

# *The Architecture of Enmity*

## *The Evros/Meriç River as Migration Infrastructures*

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In recent years, migration and border researchers started to investigate how infrastructures influence, control and facilitate people's migration projects. In this vast growing body of literature, scholars have conceptualized migration deals, camps, border control technologies, social networks, financial flows, prisons as migration infrastructures. In this paper, I will discuss and reflect on how we can map the Evros/Maritsa/Meriç River as migration infrastructures. In so doing, this paper demonstrate how the river functions first, as a line of deterrence; second, space of obscurity, secondly, as a site of containment and abandonment.

**Key words:** *migration infrastructures; Evros/Meriç River; containment; pushbacks; river-border*

### **Introduction**

Since the Treaty of Lausanne (1923) and its 1926 Athens Annex to the Lausanne Treaty, the Evros/Meriç River<sup>1</sup> came to demarcate the majority of the border between the territories of Greece and Turkey.<sup>2</sup> After Greece's integration into the EU (1981) the Greek-Turkish border gradually became part of the EU's southeastern border that turned the river into one of the main obstacles for migrant travellers to cross the border irregularly to reach the Schengen area. In 2020, I talked to Claudia, a woman in her early thirties from Congo who tried to traverse the Evros /Meriç River in order to reach the EU and apply for asylum. Together with a group of fellow travelers, she managed to cross the river, however, on the Greek side of the border, she was beaten by a group of men dressed entirely in black, and forced to cross the river again to return to Turkey.

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<sup>1</sup> The river runs through and connects Bulgaria, Greece, and Turkey where they have different names for the river. Evros (Greece), Maritsa (Bulgaria), Meriç (Turkey). In this paper I write about the river as the border between Turkey and Greece. Therefore, in this paper I use the Greek/Turkish name of the river, Evros/Meriç in alphabetical order.

<sup>2</sup> However, at the village of Karaağaç/Καραγάτς, a small Turkish enclave on the western side of the river next to the city of Edrine the border between Greece and Turkey is divided by a 12.5-km-long stretch of land.

Fearful of the swift river current, a large part of the group refused to continue onward to Turkey and instead stayed on a small islet in the river for days. In recent years, NGOs and activists alike have documented and published about similar cases reporting how people on the move have been contained in these small patches of land, surrounded by the water of the river (BVMN 2022; Karamanidou and Kasperek 2022). In various yet distinct ways, the geophysical characteristics of the river i.e., the ruggedness, the muddy river banks, the islets, the strong current, and the temperature of the water have been mobilized to contain and prevent people from crossing (Duncan 2020; Levides 2021; Forensic Architecture 2020).

In this paper, I will explore how the hostile and treacherous environments of the Evros/Meriç River is mobilized as migration infrastructures in EUrope's border regime and how people on the move use infrastructures to move through them (e.g., Starr 1996; Larkin 2021; Xiang and Lindquist 2014; Nemser 2017; Duncan 2020; Cuéllar 2021; Thomas 2021). Infrastructures, as argued by anthropologist Brian Larkin are "networks that facilitate the flow of goods, people, or ideas and allow for their exchange over space" (2013 *ibid.* 328). In the context of migration and borders, migration infrastructures are understood as the systematically interlinked technologies, institutions, and actors that facilitate and set conditions on mobility (Xiang and Lindquist 2014). In this pursuit, I will look at migration infrastructures to explore how people move, and how the infrastructures of migration influence, facilitate, and constrain such movements. This will highlight the excesses, contradictions and entanglements of how material and environmental features constitutes not only spaces of exclusion, but most of all, spaces of encounters and exchange.

In positioning the river both spatially and historically through the lens of migration infrastructure, I aim to understand not only modern spatial politics and forms of sovereignty but, also global trends in migrations: the precarity of asylum, and new spatial and sociological forms of exclusion. I employed a range of methods, including fieldwork in Turkey and in Greece, semi-structured interviews, participant observations with grassroots organizations supporting people on the move, document analysis, counter mapping, critical discourse analysis of policy documents, press statements, and news articles. During these visits I saw the river, the Gendarmerie station, and military bases where I had the opportunity to uninvitedly observe some of their work; I collected over 123 TikTok videos; and 6 videos shared by other sources stating that the people in the video are crossing the border. I analyzed 167 testimonies of people who tried to cross the Evros/Meriç river but who were pushed back. These testimonies are collected by the Border Violence Network, a network of 15 grassroots organization supporting people-on-the-move and I visited archives in the Netherlands and Istanbul to collect maps of the Evros/Meriç River

In what follows, I develop a theoretical framework that draws upon infrastructure studies, border studies, and contemporary mobility studies. From here, I first briefly recount how the Evros/Meriç river became a border and how the river-as-border has changed over time. This allows me to position the river both spatially and historically as migration infrastructure. Here I will show how the river functions as a deadly line of deterrence; secondly, I will demonstrate how the river has been mobilized to contain people; thirdly, the infrastructures people on the move use to cross this river. Finally, I will conclude by thinking alongside the work of Frantz Fanon, BM collective, Achille Mbembe and Ruth Gilmore to look at the river as a line of differential inclusion that constitute an architecture of enmity.

### **The River-as-Border**

Following the combined negotiations of the Lausanne Treaty and the Athens Annex, the land border between Greece and Turkey is currently 206 km long and mostly runs along the Evros/Meriç River. Close to the city of Edirne, the village of Karaağaç/Καραγάτς a small Turkish enclave on the western side of the river the border is a 12.5-kilometre-long stretch of land. Karaağaç/Καραγάτς was amended to Turkey because it abandoned its claim for war reparations to Greece during the Lausanne negotiations. From the Second World War onwards, the Greek authorities buried thousands of anti-personnel and anti-tank mines (in fear of an invasion) that continue to influence mobility and border regimes in the region until these days.<sup>3</sup> From the 1990s onwards, with Greece's accession to the EU, the country became both a migration destination and a transit country for people migrating to Europe.

The Evros/Meriç River has been one of many obstacles that migrant travellers seek to cross to reach Europe. Because of the heavily militarized land border, the region saw relatively few migrant travellers passing through these borderlands between 1990 and 2010. Since 2008, after a mutual abolition agreement in regard to landmines between Greece and Turkey, the region witnessed a sharp increase in the number of people trying to cross the region 'irregularly'.<sup>4</sup> Due to

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<sup>3</sup> In a study on the mortality and morbidity of landmines in Thrace, Polychronidis et al. (2006) investigated 169 landmine injuries during the period of 1991 to 2003. According to the authors, a majority of the victims were migrating people that had been trying to reach the EU. In another study by Pavlos Pavilos 2019 the coroner for the Evros region, during the period 2000–2008, a total of 49 people were killed by landmine explosions in the region (2019).

<sup>4</sup> Despite the abolition of landmines, fatalities associated to landmine detonations account for the second most frequent cause of death among border-related deaths and stood for one third of the migrants' fatal cases (Pavlidis 2019, p. 4). The reason for this is that landmines that have been moved by the river but also anti-vehicle explosives buried meters away from the lorries queuing up to enter Turkey on the Egnatia A2 motorway (EU Observer 2012) <https://euobserver.com/fortress-eu/118565>

this demilitarization, as well as the increased control over the Spanish borders (the former crossing hub), the main migration routes to Europe shifted to the eastern part of the Mediterranean, and especially towards the Turkey-Greece borders. With the movement of people shifting more towards the eastern external borders of Europe, the Frontex presence in the area was also intensified. Most notable was 2010-2011 Frontex mobilized the first Rapid Border Intervention Team (RABIT) in the region of Orestiada in 2010-2011 (FIDH et al, 2014). Around the same time, the Greek government constructed and financed a 12-kilometre fence between Kastanies and Nea Vyssa. After February 2020, when the Turkish authorities announced that they would no longer control the border or disrupt the thousands of people attempting to cross the border 'irregularly', the Greek authorities with the support of the EU enforced certain areas of the border (Karamanidou and Kasperek 2022; Teunissen and Koutrolikou forthcoming). In August 2021, 40 kilometers of the new construction was finished and the Greek authorities have since announced that they will enforce other sections of the border as well.

In understanding the changing role of the river-as-border, it is also important to contextualize the technologization of border enforcement. The border is enforced with a range of ultramodern technologies, such as an electronic surveillance network that creates 'situational awareness' by using aerial surveillance and infrared cameras. For example, 11-towers with infrared sensors and cameras have been installed, with the ability to detect migrant movement from Turkey towards the Greek/EU border to the range of 15-kilometres from the actual border. Furthermore, Frontex, in close collaboration with the Greek authorities, has started to a pilot project with a zeppelin balloon to control the land border between Greece and Turkey. The zeppelin is equipped with thermal cameras and other observation devices that will offer a live stream to the Greek Police Headquarters and six operational centres of the Hellenic Police to ensure a so-called 'timely frontier location'.<sup>5</sup> The airship is visible from the Greek town of Alexandroupoli, offering an ever-present reminder of the close proximity of the border, as well as a warning to any considering to cross it.

In this regard, we can understand the river in relation to border technologies, border authorities, discourses, laws, and policy as *migration infrastructure* (Xiang and Lindquist 2014). Infrastructures, as argued by anthropologist Brian Larkin are "networks that facilitate the flow of goods, people, or ideas and allow for their exchange over space" (ibid. 328). In the context of migration and borders, migration infrastructure is understood as the systematically interlinked technologies, institutions, and actors that facilitate and condition mobility (Xiang and Lindquist 2014). Scholars have looked at how (social) networks facilitate or support migration journeys (e.g.,

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<sup>5</sup><https://www.statewatch.org/statewatch-database/electronic-surveillance-network-to-safeguard-greece-s-borders-at-evros/>

humanitarian actors, visa brokers, and work-recruitment agents) (Xiang/Lindquist 2014). Another domain here is how infrastructures are mobilized to control the movement of people (Hänsel and Teunissen 2020) through for example camps (Antonakaki et al. 2016), databases (Pelliza 2019), and vehicles of transportation (Walters 2015).

There are some important studies that investigate how states and border authorities mobilize geophysical and topographical features to enforce control over clandestine travelers. For example, some of these studies have shown how authorities mobilize rivers, seas, and mountain passes to enforce control over clandestine travelers from entering a certain territory (Saucier and Woods 2014; Duncan 2020; Tazioli 2020; Cuéllar 2021; Thomas 2021).<sup>6</sup> Another example is the use of islands to contain people and ‘process’ asylum claims (Mountz 2011; 2020), as we have seen in the Greek islands close to the Turkish border (Hänsel and Teunissen 2021). Yet, although there are some notable exceptions (e.g., Thomas 2021; sources) most of these studies do not investigate these geophysical elements as infrastructures. However, an analytical focus on infrastructures and the relationality and interaction within and between different infrastructures allows for a more holistic analysis of (dis)functioning of border regimes. In a study on the Ganges River, Thomas (2021) conceptualizes and analyzes the river as border infrastructure that offers important insights, however, in having an analytical focus on the border the perspective of people on the move is missing. In my understanding, migration infrastructures encompass a more dynamic analytic perspective that allows to include both mechanisms of control but also those elements that support people’s migration project.

Secondly, within the literature on migration infrastructure there is a tendency to focus on a more contemporary analysis of these infrastructures. Here, the “management” of migration is often framed as a relatively contemporary or modern question, however, for centuries political bodies such as nation-states, cities, states, and empires employed geographical features and their hostile and treacherous environments to demarcate territory, separate populations, control movement or mobilized as a line of defense against an outside threat. However, some scholars have demonstrated how both (colonial) empires and state-entities enforce mobility regimes through islands, corridors, and enclaves and irregular zones around them) (King 2019; Lloyd et al. 2016; Mountz 2014;2020). In these studies, the authors observe a range of geographical patterns, including militarization, confinement, exceptionalism, and dispossession, through which both (colonial) empires and governmental entities enforce influence and power over mobility. Although these studies predominantly focus on the history of colonial empires, they demonstrate that

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<sup>6</sup> For centuries, nation-states and empires mobilized topographical characteristics to demarcate populations but also to control and enforce mobility regimes. My PhD research looks at these historical contingencies to look at the present.



*situating* geographies of exclusion and confinement, both spatially and historically deepens our understanding of how western liberal states manage migration. Here I understand the Turkish/Greek land border as a relation between technologies, discourse, politics, and actors in different configurations that does not follow a given scale or topography (Teunissen 2020). In the following section, I will look at the river through the lens of migration infrastructures. Specifically, this means that there are three domains that I will look at more closely; first, how the river assemblage functions as a deadly line of deterrence; second, how the river has been mobilized to contain people; thirdly, the infrastructures people on the move use to cross this river.

### **The river as a deadly line of deterrence**

In September 2020 I drove from the Turkish city of Edirne to the Turkish village of Enez for a short trip. Here I crossed the Evros/Meriç river at the Turkish village of Karaağaç located close to the Pazarkule border gate. The river runs with a strong current from the Rila Mountains in Bulgaria towards the Aegean Sea and is made up of several branches that are connected at its main artery with small land strips surrounded by water. The river looks calm, but this calmness conceals a deadly treacherousness. Between 2006 and 2019, 389 bodies have been found on the Greek side of the border (Pavlidis and Karakasi 2019).<sup>7</sup> In an interview by the International Red Cross (IRC), Dr. Pavlidis, a forensic pathologist at the General Hospital of Alexandroupoli stated that Evros has the largest number of buried and unidentified migrants in Greece" (IRC 2017)<sup>8</sup>. In the same interview, Jan Bikker, the ICRC's regional forensic expert said, "The bodies of people who perish while crossing the river or shortly after often remain unidentified for a long time and relatives may not know what has happened to their family member" (ibid.).

The mobilization of hostile characteristics of arcifinious boundaries obscures the involvement of governments in relation to border deaths. A lawyer from the Istanbul Bar Association who has been working in the Evros/Edirne border region for more than five years told the story of Naderi Almo from Syria, a story which embodies the worst of these hostilities and poses an important counterpoint to my own experiences (Interview January, 2020).<sup>9</sup> On February 29, 2020, Naderi, together with her family, tried to cross the Evros/Meriç river close to the Ipsala Border Gate. First, Naderi's husband Muhammad and their six children crossed the

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<sup>7</sup> <http://www.borderdeaths.org> data on border death between 1990 and 2013 missing the most crucial years. The article cited looks between 2006-2019 from border deaths on the Greek side.

<sup>9</sup> 1.5-hour online interview conducted with a Laywer of the Istanbul Bar Association. The case of Naderi has also been reported by various news agencies, <https://www.dw.com/tr/meri%C3%A7-ge%C3%A7me-%C3%A7al%C4%B1C5%9Fan-nadera-%C3%BC%C3%A7-ayd%C4%B1r-kay%C4%B1p/a-53698917>

river. Muhammed went back to cross the river together with Naderi. As Naderi and Mohammed ran hand in hand to the river two Greek law enforcement vehicles approached the children. Two additional law enforcement officers had left their car with guns in hand and started firing. Muhammed told the lawyer that Naderi's hands were around his waist but suddenly slipped away. When he looked back, he saw Naderi's motionless body being carried away by the current. The lawyer from the Istanbul Bar Association said that to this day, February 2021, almost a year later, the body of Naderi has not been found. The lawyer said that because there is no body, therefore there is no proof of a killing, i.e., they cannot file a case. Even as they continue the search for Naderi, the Istanbul Bar Association has filed a case with EHRC to find answers and bring the people responsible for her death to court. This painful example illustrates the role of arcifinious spaces in practices of deterrence, as well as how the river obscures state responsibility in border deaths.<sup>10</sup>

### **The river as a site of containment and abandonment**

With a rope tied to both sides of the river, Claudia, together with her fellow travellers crossed the Evros/Meriç River. The river looks calm, but this calmness conceals a deadly treacherousness. Between 2006 and 2019, 389 bodies have been found on the Greek side of the border (Pavlidis and Karakasi 2019). Claudia described how the current was strong and the water was cold but they eventually managed to struggle across. On the Greek side of the border they were eventually stopped by a group of men dressed in black. The men started beating them and forced them to cross the river to Turkey. Afraid of the river's strong current and the risk of re-entering its frigid waters, a big part of the group didn't continue to Turkey but stayed on a small islet in the river. Here is where they stayed several days. This practice of removing people from one territory to another without any legal procedure is also known as push-backs.

Pushbacks “are a set of state measures by which refugees and migrants are forced back over a border – generally immediately after they crossed it – without consideration of their individual circumstances and without any possibility to apply for asylum or to put forward arguments against the measures taken. Push-backs violate – among other laws – the prohibition of collective expulsions stipulated in the European Convention on Human Rights”. <https://www.ecchr.eu/en/glossary/push-back/>. In recent years, most notable after the Pazarkule

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<sup>10</sup> Similar practice has been monitored by various NGO and activist network in the Central and Western Mediterranean Sea where the geographies of seas are mobilized to prevent people from crossing by financing authorities from transit countries such as Morocco, Libya, and Tunisia to patrol the sea borders; criminalizing and preventing Non-Governmental Actors to conduct search and rescue operations in the sea; or not reacting to emergency calls of boats in distress where people are left to die (sources WTM, MSF).

border crisis of March 2020 (see Teunissen and Koutrolikou forthcoming) pushback have been documented intensively.<sup>11</sup>

The Border Violence Monitoring Network (BVMN) is one of the actors that document these violations since the summer of 2019. BVMN operated in the Greek mainland has taken first-hand testimonies of illegal cross-border pushbacks. Since then, as mentioned on their website, they collected 174 testimonies of push-backs in the Evros land border, which have affected a total of approximately 10,800 individuals (BVMN 2022b). The network, as published in a recent report, identified a dangerous shift in the pushback practice in Northern Greece. The report describes a new trend by which Greek border forces only force people halfway across the Evros river and abandon them on small uninhabitable islets, or force them to jump into the water, rather than taking them directly to Turkish territory and disembarking them on the riverbank.

Based on the analysis of satellite imagery, I identified approximately 39 of these small patches of land. However, it must be noted that the number of islets changes according to the water level and the season. During summer the water level is lower and therefore either fewer or more islets appear.



Source Google Earth Pro 2022 (mapped islets)

<sup>11</sup> This suggest that pushbacks are a recent practice, however, as argued by Karamanidou and Kasperek (2022), push-backs were practiced at this border in the 80s.



In the database of BVMN and other online sources (news articles) I found 39 cases where people have detained on these small patches of land. For example, on 20 April 2022, the network documented a pushback case where the respondent described how he was left at a small islet he describes as a *“small sad island that contain few trees”*.<sup>12</sup> In another collected testimony, the respondent described how *“They put us on an island, and we had to cross to the riverbank. We were freezing to death; even the women couldn’t breathe from the cold water.”*<sup>13</sup> In another case, the respondent described that he was contained on an islet for several days after being pushed back. Here, the Turkish authorities prevented people from crossing into Turkey *“People were drinking from the river”*. After two days on a small patch of land, the respondent said *“I got mad and crazy. I started hitting myself. I found a piece of glass on the ground and started cutting myself with it”*. After two days the group was allowed to return to Turkey.<sup>14</sup> These above examples demonstrate how the river, and the islets are mobilized as spaces of containment and abandonment. People the move have been abducted from the Greek territory, transported to the river, and ferried to islet in the river. Here, as I demonstrated, people are abandoned and contained sometimes for several days (BVMN 2022).

### **Infrastructures of Support**

Despite all the violence and illegal practices, people on the move continue to cross the river. People on the move document their journeys and share this on social media platforms. In documenting their journey, people create digital trails of their presence on Greek territory to generate proofs that people are in European territory. Other examples are that when people are contained or abandoned on these small patches of land, they share their location on social media platforms such as TikTok and Facebook or through solidarity structures like AlarmPhone or BVMN. In certain cases, these organization manage to intervene and pressure Greek authorities to act and take people from these islets; interim measures at Human Court for Human Rights (BVNM 2022).

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<sup>12</sup> <https://www.borderviolence.eu/violence-reports/april-20-2022-0000-kastaneai-gr-to-yenikaden-tr/>

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.borderviolence.eu/violence-reports/january-30-2022-0830-pythion-to-cakmakkoy/>

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.borderviolence.eu/violence-reports/june-20-2021-0000-1st-pushback-point-svilengrad-2nd-pushback-point-pythion-sigircili/>



Source: Alarm Phone Twitter



TikTok



Twitter

The above images are still from video shared by people stuck on the islets. The first, video shows people stuck on a islet (geolocated by the author summer school paper); the second video, shared by people stuck in the Evros Delta, request to be rescued by Greek authorities, the third video, shared on twitter by a Greek journalist, shows people stuck on a islet communicating with people on the other side of the river that they need support. This shows that people on the move use digital devises to mobilize solidarity infrastructures and pressure authorities to act. Secondly, while I do not wish to foreclose or ignore the risks that these data points people on the move leave behind, especially in exploitation and co-optation by violent border enforcement practices, I would like to argue for a new vision. Relying on data which individuals have chosen to post, as with the video analyzed at length above, serves to recognize migrant autonomy. In contexts where individuals have sacrificed, suffered, and been exploited to such an extent that their possessions and their bodies alike are not guaranteed any continuity, recognizing and uplifting the validity of their digital selves offers a different route. In this sense, I believe that the digital lives and archival practices of people on the move work against the erasure and misrepresentation of border controls. I collected over 123 TikTok videos; and 6 videos shared by other sources stating that the people in the video are crossing the border

### The architecture of Enmity

In this paper I showed how the river is mobilized to prevent people from crossing; how the river is used to contain people but the river also blurs the responsibility of state authorities in relation to human right and border violence. What does the river reveal and hide, how does the river

negotiate collective histories of racial tropes of otherness? Those without the right travel document have to cross this violent and deadly and racializing river-border to claim asylum or move to another territory (Isakjee et al. 2020). Here river as border and its direct surrounding, constitute what I conceptualize as the architecture of enmity. Strictly speaking, *architecture* describes both the process and the product of planning, designing, and constructing buildings, regimes or spaces. When one looks at architecture, as Tschumi eloquently describes, “all one actually sees are fragments (bits of walls, of rooms, of streets, of ideas). These fragments are like beginnings without ends... They are traces. They are in-between” (Tschumi 1996: 95). When I talk about the architecture of enmity, thereby following various scholars such as Frantz Fanon, Alexander Weheliye, Eyal Weizman, Alison Mountz, and the writings of the Black Mediterranean Collective, I try to look beyond these fragments and look at the design and functioning of spaces that materialize a “desire for apartheid, for separation and enclosure” (Mbembe 2016:21). Or, as Ruth Gilmore powerfully writes about racism, the “state-sanctioned and/or extra-legal production and exploitation of group-differentiated vulnerability to premature death” as a spatial concern (Gilmore, 2007:28). Here, the architecture of enmity is a politically and historically generated environment that constitutes a complex web of relations through which people on the move create spaces of maneuver.

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