

The Slot Remains Intact: Facial Recognition Technology, Somatocentric Infrastructure, and the Colonial Continuities of Canadian Immigration Governance

Lī Ašmane

Introduction

The growing use of Artificial Intelligence in state facilities in Canada and beyond can not only be understood and contextualised in terms of the so-called ‘fourth industrial revolution’ (Schwab, 2017), but also its adjacent utilization to control, manage, and surveil populations of interest. AI and its applications to person-identification technology, such as facial recognition, are not a unique instance of global minority countries privileging sight. Decades-long research, especially from global majority countries, has highlighted the primacy of somatocentricity in global minority countries. Somatocentricity, as explained by Yoruba scholar Oyèrónkí Oyěwùmí (1997), is the foundational bio-logic that permeates Western social organization. Somatocentricity is, thus, the epistemic privileging of biology as the only legitimate foundation of social hierarchies. Within this logic, race, among other phenotypic traits, has become the basis of differential treatment. With racial eugenics creating pseudo-scientific classifications of criminality and racial hierarchy (Backhouse, 1994), the current AI

facial recognition systems are applying similar, yet this time, automated tools for recognising, labeling, and categorising individuals of interest. What is even more important, there is undeniable evidence of present visual AI systems conferring greater error in identifying people of color, especially female-presenting individuals, with under 1% error for light-skinned men versus up to about 34 to 35% for dark-skinned women in gender classification tasks (Buolamwini & Gebru, 2018). Similar studies have showcased that in one-to-many searches, African-American females were more likely to be misidentified than other demographic groups (Grother et al., 2019), with overall performance highest for middle-aged white men (Cavazos et al., 2020). This outcome is not coincidental; it can be explained by the processes of data selection in model training stages privileging input that is seen as useful. The outcome, therefore, is the underrepresentation of people of color in these foundational data sets.

The consequences of structurally asymmetrical representation in AI systems have led to a disproportionate effect on the material lives and conditions of racialized and migrant people. Either as a result of deliberate or unconscious bias of model trainers or as a consequence of decades of racially skewed archival image availability, the differential error rate for visual AI systems (Buolamwini & Gebru, 2018) reflects a broader knowledge infrastructure that has sorted some bodies as 'legible' and others as 'peripheral.' This is what Marimba Ani (1994) has termed the Western *asili*, or the deeply ingrained cultural logic of separation and control. In visual AI systems, control and separation are further reinforced by somatocentricity. The racialised body here becomes a site where otherization materialises through automated measurements, classifications, and applied management of data. Thus, with an imperative to reinforce the existing Western *asili*, the *Utamawazo* or the culturally structured thought and epistemic framework of the West (Ani, 1994), colors the application and use of visual AI systems.

However, the classification of bodies into hierarchies within the Western *asili* did not begin with algorithmic violence (Ani, 1994). As

argued by Michel-Rolph Trouillot (1991), Western disciplines of study, especially anthropology, constructed what he termed a ‘savage slot’ or the structural description of colonized peoples as ‘the other,’ in an effort to root itself as rational, modern, and universal. What the present paper proposes is that AI facial recognition technology has not replaced the savage slot but inherited and automated it. Here, the algorithm does not discover the fraudulent refugee, the criminal suspect, or the high-risk African visa applicant; it structurally produces these categories, filling pre-existing epistemic slots with biometric and somatic data. In the context of visual AI data, this can be termed the ‘algorithmic slot’ - an extension of Trouillot’s (1991) framework into the computational infrastructure of the colonial state, where the somatocentric imperative to classify, measure, and manage racialized bodies is now executed not by the ethnographer’s narrative-building but by the state’s and private sector’s facial recognition databases. Thus, this paper’s contribution is, in part, to demonstrate that the algorithmic slot is the savage slot’s (Trouillot, 1991) most technically sophisticated and most epistemically insulated instantiation, and that the communities most harmed by it are the same communities that Trouillot’s anthropological savage slot was built to contain.

Canada, as a country with deep colonial roots, actively extending to contemporary land occupation, can serve as a case study for examining the application of bio-logic and somatocentric frameworks within state AI frameworks as a tool for control and surveillance. While the country presents itself as a liberal democracy with formal constitutional commitments to equality, multiculturalism, and the protection of minority rights (Government of Canada, 2024), its growing use of visual AI systems in border services and policing can present a case of obscured algorithmic violence and what scholars, drawing on Ndlovu-Gatsheni’s (2013) framework of coloniality, have termed ‘*algorithmic coloniality*’ (Abebe et al., 2021). In the same manner that somatocentric logic functions in the broader Western and Canadian asili to embed racial phenotypes within social hierarchies

(Ani, 1994), Canada's facial recognition systems do so by reproducing and naturalizing colonial hierarchies, disguised as technical infrastructure. This leads to '*auto-essentialization*' or the algorithmic re-fixing of racialised individuals to an automated colonial system of classification (Scheuerman et al., 2021). Thus, the present study interrogates how AI-powered facial recognition technology in Canada operationalizes Western somatocentric logics as a form of algorithmic coloniality and auto-essentialization (Scheuerman et al., 2021), and what African and decolonial critiques can reveal about its differential harm to racialized and migrant bodies.

Methodology

To answer the research question, the present study employs a myriad of anthropological methods throughout its three parts of analysis. Firstly, Part I of the study includes a genealogical and historical deconstruction of Canada's somatocentric control from the late-19th century nation state formation to the present algorithmic turn. By tracing the origins of somatocentric logics in Canada, the present study follows the methodology and theoretical grounding established by Sylvia Wynter (2003), especially focusing on what she terms 'Man2' or the universalization of the rational, secular, biocentric human of Enlightenment modernity as the center of Western asili (Ani, 1994), opposite of the 'savage slot' (Trouillot, 1991). Mirroring Trouillot's (1991) genealogical approach of tracing the history of anthropology as a field, the present study deconstructs the layers of somatocentric control of non-white phenotypes in Canada as a colonial and eugenic mechanism, echoed in today's facial recognition technology (FRT). Moreover, the mechanisms of Trouillot's (1991) epistemological argument are further reflected in the case of 'the algorithmic slot,' wherein the 'racialised criminal' or 'illegal alien' is not found but constructed as a category by its embedding within the FRT technology, its use, and the Canadian migration and border system. The "Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada" or IRCC's AI

screening tools were initially built with pre-determined conceptual risk categories, such as ‘high-risk applicant,’ ‘identity inconsistency,’ ‘inadmissibility indicator,’ producing structural slots (Trouillot, 1991). The racialized migrant, thus, is rendered uncertain, unstable, and unverifiable, not through finding fraud but through producing the conditions under which fraud becomes the legible interpretation of a face or somatic characteristics that its automated models cannot accurately identify.

Secondly, Part II of the study employs critical discourse analysis (CDA). Following the methodological teachings of Fairclough’s (1992) three-dimensional model, Part II of this study will present an analysis of state documents, journalistic investigations, and private sector responses to FRT use in Canada on micro-level textual analysis; meso-level discursive analysis; and, macro-level social analysis. CDA has been chosen as a central methodology, allowing to showcase how institutional language does not merely describe social reality but actively creates it. Applied to the present study, Canadian state and private sector documents on AI deployment do not neutrally report on algorithmic systems but discursively produce the conditions under which somatocentric harm is legitimate, technical, and administratively necessary. Wodak’s discourse-historical approach supplements this by providing the historical depth the analysis requires by situating each document within the longer genealogy of colonial body-management established in Part I, and identifying the argumentative *topoi* or tools through which racial exclusion is legitimized across the corpus (Wodak, 2009; Reisigl & Wodak, 2001). The analytical corpus comprises five document types: IRCC AI policy and strategy documents (Government of Canada, 2026); Privacy Commissioner rulings on RCMP and police Clearview AI use (Office of the Privacy Commissioner of Canada, 2021); the Algorithmic Impact Assessment for facial recognition technology use (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, 2025); court rulings, specifically, *Ali v. Canada* (Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness), 2024, and *Barre v. Canada* (Citizenship and

Immigration) (Federal Court, 2024), 2022 (Federal Court, 2022); and the internal review by the Toronto Police Service on their Clearview AI usage (Toronto Police Service, 2020).

With this, part III of the study employs what João Costa Vargas calls the ‘ethnography of the state encounter’ (Vargas, 2008). The aim of this section is not to reconstruct the subjective experiences of those affected by the harmful FRT technologies in Canada’s practice, but to contextualise and position affected communities back into the analytical center, while constructing potential solutions and ways forward. Drawing on the anthropology of knowledge to center non-Western, non-reformist intellectual traditions as primary frameworks for imagining governance otherwise, this section aims to move beyond the current Western *asili* (Ani, 1994). Applying decolonial practices to Canada’s present context, this section positions African, Black Atlantic, and Indigenous intellectual frameworks not as supplements to existing AI ethics discourse but as epistemologically prior, better equipped to dismantle somatocentric infrastructure precisely because they were produced from within, and in resistance to, the colonial systems that infrastructures reproduce.

Part I. The Slot Before the Algorithm: Somatocentric Control in the Making of Canada.

The contemporary state deployment of facial recognition AI can be interpreted as a tool in constructing and embedding the ‘algorithmic slot.’ While this ‘slot’ has manifested itself in different forms, at its core, it is a structural position that the Canadian state apparatus has consistently produced and filled with racialized and migrant bodies across successive phases of colonial governance. Its newest expression as the ‘algorithmic slot’ is, thus, the outcome of centuries of legitimisation and enactment of racist policies dating back to the formation of the Canadian state itself. Therefore, while the instruments upholding the slot have changed over time, the common logic of

separation, classification, and control, that Marimba Ani identifies as the Western *asili*, has not (Ani, 1994).

To trace how this ‘slot’ has manifested in Canada, its genealogy will be conducted, ordered in what are argued to be its distinct phases. While each introduces new shifts, methods, and tools of legitimisation, these phases overlap and exist in deep conversation with one another. By tracing their history, it can be showcased that the current algorithmic slot is, indeed, not a novel category, but rather, the consequence of a very specific state apparatus that has, since its colonial formation, organized its relationship to racialized and migrant bodies around the imperatives of measurement, classification, exclusion, and management, continuously seeking new technical instruments and ‘innovations’ to execute these controls with growing precision, at a greater scale, and with substantial insulation from political accountability.

Thus, it is argued that the foundational phase of Canada’s somatocentric state infrastructure was built explicitly on the pseudo-scientific tradition of physiognomy and racial eugenics, contemporaneous with the confederation’s inception in 1867. Canada’s colonial foundations were racist in their very fabric, and intentionally so. While the first so-called residential re-education schools for natives appeared already in 1831 (National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation, 2015), Canada’s Indian Act of 1876 established a legal foundation for the state’s administration of the status, movement, land, cultural practice, political organization, and religious life of all indigenous peoples living in the newly-founded so-called Canada (Government of Canada, 1876). The reserve system, violently displacing native populations to enclosed, isolated, designated areas (Daschuk, 2013), served as a spatial somatocentric instrument that, in the most literal sense, attempted to control the bodies of communities who had lived on the land for thousands of years (Deloria, 1997). The subsequent amendment to the Indian Act, necessitating compulsory residential school attendance for all native children in 1894, extended

the spatial confinement to the very bodymind of what was seen as the future of the indigenous survival. This colonial logic acted not just in cultural, but also somatic terms, with the body's spatial removal from its natal community, its renaming, prohibition of cultural practices, and subjugation to corporal punishment, as its logics of enforcement (S. Milloy, 1999). Indigenous 'others' did not create their slot of subjugation; it was rather fabricated by European settlers, who, over time, started to call themselves Canadians, and executed through tools infused with somatocentric logic, denoting the indigenous body as inferior. To effectively enact the slot in practice, in 1885, the colonial state established the pass system, physically bounding the indigenous subject to the discretion and will of the local Indian Agent (Storey, 2022). Taken together, these tools of subjugation of the native population were not only, as Trouillot identifies, structurally necessary to Western, in this case Canada's, modernity, but also a reflection of the colonial and somatic logic of control at the core of the confederation (Trouillot, 1991). Thus, it is within this context of violence towards indigenous populations that the somatocentric tools applied to non-Indigenous racialized and migrant populations across the same period must be understood. Both expressions of control, while directed towards distinct communities, are deeply linked to the same colonial Canadian *asili*, tied to its logic of body-reading, body-classification, and body-management (Ani, 1994).

The Canadian state extended its somatocentric management to non-Indigenous racialized and migrant populations through the use of a layered and mutually reinforcing plethora of tools, compounded by scientific authority, legislative power, medical expertise, and administrative discretion. One of the main target communities of the somatocentric control were immigrant populations. Canada's Chinese Immigration Act of 1885 established the first legislated biometric pass system applied to a migrant population (Meister et al., 2025). The so-called 'Head Tax Certificate,' possessed by each legally recognised individual of Chinese-origin in Canada, included the holder's photograph, physical description, and registration number. If the holder

wanted to leave the country, at the point of re-entry, they were to present this document to a border guard, as elaborated by the act's 1892 amendment, making physical description comparison the explicit mechanism of identity verification at the border (Meister et al., 2025).

Continuing the logic of physical measurement and description of 'undesired populations,' filling the slot, as a tool of population control, in 1898, on the recommendation of Dominion Police Commissioner A.P. Sherwood, the Canadian government adopted the Bertillon system (Cole, 2009). This system, developed in France, provided the first generalized bureaucratic infrastructure for the precise bodily measurement, including limb length, height, record of distinctive features such as scars and eye color, and photographic identification, of criminal and immigrant subjects beyond the Chinese-specific certificate system (Cleveland Police Museum, 2020). The epistemological foundation of the Bertillon system was identical to that of contemporary FRT, namely, that the meticulous measurement and identification of the body and its proportions, can yield an objective and mathematical 'truth' about a person's identity, transcending the perceived uncertainty of a name and demographic data alone.

However, the Continuous Journey Regulation of 1908 marked an important shift away from racially-explicit language to what Fairclough (1992) recognises as the rewording of racist legislation in seemingly neutral terms. While the initial regulation prohibited the landing of immigrants who "in the opinion of the Minister of the Interior" did not "come from the country of their birth or citizenship by a continuous journey," and whose amended version authorized the prohibition of "any specified class of immigrants," (Immigration Act Amendment, 1908) in practice it prohibited most East Asian and South Asian migration entirely. While appearing racially neutral, the regulation directly targeted Asian populations, given that no direct steamship services between India, Japan, or Hong Kong and Canada existed, and

the Canadian government ensured it would not by pressuring the Canadian Pacific to cease the sale of tickets to passengers from these routes (Government of Canada, 2025). Thus, while the legal grammar was somewhat shifting, the slot remained intact.

In the first half of the twentieth century, the somatocentric apparatus of Canada's racial control was greatly supported by its medicalization and academicization. While initially permeating national policy through compulsory intelligence tests on children that the state deemed 'feeble-minded,' often in line with racial stereotyping (Thomson, 2017), Canada externalised this approach via what has been termed the 'medical inspection regime' (Sears, 1990). Introduced via Canada's Immigration Act of 1906, the regime employed a direct tool for somatocentric control of racialized bodies, namely, the stationing of medical inspectors at all ports of entry. These 'experts' examined all migrants for diseases, physical defects, and mental conditions (Fogarty, 2017). The 1919 amendments to this very act added 'constitutional psychopathic inferiority,' denoting innate or biologically-determined psychological inferiority, and 'chronic alcoholism' to statutory grounds for prohibition of entry (Immigration Act Amendment, 1919). The biological grounds for supposed inferiority were, thus, directly applied to racialised subjects at the time, including Southern and Eastern European, and Black migrants. While the 1911 draft Order-in-Council prohibiting "*the landing in Canada of any immigrant belonging to the Negro race, which race is deemed unsuitable to the climate and requirements of Canada*" (Order-in-Council P.C. 1911-1324, 1911), was never fully legislated, the 1919 extension of the Immigration Act functionally allowed medical inspection to act in the same manner as direct political exclusion, with added neutrality and presupposition of objectivity. The academic institutionalization of this apparatus at McGill University, identified by the historian Sebastian Normandin as "*the centre for dissemination of eugenic ideas and theories between Britain and France at the turn of the 20th century*" (Normandin, 1998), provided the academic and pseudo-scientific evidence for implementing such exclusionary policies. This institution produced the academic foundation for justifying exclusion and violence.

McGill's Dr. Alexander Peter Reid became the first to introduce Galtonian racial classification into Canadian medicine (Normandin, 1998). Dr. Ernest McBride advocated for the racial sterilization of "slum" populations from his position as the Strathcona Chair in Zoology (MacKinnon, 2016). In 1914, Carrie Derick called from a McGill lecture platform for the segregation of what he called "backward" children, demonstrating that eugenic somatocentrism permeated Canada's progressive intellectual formations as thoroughly as its conservative ones (Belshaw, 2020). Beyond McGill, Dr. Charles K. Clarke, first professor of psychiatry at the University of Toronto, blamed "insanity and feeble-mindedness in Canada" on immigration quality and called for the institutionalization of "borderline" girls whose illegitimate children automatically rendered them "moral imbeciles" (Wheatley, 2024). He collapsed racial origin, sexual behavior, and mental classification into a single clinical category. The translation of this academic apparatus into state infrastructure was completed through Dr. Helen MacMurchy's appointment as the 'Ontario's Inspector of the Feeble-Minded,' converting pseudo-scientific classification into administrative practice through annual prescriptive reports and advocacy for the mentally-segregationist Auxiliary Classes Act of 1914 (Wheatley, 2024). The establishment of an academic, legal, and medical groundwork of 'feeble-mindedness' led to Alberta's Sexual Sterilization Act of 1928, shaped directly by Emily Murphy's insistence that "science is proving that mental defectiveness is a transmittable hereditary condition" (Saint-Fleur, 2024). This collaborative apparatus echoes the findings of Trouillot's 'slot', namely, that it was never the product of a single actor or instrument but a structural phenomenon maintained by the interlocking operation of knowledge production, medical authority, administrative practice, and legal architecture (Trouillot, 1991).

However, after the period of what Sunera Thobani calls the "Keep Canada White" era (Thobani, 2007), the country entered a phase wherein the language of the slot became invisible, thus also difficult to contest, foregrounding contemporary somatocentric implementation. While Canada's 1967 Immigration Act is often celebrated for

introducing a points-based system and replacing its national-origin quotas and racial exclusions, what it accomplished in practice is limited to the rewording of the slot rather than its erasure. This transition, as argued by Triadafilopoulos, was not ignited by a genuine commitment to racial equality, but rather an external pressure of decolonialism and human rights (Triadafilopoulos, 2013). This phase in the Canadian racial somatocentric logic was also marked by the increased processing of biomarkers, including fingerprinting requirements, photographic identification, and physical description fields in immigration documents. The scrutiny of these requirements was especially applied to migrants from the global majority countries, including the Caribbean islands, Africa, South Asia, and Latin America. According to the Canadian Council of Refugees' 2000 report, the somatic focus of the new immigration regime went so far as to require DNA tests to prove one's origin and connection to individuals in the country (Canadian Council for Refugees, 2000). Given that these practices and increased somatic scrutiny did not require explicit racial legislation, they became normalized and naturalized within the Canadian immigration system. However, the slot established since the beginning of the confederation, nevertheless, influenced the psyches and decision-making of immigration officers whose decisions reflected and reproduced the hierarchies of the broader social world (Li, 2000).

With the shift to more obscure racialised legislative practices and intensified targeted somatic tests, the state began to outsource its services under the guise of efficiency in data processing. One of the first precursors to this is the 1992 Bill C-86, which introduced the mandatory fingerprinting of asylum claimants and deportees. Being the first legislative expansion of biometric collection as an immigration management tool, it also marked the first public criticism of biometric collection (National Security and Intelligence Review Agency, 2022). The neoliberal ideological framework that would accelerate this trajectory was consolidated through the Chrétien government's 1996 budget, explicitly framing immigration settlement as a cost recovery problem rather than a rights and services problem, underlining this

neoliberal turn (Morris, 1997). The efficiency justification central to this turn was given institutional authority by the Auditor General's 2000 Report, which outlines that the perceived overload of immigration officers is "*leading to doubts about the quality and consistency of the decisions regarding immigrant selection*" (Auditor General of Canada, 2000). While, at the time, this line of argument served as the basis for outsourcing immigration services, the same justification is now utilized for immigration processing automatization (See: Part II). This line of reasoning established the administrative support for the Case Processing Centre (CPC) system, in which no applicant is faced with an actual person, but their application is centralized within inland processing facilities in Sydney, Nova Scotia, and Vegreville, Alberta (now moved to Edmonton) (Auditor General of Canada, 2000). This processing offered the possibility to apply standardised criteria to all applicants with no accountability for racialised outcomes. Thus, the CPC system acts as the direct administrative predecessor of algorithmic screening, founded on practices of centralisation and decreased accountability. This line of reasoning, ultimately, led to Canada outsourcing its biometric data collection to VFS Global. Their partnership can be traced to at least 2009, formalized through successive contracts in 2013 and 2018, and worth \$183 million across the following decade (Russell & Hartshorn, 2021). This represents the structural institutionalization of privatized somatocentric infrastructure, further embedded within neoliberal reasoning of efficiency, while ignoring avenues for accountability.

Currently, the same somatocentric logics of exclusion that were first encoded in racial eugenics, preserved through technical neutrality, and privatized through commercial outsourcing, are automated. Canada's Passport Program's adoption of facial recognition technology in 2010 for identity authentication and fraud detection marked the institutionalization of biometric screening as computational infrastructure (Government of Canada, 2016). This extended the state's colonial somatic gaze vis-a-vis an algorithm that processes millions of

faces, further isolated from accountability and removed from the applicant's ability to contest. The Citizen Lab's 2018 report, "Bots at the Gate" (2018), made this transformation critically legible, documenting that IRCC had been deploying AI screening tools with a "problematic track record" around race and gender, without public disclosure, community consultation, or meaningful accountability mechanisms (Gill & Molnar, 2018). The federal government's response, the "Algorithmic Impact Assessment" framework, introduced in April 2020, which was itself developed without consultation with the communities most exposed to its subject systems, insulated itself from accountability, especially as it was conducted by the very same individuals who work within the state framework (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, 2025). Across the Canada Border Services Agency's photo-matching software, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and Toronto Police Service deployments of Clearview AI (Toronto Police Service, 2020), and the adoption of Idemia facial recognition by Ontario police forces (York Regional Police, 2024), the same institutional logic that once justified the head tax certification and the fingerprinting of asylum claimants now justifies an implicit automated risk score. Thus, while the instruments have changed, the imperative to read, classify, and manage racialized bodies through the authority of biological and computational measurement has not.

Part II. The Grammar of Erasure: Critical Discourse Analysis of Canada's Facial Recognition Apparatus.

The following section presents an analysis of the discursive conditions under which the current somatocentric apparatus is reproduced, legitimized, and insulated from accountability. Through the use of critical discourse analysis, the section showcases how the institutional language of the Canadian state and its private sector partners does not neutrally describe algorithmic systems but discursively produces the conditions under which somatocentric harm appears legitimate, technical, and administratively necessary. Following Fairclough's (1992)

three-dimensional model, the analyses of the following documents are structured on micro, meso, and macro levels: the IRCC Artificial Intelligence Strategy (2026); the Office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner of Alberta, Investigation Report P2021-IR-01 (2021); the Algorithmic Impact Assessment: Facial Recognition in the Passport Program; the Toronto Police Service Clearview AI: Usage, Review and Analysis Report (2020); the Federal Court decisions in *Barre v. Canada* (Citizenship and Immigration), 2022 FC 1078 and *Ali v. Canada* (Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness), 2024 FC 1085. The interlocking analysis of discourse formation will, thus, showcase how the algorithmic slot is constituted, maintained, legally challenged, and institutionally reproduced across state, law enforcement, and private sector registers simultaneously, and in which the same Canadian asili is expressed in the formatting of productivity, program integrity, and algorithmic accuracy (Ani, 1994).

The IRCC AI Strategy (Government of Canada, 2026) and the Passport Program's Algorithmic Impact Assessment (2025), extracted from Canada's Open Government Portal (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, 2025), together reinforce what the present study has termed the 'algorithmic slot.' The overall tone of the IRCC AI Strategy document can be characterised by using Fairclough's analytic tool of overcrowding, or the assessment of which terms or synonyms are most frequently used to assess the ideological goals of the text. Within the 26-page document, terms such as 'integrity' (appears 20 times), 'transparency' (appears 17 times), 'efficiency' (appears 16 times), 'productivity' (appears 11 times), and 'effectiveness' (appears 9 times) can be contrasted with the three appearances of 'anti-racism' (Government of Canada, 2026). This highlights the same neoliberal and efficiency focus of the IRCC as positioned in Part I, rather than the delivery of rights-based frameworks. While terms such as 'program integrity' seem neutral (Government of Canada, 2026), they are representative of what Wodak (1999) terms 'a condensation symbol,' wherein a seemingly general term use is indicative of deeper institutional

aims. In this case, terms such as ‘integrity,’ ‘transparency,’ and ‘efficiency’ entail a worldview of immigration systems as primarily vulnerable to fraud and abuse by applicants, that migrants are presumptively suspect, and that the state’s primary obligation is protective self-maintenance. This lexical asymmetry is further highlighted when terms of equity vocabulary are examined. The document does include the language of rights, namely, ‘fair’ appears 12 times, ‘equitable’ 7 times, ‘anti-racism’ 3 times, and ‘justice’ once (Government of Canada, 2026). However, the semantic field of equity is concentrated almost entirely in the AI guiding principles and AI Charter sections, while the operational framework, the implementation steps, the adoption framework table, and the areas of interest sections are exclusively governed by the managerial semantic field of efficiency, productivity, and program integrity (Government of Canada, 2026). The equity terms, thereby, perform what Fairclough (1992) identifies as legitimation through inclusion, assuming that their presence is sufficient to render the document legible as rights-respecting and anti-racist, while their systematic absence from every section where AI is actually designed, deployed, and governed ensures they exercise no operative constraint on the apparatus they nominally oversee. While the document affirms that AI “tools do not refuse or recommend refusing any applications” (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, 2025), it can appear as misleading, especially as FRT use is not integral to the refusal phase, but rather during prior data matching and flagging processes. Moreover, the document constructs an AI charter, whose item 3 highlights that the IRCC “will not use vision technologies to profile, target or track individuals” (Government of Canada, 2026), all while the Algorithmic Impact Assessment acknowledges that its technology performs one-to-many comparisons against all past applicants, flags individuals for additional review, and can render decisions without direct human involvement (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, 2025). Thus, this cross-document analysis showcases a direct contradiction. Within the risk assessment for the use of facial recognition in the passport program, Questions 13, 14, 33,

and 35 are systematically answered ‘No’ and ‘Little to no impact’ to whether clients are vulnerable, the stakes are high, and rights or dignity are affected (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, 2025). However, Question 36 is the document’s most revealing passage, acknowledging that “certain demographics may produce a higher false match rate than others” (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, 2025). Nevertheless, it continues by noting that any harm that is caused is “quickly resolved” (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, 2025). Regardless of the mounting evidence against the use of FRT, especially in relation to people of color (Buolamwini & Gebru, 2018), the racialized body’s differential experience is seen and immediately rendered administratively invisible through procedural reassurance. This occlusion was completed by Q53, and its disclosure that training data were collected by “a foreign government or non-government third party” (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, 2025). This creates a database that is unnamed and unspecified, further feeding into an algorithm that Q18 classifies as a trade secret (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, 2025); meaning, that an undisclosed racial archive powers an obscure mechanism whose differential harm is acknowledged, minimized, and then commercially protected from scrutiny.

The lack of self-scrutiny and investigation into the use of AI systems within the IRCC largely stands in contradiction to the 2022 and 2024 court cases that showcase the harms of FRT deployment. In *Barre v. Canada*, 2022 FC 1078, Justice Go found it procedurally unreasonable for the Minister of Public Safety to introduce photo-comparison evidence as the basis for revoking Asha Ali Barre’s and Alia Musa Hosh’s refugee status while simultaneously invoking section 22(2) of the Privacy Act to shield their methodology from disclosure to the people affected (Federal Court, 2022). This ruling identified, with precision, the epistemic violence at the core of the algorithmic slot; namely, the women whose identities were being challenged through undisclosed computational body-reading were denied access to the terms under

which the verdict against them was produced. Nevertheless, two years later, *Ali v. Canada* (Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness), 2024 FC 1085, confirmed that the Canada Border Services Agency had not corrected its practice (Federal Court, 2024). Justice Battista was asked to adjudicate an almost identical case, embodying the same structural harm against the Somali community. This confirmed that the judicial intervention in *Barre* had produced no systematic change in the way immigration systems in Canada operate (Federal Court, 2022). Read in the context of the IRCC AI Strategy's repeated commitments to improvement and "human-centered and accountable" AI (Government of Canada, 2026), the aforementioned legal case studies expose a persistent gap between the outlined practices of operation and the legal findings of harmful practice against a specific racialised community. This showcases that the failure is not the implementation of the 'algorithmic slot,' but rather the structural apparatus of auto-essentialization (Scheuerman et al., 2021).

However, this structural failure is not isolated to the state's internal governance documents as it is reproduced and commercially amplified through the private sector infrastructure that the state simultaneously deploys and disavows. The Office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner of Alberta, Investigation Report P2021-IR-01 (Office of the Privacy Commissioner of Canada, 2021), reveals that the commercial architecture of auto-essentialization upon which the algorithmic slot depends (Scheuerman et al., 2021), Clearview AI, scraped over three billion facial images and converted them into biometric identifiers without consent. The Commissioner's finding of confounding violations (PIPEDA, PIPA AB, PIPA BC, and Quebec's "*Loi sur la protection des renseignements personnels*") constitutes a regulatory rupture in the intertextual chain of mutual legitimation (Office of the Privacy Commissioner of Canada, 2021). The Royal Canadian Mounted Police's (RCMP) conduct sharpens this pattern of self-isolation from accountability, followed by the revelation of contradicting evidence. At first, the RCMP publicly denied any use of Clearview AI, which is a private FRT company. However, after the Privacy Commissioner's 2021

investigation, the RCMP acknowledged their use (Toronto Police Service, 2020), while severely understating it by 443 searches, as later confirmed by Clearview's own records. Thus, given that only approximately 6% of searches appeared to relate to child exploitation or victim identification, around 90% were conducted without documented justification, outside any disclosed legal basis, and against communities who had no knowledge they were being searched (Office of the Privacy Commissioner of Canada, 2021). Thus, the searches conducted without documented justification confirm that the somatocentric apparatus operates not as a targeted, procedurally bounded instrument, as the IRCC AI Strategy, the Algorithmic Impact Assessment, and the AI Charter all claim, but as a generalized surveillance infrastructure whose default subject is the racialized body at large, institutionally presupposing, as Oyěwùmí (1997) theorizes, that the body is already available for state scrutiny without consent, justification, or knowledge. The Royal Canadian Mounted Police's documented sequence of denial, severe understatement, and forced disclosure is therefore an example of Canadian institutional practice of maintaining the algorithmic slot's opacity.

Part III. Beyond the Retrofit: Decolonial Frameworks for Dismantling the Algorithmic Slot.

While Part II of the present study demonstrated how Canada's institutional discourse on AI and FRT use in migration and policing produces the conditions under which somatocentric harm is legitimised and obscured, the analysed corpus largely excluded the voices of those affected by these technologies the most. However, the exclusion and silencing of racialised subjects is a foundational characteristic for the perseverance of the 'algorithmic slot.' Thus, the following section aims to enact a rupture within the Canadian knowledge network by restoring the focus on the people harmed. With this shift, imaginings of potential ways to govern otherwise will follow.

To contextualize the violence occurring in Canada, the experiences of Asha Ali Barre and Alia Musa Hosh will be highlighted. Barre and Hosh are both Somali women who fled sectarian and gender-based violence from Al-Shabaab (Federal Court, 2022). Al-Shabaab is widely known as a religious fundamentalist and militant grouping that has been the documented cause of grave civilian casualties, e.g., 1 552 in 2017 alone (OHCHR, 2019), forced marriages (Bader, 2023), kidnapping of women, and occupations of hospitals (OHCHR, 2019). It is recorded that Barre and Hosh arrived in Canada in 2017 and 2018, respectively. However, while they were both accepted by Canadian authorities, in 2019, their refugee status was revoked based on an undisclosed photo-comparison evidence. This followed after a border agency presented these photos as evidence before a tribunal that then approved their refugee status revocation. The government's position was that the two women were, in fact, Kenyan nationals who had entered Canada on student permits under different identities (Federal Court, 2022). This claim, however, rested entirely on a computational similarity produced by FRT. Critically, Barre and Hosh belonged to the precise demographic for which facial recognition technology carries its highest documented error rate. This was also revealed during their case when Justice Go's ruling explicitly cited research findings that darker-skinned females are the most misclassified group, with error rates of up to 34.7%, compared to 0.8% for lighter-skinned males (Federal Court, 2022). Unfortunately, however, the experiences of these two women are not isolated cases. Their lawyer, Tina Hlimi, revealed that she had seen more than a dozen similar identity challenges against Somali clients since 2019, suggesting a pattern of disproportionate FRT use against the Somali community (Keung, 2022). Thus, what the state encounter of Barre and Hosh reveals, as Ruha Benjamin (2019) theorizes, is the 'New Jim Code,' or the intended social function of predictive and biometric technology that codifies racial hierarchy into coded exposure.

However, the decolonial solution to the growing 'New Jim Code' is not a demand for new or better technology (Benjamin, 2019), but rather a

project of conceptual decolonization. Following Kwasi Wiredu's (1980; 1996) project of stripping colonial concepts of their unexamined Western assumptions and reconstructing them from within African and Indigenous intellectual traditions, the present context demands the active elimination of the 'slot,' always imagined and pre-filled by a hypothetical 'other.' In the context of Canada, that could mean returning to what was described at the very beginning of the present paper (Part I). While the Canadian state has superficially engaged with the mourning and reconciliation of the harms and genocide it violently executed towards its indigenous populations, it is still utilising symbolic rhetoric and inconsequential acts, disguised as transformative and structural shifts, to continue to preserve the status quo. The very tradition at the root of the Canadian *asili* is the subjugation of its native populations, followed by any racialized 'other' (Ani, 1994); as only with this logic, it is thought, can it remain legitimate and not be labelled as a 'failed state.' As guided by Trouillot, "*the burden of the past is alleviated when the sociobistorical conditions that obtained at the time of emergence have changed so much that practitioners face a choice between complete oblivion and fundamental redirection*" (Trouillot, 2021). The present essay argues that the threshold has been reached in the shape of violence towards individuals whose identities have been reduced to mere somatic characters, generalised and violated over and over. What is needed, as argued by Glen Coulthard, is not reconciliation, but resurgence (Coulthard, 2014). It is the active reconstruction of Indigenous governance, land relations, and knowledge systems outside and against the state apparatus that still seeks to eliminate them (Coulthard, 2014). In terms of policy, resurgence can entail the expansion of indigenous jurisdiction, land restitution, self-governance systems, and designing policies that treat each first nation in Canada as rights-bearing governments and landholders, not mere stakeholder groups. The logic at the very premise of FRT can be rendered incoherent under a transformed epistemological lens of identity as belonging, social membership, relational accountability to land, community, and ceremonial life, irreducible to a biometric template. This is not a

reformist demand directed at technology; it is a fundamental challenge to the somatocentric worldsense that Oyěwùmí (1997) identifies as the organizing epistemology of Western governance, applied to the specific Canadian context in which that worldsense was first encoded in the Indian Act's pass system and is now encoded in the Passport Program's biometric templates, among others.

The question of dismantling somatocentric logic as a colonial tool of the Canadian state requires acknowledging, as Sherene Razack (2002; 2008) argues, that the Canadian territory is a racially organized geography in which certain bodies are presumptively suspect at every threshold. Then, by centering Indigenous knowledge systems of relational accountability as the core governance systems, epistemological tools developed by Indigenous communities, such as the OCAP or Ownership, Control, Access, and Possession, can be utilised at aggregate levels (First Nations Information Governance Centre, 2014). As positioned by Benjamin's (2019) New Jim Code framework, any technical reform short of abolition risks functioning as what she calls 'the retrofit' or modifications that make discriminatory infrastructure more palatable and therefore more durable, extending the life of the apparatus by absorbing the critique that would otherwise dismantle it. Lastly, Razack's unmapping project, translated into policy (Razack, 2002; 2008), means challenging the legal construction of the border as a racially neutral administrative threshold. As immediate structural measures, this means the abolition of FRT and other similar somatocentric logics from all immigration, refugee determination, and policing contexts. It further entails the ongoing conduction of independent investigations to reassure FRT's non-use, deletion of existing FRT archives and data gathered without consent, retribitional measures for those who have been wrongly convicted or whose immigration status has been changed based on supposed FRT evidence, and replacement of FRT and other biometrics-focused technology with already existing tools such as testimonial evidence, documents, and interviews (Kim, 2011). In practical terms, a shift toward relational accountability would require that these non-biometric instruments be

governed by Indigenous, Black, and migrant communities themselves, for example, through community-controlled review bodies with binding authority and potential veto rights over surveillance infrastructures and decision-making in immigration and refugee status determination, replacing the closed epistemic loop of Canada's current immigration system with genuinely adversarial, external, and community-accountable oversight.

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