureaucratic violence. This will be followed by an exploration of how time is used as a weapon for bureaucratic violence. Then, the requirements of being let in through the porous borders will be explained with the concept of deservedness. Finally, I will share another friend's story to include the different workings of the same mechanics when it comes to labor migrants. The chapter will end by connecting it back to the game, which brought us all here in the first place.

A friend of mine, was falsely accused of a crime back in the country he is from, partly due to his marginalized identity. After the police failed at locating the culprit, they decided anyone from close proximity with an identity already disfavored by the state would do. They needed a criminal to persecute and the innocence of my friend was the least of their worries. He didn't live in a country in which his rights as a citizen were protected, respected or even acknowledged.

I.I Nation-States

Our sense of safety and security is directly tied to the state we are a citizen of and reside in. Within the Netherlands, there is more faith in the legal system to protect us, and more hope that human rights would be taken seriously².

Security and citizenship correspond to two of the three distinct parts of a nation-state, according to David Graeber (2015). In his book *The utopia of rules on technology, stupidity, and the secret joys of bureaucracy*, he explains that even though we assume nation-states to be a single entity, it is actually a combination of increasingly separated three parts³; sovereignty, administration, and politics(2015). Sovereignty refers to the monopoly over legitimized violence (Graeber, 2015; Mbembe, 2019).

In his book *Necropolitics*, theorist Mbembe explains it as “the state could recognize no authority above it within its own borders”. The monopoly on legitimate violence can be explained by the state setting the possible legitimate reasons for death; “ ‘civilizing’ the ways of killing” and “attributing rational objectives” to it (2019, p77).

Administrative part of a state refers to the everyday workings, the paperwork, the tracing, and the records. Essentially, the bureaucracy (Graeber, 2015). Administration is the rules defining citizenship's boundaries, the paper trail ensuring it, and the street-level bureaucrats who interact with you to enact it. Thus, our sense of security (sovereignty) is tied to the (administrative) label of citizenship.

² source is your answer to the question, “If you knew you couldn't get another citizenship through your life would you prefer being born Dutch or Turkish?” Adopted from bell hooks teaching on making racism visible. (Teaching community, bell hooks, p 26 2003)

³ I don't necessarily agree with the separation between sovereignty and administration and the remaining of the essay will demonstrate why.

Politics refers to the popularity race of contemporary democracy, which is outside of the scope of the study⁴.

Countries in Northern Europe function as welfare states, “are known for their efficiency and the support that their national as well as local institutions of government enjoy among citizens” (Fitzgerald and Wolak, 2014 quoted by Abdelhady et al. 2020). Through efficient bureaucracy and financial abundance, they not only protect the safety of their citizens but provide secure living standards.

Within the welfare states, the lives of the citizens are insured (Mbembe, YouTube video). An insured life requires a reason for its death, an explanation, or a justification. As a contrast to insured lives, uninsured lives coexist within the state. The uninsured lives can be taken, abandoned, or exposed without any justification. This death can also be social, excluding people from the social life, or civil⁵ with denied or impaired civil rights (Mbembe, YouTube)⁶. The divide between the insured and uninsured lives is often racial and classed; however, the welfare state justifies the selective treatment of their residents through the lens of risk management (Abdelhady et al., 2020).

Refugees, in this context, are positioned as potential risks to; the safety of the country (through potential ties to terrorism), the efficiency of the welfare state (framing them as burdens), or as disrupters of social cohesion (they can’t adapt to Western values). This assumed risk of refugees and migrants triggers the “need to control the flow of bodies as well as the control of individuals who embody the perceived risk” (Abdelhady et al., 2020).

I.II Borders

With a desire to hold on to sovereignty, borders are utilized as “mobility governance”, and as a “policing device” (Campesi, 2021). They are no longer the physical boundaries of a state protected or expanded through wars⁷, but rather, porous and ever-moving structures, arranging their openness based on different identity markers (mainly nationality and capital) of those moving through them. They are enacted as a series of practices rather than stuck physical boundaries of the country through outward and inward expansions (Walter, 2004 as taken by Parker et al. p586, 2009).

The porousness determines who is granted free access, who is supposed to be screened meticulously, and whose entrance is to be prevented at all costs. When this is the aim, the question arises...

What is the appropriate amount of violence that needs to be enacted to maintain the safety of the relatively safer countries? How brutal can the borders be so that the dangers from the outside don’t come through? How to protect the human rights of the citizens from the non-citizens who have already found their way in?

When it comes to an outward expansion of border practices, it takes the form of militarized organizations.

Frontex is repeatedly, routinely, and deliberately committing human rights violations at the European Borders. Illegal pushbacks, refusing to take accountability for partners’ human rights violations within operations led by Frontex, detainment of asylum seekers, and attempting to

⁴ Although increasingly the politicians are using migrants and refugees as the scapegoats of falling standards of living, which leads to harsher administrative processes to be enacted (Abdelhady et al., 2020).

⁵ Maybe one of the most prominent examples of it is the prison industrial complex, leaving huge portions of a population outside of the civil processes.

⁶ The dichotomy between the insured and uninsured lives, according to Mbembe, is a foundational element of democracy. Read more on Necrotemporality (2019)

⁷ Although there are still contested borders, and illegal occupations around the world, the most prominent one being Israel.

criminalize humanitarian work are all parts of the EU protecting its borders. (*Mediterranean the deadliest sea for refugees and migrants, says UN agency*, 2012. AFP and AP, 2026)⁸.

The game, and the remaining parts of this thesis, focuses particularly on the inward expansion of borders through migration bureaucracy and bureaucratic violence.

I.III Bureaucratic Violence

Bureaucratic violence manifests as “not physical(ly)” but mostly as “the denial of rights and freedoms, especially the right to appeal and resist the injustices of power” (Arendt, 1969 as taken by Abdelhady et al., p. 13, 2020). Bureaucratic violence has its roots in colonial bureaucracy of excess surveillance and control of vulnerable populations (Abdelhady, p14, 2020). It forms different levels of constituency with varying agency on the individual's or groups' deservedness. For migrants and refugees, bureaucracy repositions the borders of citizenship and integration.

Arendt explores the rights of men through the space refugees occupy within her writings. As the rights are provided by the nation-states, being a refugee leaves the individual without protection and recognition. Within a world composed of families of nation-states, the responsibility of protecting their rights through democracy (via elections or revolution) is placed upon the citizens of a state (Arendt, 2007).

However, refugees, as outsiders, lack both the means and the responsibility of voting. It is not that they can't voice their opinion, but no entity exists to hear it out⁹ (Arendt, 2003). Leading to what has been defined as civil death, and positions them as a part of the uninsured population.

As a refugee, the rules that apply to the citizens don't apply to you. The porous borders are not the physical boundaries of the country; they let people in hierarchically based on certain identity markers. A Non-EU student cannot work for more than 16 hours and needs a sponsor, an asylum seeker owes 3/4th of their wages to the government (Ministerie van Justitie en Veiligheid, 2026)... The bureaucracy functions as a border around the economy and Dutch society, regardless of the individual's existence within the state's physical borders.

How well a newcomer integrates into a country is determined by socioeconomic factors; their contribution to the labor market and social life are the main determinants (Schinkel, 2018). When their labor participation is impaired through bureaucracy, their integration into society is also hindered. The asylum seekers, although allowed to legally exist in the Netherlands, don't have the same rights and benefits as citizens.

Some of the ways migration bureaucracy aims to deter incomers is through control over time, ambiguity of the rules, and continuous movement of the migrant body (Martinez, 2023). Take my friend's story for example...

When he first arrived here, he had to register at Ter Apel, which is the biggest one of two registration centers within the Netherlands for asylum seekers. The other one being in Schipol Airport and only reserved for entries through planes.

Because of Ter Apel's limited capacity, it can take multiple days of waiting just so one can declare themselves as an asylum seeker.

In order to be placed within a COA center, the intake interview needs to take place, which starts the second waiting period in which temporary camps are arranged. Through this the migrant body is being moved from camp to camp awaiting for an available interview slot, legally all is stagnant, physically, movement is continuous.

⁸ As the outward expansion is outside of the scope of this study, I would recommend Policing Mobility Regimes Frontex and the Production of the European Borderscape for further interest (Campesi, 2021).

⁹ of course increasingly there are protests and they have agency (Anderson, 2014)

After the initial interview takes place, asylum seekers obtain the right to be placed (until their asylum decision arrives) at a COA center. Everyday their temporary camps post lists of those eligible to leave for the next day. If you miss your name when it's called out and miss your bus, you need to find a way to reach the center on your own.

After you reach the COA center, the periods of waiting sprinkled with interviews done by overworked and underpaid officials, aided by uncaring and tired translators continue. They are asking the same questions over and over again trying to determine your deservedness¹⁰ of asylum, and trying to get as much information on human smuggling routes, so you will be the last one to enter through those means.

I.IV Temporal Violence

This period of waiting without knowing when you may get an answer, the constant movement of your body with little to no notice of when and to where is wearing for the individual. Time becomes a prominent weapon of bureaucratic violence. “Disciplinary institutions rely on mechanisms such as surveillance, assessment, the organisations of space, timetables, and daily routines, which ensure that people behave in certain ways or are being disciplined without having to resort to the use of corporal violence”(Abdelhady et al, 2020). The control over time, through an elongated and ambiguous waiting period “molds a particular submissive form” amongst those it is enacted upon (Auyero, 2012). In *Patients of the State*, Auyero analyzes temporal violence and power over time as a method of controlling populations, with regard to poor populations in Argentina. He explores the unending and ambiguous bureaucratic procedures in blocking poor people from accessing simple administrative functions of the state. “Domination works, through yielding to the power of others; and it is experienced as a waiting time: waiting hopefully and then frustratedly for others to make decisions, and in effect surrendering to the authority of others”(ibid, p4).

This control over time and its effect on subordination is analyzed in relation to migration by various scholars (Necrotemporality, Time and migrant other, and On Stuckness and Sites of Confinement). The camp structure is understood and explained as a trap enclosing the immigrants stuck within time.

Of course, it is never the time that stops, but rather you are supposed to remain immobile. Through this stuckness within time, ways of actions and agency flow through relations and personal narratives(Kohli and Kauko, 2018. Auyero, 2012).

Temporal violence is a part of bureaucratic violence. The countless interviews, continuous moving, and the need to sign in within the COA center you have been placed at are the bureaucratic enactments of the state’s control over asylum seekers’ time.

Of course, as the Netherlands is nicer(?), there are possible modes of action through this waiting period.

Technically, once you enter the system of awaiting a decision, you can study and work, and are eligible for government loans. However, 3/4th of your wages are taken as “accommodation payment amongst other things”, you are free to bring home up to 269¹¹ Euros per month. If you make more than the fees of COA centers (the amount is not disclosed anywhere) you are free to keep the remaining money (Ministerie van Justitie en Veiligheid, 2026).

¹⁰ More on this later.

¹¹ a fast calculation places the fees of COA above 510 euros for a room divided by curtains, shared with 3 other people, and oftentimes hard to reach locations (deducted 300 for the weekly allowance and one meal a day which I am not sure if it continues after finding a job) (a little reminder that you are not allowed to opt out of staying at a COA center, and have to sign-in weekly to let the state know of your whereabouts).

This is another method of ensuring the refugee is not a burden on the welfare state through the inward expansion of borders. The country is trying to protect its welfare system from those undeserving of support (Joormann, 2020).

I.V Deservedness

This is also connected to the presumed deservedness of the migrants. An asylum seeker's assumed integration is directly tied to their presumed deservedness. Van Oorschot states there are five central criteria when assessing deservedness in welfare state context;

“control over neediness (people who are seen as being personally not responsible for their neediness are seen as more deserving), level of need (people with greater need are seen as more deserving), identity (those more similar to “us” are seen as more deserving), attitude (people who are more compliant and conforming to the standards, more deserving), and reciprocity (those who have previously contributed to our group, more deserving)” (cf. van Oorschot, 2008 as quoted by Ataç, 2019).

The most concise way of understanding deservedness is through Rave et al. 's three main factors; their vulnerability, their financial contribution to the host country and their social integration to the cultural norms (2020). In essence, the host countries want a helpless, working, and obedient asylum seeker. Access to, or the capacity to generate capital, is one of the most prominent factors in opening the borders of a country (whether external or internal) to individuals.

While the capacity to generate income is desired of asylum seekers, their participation in the labor force is dissuaded. Additionally, deterrence from labor further hinders the possibility of socializing with locals, barricading social integration.

As a consequence, the lack of integration, both financially and socially, deems asylum seekers as undeserving of refuge. Or are compiled in numbers and percentages to show the failure of current migration policies in upholding a cohesive society (Schinkel, 2018).

This sense of running stuck in time, of trying to prove your worth and deservedness, is not solely an outcome of the asylum process, but any form of migrating from “outside” to the “inside”. As the EU Migrant Pact has made a point of ensuring legal ways of entering through their borders there may appear almost willing to open the legal borders to those who arrive as workers or students. For sure, the borders for such individuals are more porous, and the country more permissible. However, it is not a guarantee, nor is there continuous access to rights and freedoms.

I.VI Porous Borders for Migrants

Another friend of mine who came here as a student decided to go through the artist visa route, which is a visa given to arts and cultures workers who are significantly contributing to the Dutch culture scene.¹² This is evaluated through your business deals, projects, and exhibitions planned and done together with organizations funded by the Government, the Municipality, or one of the big art funds. The applications consist of letters from organizations showing intent of working with you, a CV, and a portfolio. The evaluation process goes through both the IND and the MECS. After the IND gives clearance that the applicant doesn't pose a threat, doesn't have (some word here) fines, has all the necessary legal documents, health checks, and insurance, they send the application to the MECS for the applicant to be evaluated on their contribution to Dutch culture. Technically, they both

¹² Do not ask me what that means, nobody is completely sure.

have up to three months to complete their respective evaluations, which leaves the expected waiting period at 3 to 6 months. In reality, I don't know of anyone who applied within the previous two years and received an answer earlier than 11 months.

While you are awaiting the decision, you are allowed to stay in the Netherlands. If your previous residency permit has expired, they provide you with stickers on your passport showcasing your legality within the country. However, since you do not have a resident permit yet, you lose free movement within the EU. If you want to go to another European country, you need to apply for a Schengen visa. There is a big chance to get denied, since you have proven you want to stay in Europe, there is a folktale on visa applications of former EU residents getting rejected more than anyone else's. Furthermore, before every time you leave the Netherlands, you need to get a one-time entry visa from the IND because technically, you don't have a visa. The one-time entry visas are given for a set duration that doesn't surpass a month. All of this results in a state of practically being stuck in the Netherlands. Especially for an artist, it means you can not take part in international residencies, can not visit your exhibition opening, nor, in the case of an emergency, go back home immediately.

While the body is not allowed to move through the waiting period, it is constantly afraid of being forced to move on a month's notice if the application gets rejected. When your artist visa application gets denied, you are given 28 days to leave the country.

My friend has been waiting for his artist visa for almost a year now. Within that time, he had to miss the opening of his exhibition in a different European country because the visa application process was financially, mentally, and bureaucratically too burdensome. He also missed the wedding of his brother because it was around the time IND¹³ had told him to wait for their decision. Had he been outside the country when he got rejected, he wouldn't be able to get back in.

His decision of moving to the Netherlands was partially motivated by the desire for free mobility; ironically, his migrant status left him stuck. The process of waiting also doesn't leave much room for any other form of action. Any possibility of rootedness is taken away since, in case of a rejection, he will be forced to leave the country immediately.

Additionally, although he has been waiting in this purgatory of limited rights within Europe, when¹⁴ he gets accepted, the 2-year span of the visa counts from the first day he applied. Meaning he seems like he has had an active artist visa for the past year. All the opportunities he has lost through the waiting period are ignored. The stress of uncertainty is completely disregarded. Furthermore, because when the visa gets accepted seemingly from the day he applied, he will need to apply again before the permit expires (in less than a year).

Here we witness how the body is moved through different stages of rightedness, while the definition and temporality of it are set by the state with no contestability. The state has all the time it needs to decide on your deservedness; however, if you are found undeserving, you are immediately cut from your health insurance, the municipality de-registers you, and you are left with a very short window to appeal.

This system doesn't provide him with the necessary comfort of being in a space legally because he will need to go through the same limbo again. He will have a year to prepare the documents for the next application, and then yet another waiting period. His body, although not being moved physically, is continuously shifting through different rightednesses. The borders extending inwards are taking him in and pushing him out without much control or even a warning beforehand. The

¹³ Before you ask, no of course he didn't get the decision for four more months.

¹⁴ Within the process of writing this text he has indeed received an approval to his application. Go celebrate it.

stress of uncertainty takes away any chance of leeway in experimenting with his art, it stops him from taking any risks, and makes it impossible to rest.

The bodies continuously being moved, not necessarily through space, different camps and physical locations, but also through different legalities of their existence within the country. It turns into a game of puss in the corner. Trying to find and enter through the empty corner, trying to remain.

I.VII Game of Bureaucracy, Rules of Ambiguity

Migration is already a game, me and all the people I have told the stories of have been playing. Similar to bureaucracy, it's a game in which the rules are hidden from its players. It is there, *theoretically*, to make things easier, more equal, standardized, and, when need be, contestable (Abdelhady et al., 2020).

The migration bureaucracy functions as the internal borders of the country. Furthermore, the standardization blurs the responsibility (Graeber, 2015). The nameless, faceless IND worker, who will reject your visa, residency, or asylum request, can do it with the clearness of a conscience coming from how they are just following the procedures, how it wasn't their decision to let you stay or go, but to check if you fulfill the already set out requirements. They never have to face you, the person who will need to leave the life they had built, the you who has to return to a country in which they will be unjustly persecuted, the you who will leave all your loved ones, all your work, and the freedom of mobility. Mobility is a right they (not personally but institutionally) could grant, a right that they have always had, a right they never had to fear losing, a right they never even considered could be taken away¹⁵. Now they are determining who else deserves their birthright.

Some chose to beat the system through mastering it, which in all honesty seems like your only option. A friend of mine calls the IND at least three times with the same questions after enough experiences in which the IND worker shared the wrong information, and thus left her in precarious situations. She now has perfected the method of reaching an IND worker through the online chat box¹⁶. She knows exactly how to reply to the bot that does not want to connect you to a person. She has had at least three options of applying for different residence permits based on her rights (again provided by the nation and dependent on her origin country, education, status, and working conditions). However, with all the time and effort she has spent figuring out all the nitty-gritty details of what is required of us, which conditions we have to meet, and how to demonstrate it to the government, she is still in the waiting period. Her application for a highly skilled migrant visa has reached the IND. It is a solid application, but we have no way of knowing the outcome until it arrives.

This ambiguity and uncertainty make the waiting unbearable.

This leaves the body in a restless state, of always waiting, always moving, and ever stuck. While the aim for migration is a chance for a better life, the system is in place to prevent the migrant from accessing it. Within this immobile space, life keeps on moving. Years are spent in this limbo, in which you also lose your belonging to your *home*. Through different relations, opportunities, loopholes, and sometimes not-so-legal means (because you have to), you form a life for yourself carved out of unwantedness. A routine, familiar faces, places, and familiarity with the tongue.

Having migrated becomes an essential part of your identity; your body finds a place to carry the movement and stagnation simultaneously. Waiting is not a passive state for refugees; it is a sickness embedded in hope and woven through relations (Kohli and Kaukko, 2018. Auyero, 2012). Opening yourself wide open to fit in your past and make in what you hope to be your future. The possibility

¹⁵ There are migrant IND workers, and as studies suggest social workers are those who bend the system to help and thus this is not a full representation (Lindberg, 2020).

¹⁶ First, choose 'resident permit'. Second, choose 'renewal', Third, keep on choosing 'something else'.

of leaving, after years, because of a denied artist visa is not just the loss of a chance for a better life, but the loss of a life you have built. Coincidentally, it is the loss of self that formed through migration; the new relations, practices, and patterns. Stuck bodies keep on living, and if their application gets rejected, what unstuck their body will also strip away a part of it.

As a disclaimer, I am not stating that all refugees (let alone all migrants) are left in complete civil death, nor do I single out the Netherlands or Northern Europe more broadly as the most vigilant perpetrators of bureaucratic and temporal violence. I can not offer much solution on the current procedures above a desire of a borderless world¹⁷. All I am saying is that this process of leaving refugees and migrants outside the borders of the social and civil life of the country results in failed attempts of integration,¹⁸ which leaves the aforementioned parties less deserving, more as a threat and a further reason to harshen the migration policies. It is a cycle that keeps on feeding itself; the desire is a scapegoat for the failings of the state as well as a reason (Abdelhady et al., 2020) to double down on violent mechanisms to strengthen sovereignty. And when all is done, the only thing that remains are the stories shared with you thus far, the confusion, the fear, the stuckness. I just need those who don't experience the process to know of it.

So I am writing this thesis, and making this game. This unending energy has to be channeled outwards somehow. So here we are, you reading the experiences of those I hold dear, and my stuckness because I simply had to write it down.

¹⁷ And maybe better training of IND workers because I swear their ignorance is deliberate.

¹⁸ Of course me being me, I have issues with integration as a term as well, would suggest 'Against 'immigrant integration': for an end to neocolonial knowledge production,' by Schinkel, 2018 if interested.

How?

Migration is a difficult experience to translate through text alone. The frustrations take a few sentences to write down, and a few breaths of being read, but there is a very physical reality of time spent, time lost, time running out. A very visceral experience of truly never being certain until you get your papers. I initially wanted to translate this experience into a game because I wanted to share my dinner conversations with you. The hours spent trying to decide the best move forward, brainstorming how, when, and in which ways we should apply, how to keep on holding onto a country, and at times, how much this grip we have over our lives here is making it impossible to move within our own lives. I wanted to show the impossibility of making substantial money as an asylum seeker waiting for a decision because even when you have the right to work the government takes away a huge chunk out of your pay. I wanted to demonstrate how the legality of “legal means of coming” are arbitrary at best, and directly tied to the applicants' *deservedness*. But the more I read, speak, code, and prototype, the more I realize that the making of the game is a great analogy of my experience through migration bureaucracy. The processes follow the same rhythm, requirements, and learning incentives. It freezes me with countless choices, and leaves me stuck between the options.

Instructions to Self

A How-to guide on Migration/ Making a game on migration

Be sure to follow all the points meticulously

The inability to fulfill the requirements will result in;

- 1) Deportation
- 2) Flunking out of your Masters

To Migrate	To Make the Game
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1 You can't do it alone.

You have to build a community. You need support. People who have been through the same process or are going through it with you. People who know the language and preferably the system. You need to make sure to learn it so you can help others too. The lawyer my friend has for his artist visa application, we reached through another friend, my friends showed me how to pay my taxes. We are continuously debating different visas to apply for. Everyone is sharing the pieces of information they gather, and in the end, a coherent plan emerges. Let those around you be your compass. Your agency within this stuck waiting period is your relations(welfare, patients, finland girls).

2 Learn the Language.

In this country, you want to work with and through people, for that you have to understand them. Learn a new language. Start by speaking the few words you know. If you wait until you understand the grammar and have a big enough vocabulary, you won't ever start. Get comfortable making mistakes, keep on trying, and ask questions. Put in the effort to create in this language.

3 Keep on Trying.

Find different ways of staying. Don't put all your eggs in one basket, but also make sure all your baskets are filled with enough eggs (otherwise you are just wasting some good eggs). You are running out of time. Figure out your strengths and what is needed, make sure they know you can fill in the gaps. Try things you are not qualified for, and learn along the way. You will realize how gratifying it is, to give yourself the chance to make things come into existence.

1 You can't do it alone.

Migration is a concept you are familiar with, but you have only experienced your version, your story. There are many different ways of coming and staying here, many different routes and struggles with the bureaucracy. You have to depend on the stories shared with you, but more than that, you need to translate them the way they want to record their experience. When you share this idea of making a game with fellow migrants, asylum seekers, those stuck and are on the move, they come with ideas already. Those who want the difficulties of their everyday life translated onto the screen will be your compass. Let your relations take agency over the game.

2 Learn The Language.

In the end, it is a tangible project. You have to make it for it to exist. Learn the languages you are using to program the game. Learn by trying, by jumping in with the little that you know. Learn what is possible, what is not. Write it even if you are sure it won't work. Ask questions. Do not be afraid of messing it up. Perfection is not the aim here, only getting more and more acquainted. Put in the effort to create in this language.

3 Keep on Trying.

Learn by doing, you don't have the time to perfect the craft, you are running out of time. Graduation is in 4 months. Start making even if you don't know how to, ask for help along the way. The more you do, the more you know what to learn. You will realize, along the way, how gratifying it is to learn by making. You will realize how gratifying it is, to give yourself the chance to make things come into existence.

4 Understand the rules.

Understand how they are rigged, and understand how they are not properly communicated. For example, the rules are rigged to my advantage as a Turkish citizen, I can technically use the Ankara convention which states that if I have worked in any Dutch company (could be service industry) for more than a year for at least 16 hours and if I have a contract for at least another year I can apply for a residence permit. This is a significantly easier route of migration, compared to the possibilities ahead of people from lets say *less desirable* countries. This gives me the opportunity to start working on a service job right now and almost (will explain shortly) ensure my stay in this country. However, how long the Ankara convention will be in place is an ever contested topic.. Furthermore, finding a service industry job right now is difficult for me considering they would need to apply for a work permit on my behalf as I am a non-EU student and most service jobs refuse to deal with the waiting period. Furthermore, I already have a job and my studies. An additional 16 hours of work would make it significantly harder to focus on the work I actually want to do. It would also tie me to the service job for at least two more years. However, the possibility, even though still uncertain, is comforting considering the other possibilities.

Another option would be the artist visa but then you have to be deserving. The government has to believe you are indispensable. That no one who is a European national and who wants to live in The Netherlands can do what you can. You need to sell yourself, to show you always pay your taxes, no bills or fees left, that you have never been arrested even if the country arrests those who protests against a genocide. For your friends who are asylum seekers, it is even stricter with contradictory requirements. They need to be both the victim and the hero at the same time. They need to be bringing enough monetary value to be considered an effective part of this society, be mailable enough that they will assimilate into Dutch

4 Understand the rules.

The game needs to follow procedures in order to be operational and playable. Distinct boundaries set in front of the players so they don't get lost. Rules are needed, rules that are both communicated with the players and kept embedded in the game while it is programmed. However, how can one turn the experience of migration bureaucracy that is in and of itself a game with ever-changing never communicated rules into a procedure? Those who engage with migration bureaucracy are lost within hidden regulations, miscommunicated requirements and a rigid system that treats the players based on identity factors beyond their control. If you do accurately translate them into the rules of the game, then you run the risk of losing the players. The process of migration is so soul-crushing that if you didn't believe it would provide you with a better life and more rights you would never go through with it. However, your intended audience has all the rights and have no reason other than the pleasure they would receive from the play to engage with the game. You could very easily lose your audience before they can meaningfully interact with the material just because of its (accurate levels of) frustrating procedure. If you focus more on keeping them in and bringing them closer you run the risk of programming a game that loses its potential of inviting reflection through its pleasurable procedures in which players get sucked into with excitement(Schleiner, 2018). You can not create a game that demonstrates migration, let alone asylum requests as pleasurable activity. Now you may find yourself in a conundrum. How do I keep the interest, keep it educational, make sure the player understands but remember it's a game they should choose to play. This is supposed to be an educational game, they need to interact with it to learn from it. They need to enjoy it to some extent. Remember, they are not running away from anything, nor running towards more rights. The incentives that push you and the others around you to keep on playing this game of migration bureaucracy doesn't exist for your

culture but also somehow traumatized and in need of saving enough that life back home is unimaginable(Ravn *et al.*, 2019. Ataç, 2019). They need to find the perfect balance of victims in need of protection, and a worker capable of increasing the GDP of the country.

5 Learn by trial and if necessary error.

Learn the system as you try living in it. If you make mistakes, make sure to turn them into lessons. If you lose job opportunities because of language, then better start learning it. Try and turn the trials into opportunities

6 Learn how to shut up.

Don't overshare, don't send everything to the government. Don't speak when you are not supposed to, don't tell the employer about work permits until you are hired. Don't tell them the minimum salary you need to qualify for a highly skilled migrant visa, don't tell your employer you need an indefinite contract until they depend on you. Don't tell them they will need to sponsor your visa, or that you won't be able to work for up to 2 months while it is accepted. Don't tell your landlord you may get deported. Don't let them know you are still a student. Only share what is necessary and needed, the rights you lack will make it

audience. They won't stay if it's just a waste of their time. Make sure to keep in mind you also want to make an accurate translation. It needs to be critical of the system. An option I found through Broken Toy Tactic by Schleiner was to break the game intentionally (2018). The broken toy theory, to introduce parts within the game that intentionally breaks the procedure so that the citizen-player has to take a step back from their pleasure and realize the world in which they are playing(Schleiner, 2018). Do this by asking them to click a button to stop playing that activates a pop-up explaining to them which rights they are giving up on by refusing to play.

5 Learn by trial and if necessary error.

Keep on testing your prototypes. Iterative design is important because you need to know people's reactions to your game. Do the migrants feel it to be an accurate depiction, do the nonmigrants stay long enough to interact with it. Are the rules blurred enough to mimic the IND while self-explanatory enough that anyone can just sit down and play it? Make sure to involve testing as an integral part of the process, as the levels prototypes are developing get feedback and use it to better structure the game(Tekinbas and Zimmerman, 2003).

6 Learn how to shut up.

Don't overshare, don't publish everything in the game. Your correspondents are in vulnerable situations. They share their experiences from a place of trust. Don't you dare abuse it. If they share potentially dangerous information, burn and bury it. The game's accuracy is important but could never come close to the safety of your respondents. Consent within this project goes beyond questions on anonymity and the right to withdraw. Your positionality doesn't only inform the game but shapes it. Your privileges keep you safe and comfortable, they are your blind spots. You never existed within this

impossible for you to get hired, and consecutively, remain here.

7 Most importantly do not stop.

Keep on moving. At the end of the day migration is mobility, the right to move, you are moving so you can keep on moving. All of these seven steps, each morning just rinse and repeat. Learn, and try, and sell yourself and start understanding Dutch. Deportation is around the corner.

country without documents, nor in a position in which information about your experience with the bureaucracy could endanger your stay. Make sure your respondents are the first to read what you have written about them, and the first to play their own level so they can consent. Because you are not an asylum seeker you may not instinctively know what could endanger their stay here. Remember you are from a very easy country to live in. Even the worst outcome for you wouldn't be the end of anything. This is not the case for the asylum seekers you are in contact with.

7 Most Importantly do not stop.

Keep on trying, don't stop. Yes you are making this game because you wanted to share the process with those who don't experience it, but the truth is you are also making it to make sure you can contain all the anxieties in a physical format. So they have a place to go to. Graduation is around the corner.

Conclusion:

I suppose this is the point I answer the research question: How to migrate and how to make a game, can I even tell them apart anymore, if not, why is that?

I can't tell them apart. Migration is set as a choose-your-own-adventure game, in which the players set the plot but have no control over their starting point.

There are points to be collected to prove deservedness, to be vulnerable but capable of generating income, and "fitting" into the host culture. There are levels a player has to unlock to pass through exceeding numbers of borders. First you enter, and then you remain, in one level you are free to work, in another you need work permits, and just as you think you have figured it out, you are no longer allowed to move anymore.

The rules are hidden to hinder permanent migration, locking you in an ambiguous structure. The possibility of deportation is always at the corner of your mind.

I want to make this game because I have been watching people play it. I have been reading people explain it, but maybe this bureaucracy of migration can be translated as a simulation game so, at least for the duration of *Running Stuck in Time*, we can dance around the boundaries of the Netherlands, being moved from side to side, trying to hold on, together, regardless of nationality.

I will be here, playing, dancing, and trying; to understand the rules, to stay, to earn the right to move¹⁹.

¹⁹ Instead of being moved.

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