

THE IMPOSED REALITY OF THE STATE

ENCLOSURE, ONOPTICON, AND THE ADMINISTRATIVE
ENCLOSURE OF SOCIAL REPRODUCTION

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*“The Reality Paradigm is not a theory of that which has occurred, but of
that which is *occurring*.”*

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ABSTRACT

Digital transformation has altered more than the speed and scale of government. It increasingly determines what public authorities can see, classify, verify, process, and act upon. Authorities select data. Administrations define categories. Legislatures and regulators authorize thresholds. Providers encode models. Officials adopt outputs. Together, these actors shape the reality that reaches the visible moment of decision.

This article develops the Reality Paradigm as a framework for analysing that prior field. The Reality Paradigm does not ask only whether institutions describe the world accurately. It asks how persons, claims, risks, payments, and objections become available as intelligible and actionable reality in the first place. Its central concept, the infrastructural a priori, names the historically constructed technical and institutional conditions that determine what can appear as visible, processable, eligible, risky, legitimate, or targetable before a decision is formally made.

The article begins with English enclosure. Enclosure did not merely privatize land. It reconstructed the conditions of access. It converted customary use into conditional property, shared habitat into authorized entry, and relative subsistence into increasing dependence on wages, markets, and legally recognized access. Enclosure was not an early Onopticon. It was a material genealogy of infrastructural imposition.

Onopticon names the contemporary logic that emerges when technical mediation becomes a compulsory environment of recognition and action. It begins where modulation becomes imposition: where institutions make legibility compulsory, classifications foreclose material possibilities, contestation weakens, and persons, groups, transactions, spaces, or institutions are produced as targets.

The article then develops the concept of the administrative enclosure of social reproduction. Kenya's NIIMS, Aadhaar-linked welfare systems, the Windrush case, and Universal Credit do not all exhibit the same intensity of Onoptic power. They show how identity, welfare, food, work, housing, mobility, and recognition can become conditional upon technical identity, documentary proof, biometric verification, data linkage, digital administration, or behavioural compliance.

Finally, the article argues that this process separates people not only from material conditions of survival but also from the authority to represent their own lives. The subject's lived account becomes secondary to the system's operational account. This is not merely alienation in the abstract. It is a form of infrastructural self-dispossession: a loss of effective authority over how one's own life is institutionally defined, verified, and acted upon.

The article does not offer a policy programme. Its task is diagnostic. It identifies the points at which a prior reality of access, recognition, and survival is being made conditional upon infrastructures built elsewhere.

Keywords: Reality Paradigm; Onopticon; enclosure; administrative enclosure; social reproduction; infrastructural a priori; infrastructural imposition; mandatory legibility; target production; self-dispossession; digital capitulation; legitimacy fracture; de-societalization; Homovictimism.

SECTION

1. Introduction: Before the State Decides

The Reality Paradigm does not begin with the completed event. It begins before the event becomes possible.

A denied benefit, a blocked payment, a sanctions designation, a rejected application, a border intervention, an eviction, or an arrest may appear as the visible endpoint of public power. Yet each outcome is preceded by another process. Authorities select data. Administrations define categories. Legislatures and regulators authorize thresholds. Providers encode models. Officials adopt outputs. Institutions then act upon what the system has already rendered visible, risky, eligible, suspicious, compliant, or targetable.

No single actor controls every stage. That is precisely the point.

Public reality is increasingly assembled through distributed infrastructures. The state may remain formally sovereign, but the ground on which it decides can be prepared elsewhere: in databases, procurement contracts, identity systems, payment architectures, compliance tools, risk models, proprietary interfaces, and technical standards.

The central question of political theory has often been: who decides?

The question now becomes:

Before the state decides, who constructs the reality through which the state is able to decide?

States have never encountered society directly. They have always relied upon records, categories, legal status, statistics, maps, documents, registers, and administrative routines. What changes in the digital age is the density, speed, interoperability, and reach of this mediation. Data travels across institutions. Classifications circulate. Models update. Technical outputs enter files, workflows, payment systems, welfare platforms, border systems, and public decisions.

Mediation exists.

Compulsory mediation creates another world.

This is technological dependency remade as public reality.

The problem is not merely that technology influences government. The problem is that infrastructures can establish the conditions under which government sees, classifies, and acts. A state may retain the authority to decide while losing the practical capacity to determine what appears before decision as reality.

The argument of this article is therefore direct:

The crisis of sovereignty in the digital age is not exhausted by the loss of technical autonomy. It concerns the loss of control over the conditions through which public reality becomes visible, actionable, and contestable.

This argument does not portray the state as passive. States procure systems, define priorities, authorize categories, impose sanctions, regulate data, and benefit from infrastructures that intensify their capacity. Power is co-produced.

But co-production is not equal experience.

Some actors define the architecture. Some profit from it. Some audit it. Others must live inside it.

SECTION

2. Reality in Formation: What Is Occurring

The Reality Paradigm is not a theory of events that have already been completed. It is a theory of reality while it is being made.

This distinction is essential.

A completed event can be recorded, litigated, interpreted, or condemned after the fact. A denied benefit has already been denied. A payment has already been blocked. A person has already been excluded from work, housing, welfare, or movement.

The Reality Paradigm begins earlier.

It asks when a system begins to reorganize the conditions under which access, entitlement, recognition, and survival become possible. It asks when a technical arrangement that first appears optional becomes procedural; when a procedure becomes an eligibility requirement; when eligibility becomes an indispensable condition of social life.

A world is not imposed only when it is complete. It is imposed while its conditions are being installed.

This does not mean that every proposal, prototype, or policy ambition constitutes an imposed reality. Plans remain plans until they begin to alter the actual conditions of access, recognition, or survival.

The distinction is therefore temporal:

- A proposal announces an intended future.
- An installation creates an institutional or technical capacity.
- An emerging formation begins to alter practical conditions of recognition.
- An Onoptic arrangement appears when compulsory legibility, material foreclosure, weak contestability, and target production converge in a concrete decision chain.
- An Onoptic regime exists only when such arrangements become stable, recurrent, cross-domain, and institutionally normalized.

The name does not wait for total completion.

But diagnosis requires evidence.

The task is not to declare that the world has already been fully transformed. It is to identify the points at which transformation has already become operational.

Mandatory legibility does not arrive all at once. It begins as convenience, becomes procedure, hardens into eligibility, and can finally become the condition of access itself.

The same is true of classification. A category may first appear descriptive. It may then become predictive. It may later become actionable. Once it determines access to food, housing, work, payment, mobility, or public recognition, it no longer merely describes the world.

It begins to make the world.

SECTION

3. Enclosure: The Historical Reconstruction of Access

Enclosure did not merely divide land.

Enclosure reconstructed the conditions of access.

The English enclosure movement should not be treated as the complete origin of capitalism, the beginning of all modern power, or the sudden destruction of a harmonious common world. It unfolded unevenly across regions and centuries. It involved local agreements, parliamentary acts, maps, surveys, titles, hedges, fences, legal disputes, and changing forms of landholding.

Nor were commons open to everyone without limit. Common rights differed by locality, tenure, household status, gender, livestock ownership, custom, and legal recognition. Their value was uneven. Their holders were not socially equal. Some rural labourers possessed few common rights before enclosure, while others depended upon them materially (Humphries, 1990; Neeson, 1993; Shaw-Taylor, 2001).

Yet this variation does not weaken enclosure as a historical rupture.

It clarifies the nature of the rupture.

Enclosure did not affect every person in the same way. It altered the reality within which access itself could be recognized.

3.1. Habitat Before Property

Land was never only land.

For many households, it formed part of a material habitat: grazing, fuel, water, passage, gleanings, gathering, informal exchange, subsistence cultivation, domestic animals, seasonal work, and collective survival. These practices did not abolish poverty or dependence. They did, however, provide forms of material reproduction that could not be reduced to wages or formal ownership.

Habitat, in this sense, does not describe an idyllic rural past. It describes the material environment through which life can be reproduced with a degree of autonomy from markets, employers, and landlords.

Enclosure narrowed that environment.

A right grounded in use, custom, collective memory, and local practice increasingly ceased to be sufficient. Access came to depend upon title, boundary, property, and authorized recognition.

The fence was never only wood or hedge.

It was law made visible, a map made enforceable, and administration made material.

Surveyors measured land. Legislators formalized rights. Courts protected title. Owners excluded users. What had appeared as a lived field of access became a bounded field of property.

The decisive change occurred before any particular person was removed.

The world in which people could remain, use, move, gather, graze, claim, and survive had already changed.

3.2. From Habitat to Labour Availability

Enclosure did not send every commoner directly to the factory. It did not uniformly drive all rural households to the city. Industrialization, urbanization, population growth, colonial trade, poor-law reform, technical change, and regional labour demand formed part of the wider historical process.

But enclosure altered the conditions under which remaining on the land could sustain life.

When common rights narrowed, many households lost access to mixed forms of subsistence. They depended more heavily on wages, landlords, markets, employers, and legally authorized access.

Enclosure did not merely create private property. It helped produce labour availability.

The city and factory should therefore not be understood merely as destinations of rural displacement. They became operational environments. They concentrated bodies, time, movement, discipline, and production. They made labour more measurable, schedulable, and extractable.

The person separated from a habitat of partial autonomy did not simply become free to sell labour.

The person became increasingly compelled to sell labour in order to reproduce life.

Enclosure converted the loss of habitat into the precondition of labour's availability.

3.3. Improvement as the Language of Imposition

Enclosure often spoke in the language of improvement. It promised productivity, rational cultivation, efficiency, innovation, and more profitable land use.

This language was not pure deception. Enclosure could consolidate holdings, support new agricultural practices, raise yields, and increase profitability (Allen, 1982).

That is why its language mattered.

The question is not whether improvement occurred. The question is who defined improvement, what it made possible, and which forms of life it rendered secondary or invisible.

Improvement did not merely describe a more productive use of land. It converted a new property reality into the language of necessity.

What increased efficiency for an owner could reduce grazing, fuel, passage, subsistence, or relative autonomy for others.

The language of improvement did not need to deny harm. It subordinated harm to an authorized measure of reality.

This structure survives in altered form. Efficiency, interoperability, compliance, optimization, risk management, security, and digital transformation can describe real institutional gains. Yet they can also normalize infrastructures that alter access, recognition, and survival before subjects can contest what has changed.

3.4. Enclosure as Material Genealogy

Enclosure was not Onopticon.

It did not operate through real-time data, algorithmic thresholds, biometric identity, predictive modelling, generative outputs, or networked feedback.

Its relevance is genealogical.

Enclosure was a material genealogy of infrastructural imposition.

It reorganized a shared habitat. It invalidated prior forms of access. It forced life to enter a new reality structured by property, wage dependence, and conditional recognition.

The analogy with Onopticon is not technological.

It is structural.

Enclosure changed the conditions under which land could be encountered. Onopticon changes the conditions under which persons, claims, risks, payments, mobilities, and institutions can be encountered.

The modern subject is not simply expelled from a common field. The subject is increasingly compelled to enter a field whose rules of recognition, eligibility, classification, and access are defined elsewhere.

Enclosure matters not only because it happened.

It shows how a new world becomes real before it is recognized as a new world.

SECTION

4. The Reality Paradigm and the Infrastructural A Priori

The Reality Paradigm is not a theory of truth.

It does not begin by asking whether an institutional representation is accurate, ideological, false, or distorted. It begins earlier.

Under what conditions can a person, institution, or state encounter the world as reality?

A state does not encounter a person as a whole human being. It encounters a record, an identifier, a document, a biometric trace, an address, a tax history, a benefit claim, a transaction, a migration status, a risk score, or a platform profile.

A claim becomes visible through admissible forms, documentary requirements, procedural channels, and system-compatible categories.

A payment becomes visible through identity verification, compliance screening, routing standards, account structures, and institutional recognition.

A risk becomes visible through data selection, patterns, thresholds, correlations, alerts, models, and authorized interpretations.

The infrastructural a priori names these conditions.

The infrastructural a priori is the historically constructed condition that determines what can appear as visible, processable, eligible, risky, legitimate, or actionable before decision begins.

It is not transcendental. It is built.

Institutions build it. Legislatures authorize it. Procurement contracts stabilize it. Engineers encode it. Bureaucracies operate it. Courts may review it. Markets profit from it. Citizens encounter its consequences.

The infrastructural a priori is therefore not a finished structure.

It is being built each time a record, threshold, interface, classification, or verification requirement becomes necessary for institutional recognition.

TABLE 1. CONCEPTUAL ARCHITECTURE

Level	Function	Concepts
Conceptual ground	Explains how reality becomes encounterable	Reality Paradigm; infrastructural a priori
Historical-material genealogy	Identifies earlier transformations of access	Enclosure; habitat
Logic of power	Explains how reality is imposed	Onopticon; infrastructural imposition
Operational mechanisms	Explains how imposition works	Mandatory legibility; classification; thresholding; synthetic operational reality; foreclosure; target production; weak contestability
State transformations	Explains how public power is reorganized	Constitutional bypass; constitutional externalization; digital capitulation; reflexive digital risk
Political-economic carriers	Explains how dependency is reproduced	Public procurement; infrastructural rent; knowledge monopoly; financial infrastructural imposition
Juridical and political consequences	Explains what follows	Infrastructural coercion; legitimacy fracture; derivative burden of justification; de-societalization; operational hollowing
Subjective consequence	Identifies the subject produced by the system	Homovictimus; self-dispossession
Analytical limit	Identifies incompleteness and contestability	Counter-legibility

This hierarchy matters.

The Reality Paradigm provides the ground. The infrastructural a priori identifies the prior condition of encounter. Onopticon identifies the logic that imposes that condition. The remaining concepts explain mechanisms, transformations, consequences, and limits.

The concepts should not be treated as a flat list.

SECTION

5. From Modulation to Imposition

Foucault showed that modern power does not govern only through prohibition. It governs circulation, probability, normalization, security, and population.

Algorithmic governmentality extends this insight. It anticipates, correlates, ranks, and modulates possible conduct without always issuing an explicit command.

Onopticon begins at another threshold.

Algorithmic governmentality modulates possible conduct. Onopticon imposes the environment within which conduct, claim, risk, objection, payment, and decision can appear at all.

The distinction is not absolute. Systems can move from modulation toward imposition.

They may first influence choice. They may then raise the cost of alternatives. They may later make alternatives ineffective. Finally, they may produce a person, transaction, institution, or movement as an actionable target.

This is a thresholded continuum.

5.1. When Reality Is Imposed

Reality is imposed when institutions make legibility compulsory, classifications foreclose access, and persons or transactions are produced as targets.

Four conditions identify the threshold:

1. Compulsory legibility: A person, institution, claim, or transaction must enter a technical system to remain socially or institutionally operative.
2. Material foreclosure: Classification closes access to work, welfare, payment, housing, mobility, recognition, or other meaningful possibilities.
3. Weak contestability: The affected actor cannot adequately inspect, understand, correct, challenge, or exit the system.
4. Target production: The system turns a person, group, transaction, or institution into an object of exclusion, sanction, investigation, intervention, or intensified scrutiny.

A credit score may influence the cost of credit without imposing reality. It approaches imposition when that score spreads across housing, employment, insurance, financial access, and mobility; when alternatives disappear; and when the subject cannot identify or contest the classification.

5.2. Mandatory Legibility

Mandatory legibility begins when the system must read a person before society can recognize that person.

A person may exist outside the system. But that person may not be able to live through its institutions unless the system reads them.

Access to healthcare, work, welfare, finance, education, housing, mobility, or public recognition can become conditional upon technical readability.

Mandatory legibility is not mere visibility. It is the compulsion to become processable in order to remain socially operative.

Legibility becomes mandatory gradually: first as convenience, then as procedure, then as eligibility, and finally as the condition of access itself.

5.3. Classification and Thresholding

Once institutions render an actor legible, they classify.

A person may become eligible or ineligible, safe or risky, normal or anomalous, compliant or non-compliant, credible or suspicious.

Thresholding determines when classification becomes action.

A threshold can trigger an investigation, deny a benefit, block a payment, suspend an account, initiate an inspection, elevate a risk score, or authorize intervention.

Classification determines what exists for the system.

Thresholding determines when that existence becomes actionable.

Risk is not defined by models alone. Legislators, regulators, administrators, security agencies, providers, data engineers, and institutional routines jointly determine what can appear as risk.

5.4. Synthetic Operational Reality

Generative and agentic systems add another layer.

They do not merely sort existing records. They summarize files, infer relations, draft rationales, generate risk narratives, identify patterns, and recommend actions.

A generated output becomes significant only when authority adopts it.

A synthetic output passes through three stages:

1. Generation. The system produces an inference, summary, relation, explanation, or recommendation.
2. Adoption by authority. An official, agency, institution, or authorized workflow incorporates the output into a file, review, record, or decision process.

3. Consequence in life. The output shapes eligibility, risk, reputation, payment, mobility, classification, target selection, or intervention.

Synthetic operational reality begins when generated content becomes a condition of institutional action.

A hallucination is not yet an Onoptic event simply because it is false. It becomes structurally consequential through a chain:

Synthetic falsehood -> adoption by authority -> consequence in life -> target production -> weak contestability -> material harm.

This is more than a technical error. It is the institutional production of false reality.

Operational reality does not appear in one act.

It forms as outputs move from machine generation to institutional adoption and from adoption to consequence in life.

5.5. Foreclosure

Classification does not merely describe the present.

It closes futures.

A blocked payment, a rejected application, a denied benefit, a suspended account, a risk label, or a mobility restriction can close a path before the person can meaningfully enter it.

Foreclosure occurs when infrastructure makes an alternative unavailable, ineffective, prohibitively costly, or institutionally unintelligible.

5.6. Target Production

Onopticon does not merely narrow options.

It produces targets.

A target may be a person denied welfare, a family selected for investigation, a transaction flagged for blocking, a bank excluded from financial communication, a migrant selected for restriction, a neighbourhood marked for monitoring, or a claim rendered unprocessable.

Target production transforms a person, group, institution, transaction, space, or movement into an administratively actionable object.

This is the point at which technical classification becomes political exposure.

SECTION

6. The State, Infrastructure, and the Political Economy of Dependency

Onopticon is not technological determinism.

States do not simply receive infrastructure. They procure systems, define security priorities, authorize data collection, set legal standards, determine categories, and select technical partners.

Providers design systems. Consultants translate policy into procurement language. Engineers encode technical rules. Administrators normalize workflows. Legislatures and regulators authorize thresholds. Courts may intervene after harm becomes visible.

Onopticon is co-produced. Its burdens are not.

Some actors define categories. Some profit from technical dependence. Some inspect the architecture. Others must survive its classifications.

6.1. Constitutional Bypass and Externalization

Constitutional bypass occurs when legally constrained public capacities expand through private technical intermediaries.

The issue is not that private involvement is automatically unlawful. Public institutions have long relied on private suppliers.

The issue arises when technical arrangements make public functions harder to see, attribute, challenge, or remedy.

Constitutional externalization begins when this arrangement becomes durable.

Constitutional externalization occurs when public functions remain public in law but become operationally dependent on external infrastructures.

The state may retain formal authority. Yet data formats, model logic, interfaces, updates, compliance tools, and technical expertise may become embedded in architectures it does not fully control.

The state retains responsibility in law while losing capacity in operation.

6.2. Digital Capitulation

Digital capitulation is not formal surrender.

A state may remain sovereign in legal doctrine, politically visible, and institutionally powerful. Yet it may lose the practical ability to inspect, alter, object to, or exit the infrastructures through which it encounters public reality.

Four capacities reveal this condition:

1. Audit capacity: Can the state inspect what the system sees and how it classifies?
2. Alteration capacity: Can it change the rules, thresholds, formats, interfaces, and technical conditions?
3. Objection capacity: Can it resist contractual, technical, or financial terms imposed by providers?
4. Exit capacity: Can it leave without disabling essential public functions?

Digital capitulation begins when a state must govern through infrastructures whose conditions it cannot meaningfully audit, alter, contest, or exit.

This does not mean every state actor loses power. Some institutions gain power through dependency.

Digital capitulation redistributes sovereign capacity unequally.

6.3. Procurement, Rent, and Knowledge Monopoly

Public procurement is not merely budget administration.

Every major procurement decision is a decision about the future conditions of public reality.

Procurement determines which standards persist, which data formats become permanent, where institutional memory accumulates, which providers gain leverage, and how expensive future exit becomes.

Infrastructural rent follows. Providers do not merely sell products. They establish continuous revenue through licensing, maintenance, storage, updates, support, processing power, compliance tools, and switching costs.

Knowledge monopoly deepens the dependency. A public institution may own an output without understanding the model, data architecture, threshold settings, or alternatives that produced it.

The state then becomes responsible for decisions whose operational conditions it cannot fully comprehend.

6.4. Financial Infrastructural Imposition

Financial systems do not sit outside political power.

Payment, messaging, settlement, compliance screening, identity verification, correspondent banking, card networks, and currency conversion shape economic participation.

Financial infrastructural imposition begins when economic life depends upon systems whose classifications, exclusions, and alternatives cannot be meaningfully inspected, contested, altered, or exited.

Financial infrastructural imposition does not seize money. It imposes the conditions under which money can remain operational.

A financial network does not become Onoptic merely because it standardizes transactions or screens for risk. The threshold appears where access becomes materially unavoidable, alternatives become ineffective, screening produces exclusion, contestation weakens, and exclusion affects the ability to pay, receive, contract, organize, travel, or sustain institutional life.

CBDCs should be treated with the same caution. A digital currency is not inherently coercive. It becomes relevant to Onopticon only where identity, programmed restriction, weak contestability, material exclusion, and practical absence of alternatives converge.

SECTION

7. From Enclosure of Land to Administrative Enclosure of Social Reproduction

The comparison between enclosure and contemporary administration must remain precise.

A biometric registry is not a field. A welfare platform is not a hedge. A digital identity system does not simply repeat the history of English enclosure.

The continuity is structural.

Enclosure transformed the material conditions through which life could be reproduced. It converted customary access into conditional access through property, title, boundary, and legal recognition.

Contemporary administrative infrastructures can transform the social conditions through which life is reproduced. Welfare, food, health, housing, work, migration status, mobility, payment, and public recognition can become conditional upon documentary proof, biometric authentication, data linkage, online administration, behavioural compliance, and system-compatible identity.

This article calls that process the administrative enclosure of social reproduction.

Administrative enclosure occurs when a condition of social reproduction becomes a technically mediated condition of authorized access.

The issue is not that states verify identity, administer welfare, regulate migration, or operate public databases. These functions are neither new nor automatically oppressive.

The issue arises when documentation replaces substantive entitlement; when technical verification overrides lived reality; when inability to navigate an interface becomes non-compliance; when data linkage becomes a condition of subsistence; when private actors enforce public exclusion; and when classifications become materially decisive before they can be effectively contested.

7.1. Kenya: NIIMS and Identity-Conditional Public Life

Kenya's National Integrated Identity Management System, commonly known as NIIMS or Huduma Namba, illustrates an emerging Onoptic formation.

NIIMS sought to combine different forms of personal information under a central identity infrastructure. The project involved demographic, biometric, contact, professional, civil, transport, and other data. It was conceived as a unified register capable of becoming a central institutional reference point for citizens and residents.

The central issue was not data collection alone.

It was access.

Government statements connected Huduma Namba to access to public services. Registration was thus positioned to move from administrative convenience toward a potential condition of public existence. Treatment at state hospitals, marriage registration, tax procedures, and other institutional encounters could become dependent upon entering the new identity environment (BBC News, 2020; Mahmoud, 2019).

The constitutional litigation revealed the deeper problem. Interim orders restricted compulsory registration, registration deadlines, the collection of DNA and GPS data, the tying of government services to NIIMS registration, and the sharing of collected information. The litigation also foregrounded the vulnerability of communities that already faced unequal access to foundational identity documents, including Nubian and Kenyan Somali communities (Mahmoud, 2019).

The chain is direct:

Historical identity discrimination -> lack of foundational documents -> exclusion from digital registration -> weakened access to public services -> administrative invisibility -> material exclusion.

NIIMS did not become a complete Onoptic regime. Litigation, constitutional review, and collective resistance interrupted the process.

But NIIMS was not simply a neutral modernization project.

NIIMS became an emerging Onoptic formation where technical identity was positioned to become a condition of public recognition, while prior documentary inequality threatened to become a new threshold of public exclusion.

The system did not need to create discrimination from nothing. It could inherit an older inequality and convert it into technical ineligibility.

This is how an imposed reality begins to form: not when every person is excluded, but when the infrastructure begins to make recognition conditional upon a proof that many cannot equally obtain.

7.2. Aadhaar: Welfare as Verification

Aadhaar presents a more complex case.

It is neither accurate nor useful to describe Aadhaar as a single, uniform machine of exclusion. It operates across multiple domains, regions, institutions, and welfare programmes. Its effects depend on design, implementation, manual override provisions, local practice, infrastructure quality, and the availability of alternative routes.

The central question is narrower:

When does biometric identity become a compulsory medium through which welfare and entitlement can be accessed?

Aadhaar was publicly justified through inclusion, efficiency, targeting, and reduced fraud. Yet critics documented how failures of registration, record-linkage, authentication, or system access could interrupt the delivery of legally recognized benefits (Khera, 2017, 2019).

The theoretical significance lies in the transformation of entitlement.

A person may possess a legal claim to food or welfare. Yet the activation of that claim can become conditional upon enrolment, record seeding, successful authentication, platform connectivity, data matching, and administrative recognition.

Muralidharan, Niehaus, and Sukhtankar's study of biometric identity requirements in India's largest social-protection programme offers a necessary complexity. More stringent verification reduced corruption, but it also imposed substantial costs on legitimate beneficiaries. The study estimated that 1.5 to 2 million legitimate beneficiaries lost access at some point during the reforms; it also emphasized that these harms were shaped by transition design and the protocols governing the technology's use, not by biometrics in isolation (Muralidharan, Niehaus, & Sukhtankar, 2020).

This matters.

Aadhaar becomes Onoptic not because it identifies a person, but where identification becomes the compulsory and weakly contestable condition under which the person may eat, receive benefits, or sustain life.

The chain is:

Legal entitlement -> technical identity requirement -> record linkage -> authentication threshold -> failed or incomplete verification -> denial or delay of benefit -> material deprivation.

Aadhaar therefore shows that one infrastructure can operate at different intensities. It can remain non-Onoptic in one domain, become partially Onoptic in another, and become fully Onoptic only within a determinate chain of compulsory recognition, material foreclosure, weak contestability, and target production.

The question is not whether Aadhaar has already become a total system.

The question is where verification has already begun to replace entitlement as the condition of survival.

7.3. Windrush: Documentary Identity and Distributed Exclusion

Windrush provides one of the clearest cases of administrative target production.

Many people affected by the scandal had lawful rights to remain in the United Kingdom. Some had lived there for decades. Their problem was not the absence of belonging. Their problem was that historical arrangements, missing documents, inadequate records, legislative change, and enforcement practice made belonging difficult to prove within the documentary grammar of the immigration system.

The Windrush Lessons Learned Review reveals the transformation.

Immigration control did not remain confined to specialist public authorities. Employers, landlords, banks, health services, and other institutions became part of the operational environment through which immigration status was verified. Work, housing, finance, and social participation could depend upon producing the correct documents in the correct form at the correct moment (Williams, 2020).

The critical issue was not error alone.

Administrative uncertainty became a condition of social exclusion.

A person could hold lawful status yet be produced operationally as someone who could not rent, work, access services, or move through ordinary institutional life without suspicion.

The chain is:

Historical legal status -> inadequate proof or deficient records -> administrative doubt -> distributed verification -> exclusion from work, housing, banking, or services -> social vulnerability.

Windrush demonstrates constitutional externalization. The state did not need to exclude every person through direct public action. It distributed verification obligations across ordinary institutions. Employers, landlords, banks, and service providers became practical agents of exclusion.

Windrush was not merely a failure of immigration administration. It was the administrative enclosure of social existence.

Its Onoptic character lies in the convergence of compulsory legibility, material foreclosure, weak contestability, and target production.

A lived history, lawful presence, and social belonging became insufficient when they could not be translated into the documentation demanded by the system.

Windrush did not begin when exclusion became visible.

It began when lawful belonging became dependent on forms of proof many people could not produce.

7.4. Universal Credit: Need Reformatted as Administrative Performance

Universal Credit reveals another form of administrative enclosure.

It is not primarily a biometric identity system. It is not a migration-control regime. It is not a population register.

Its central mechanism is the relationship between subsistence, behavioural conditionality, digital administration, and sanction.

Universal Credit requires claimants to manage significant elements of their claims through an online account. Claimants may need to respond to messages, report changes, record activity, communicate through a journal, and accept a claimant commitment. Failure to meet relevant commitments can reduce or stop payment (Department for Work and Pensions, 2026).

The system is not fully automated. Work coaches, discretionary decisions, telephone contact, hardship mechanisms, and formal appeal routes still exist. It should therefore not be called a complete Onoptic regime.

But it changes the relation between need and administrative visibility.

A person's need for food, housing, transport, heat, and basic security becomes tied to an environment in which the person must remain digitally reachable, behaviourally responsive, procedurally legible, and administratively compliant.

The chain is:

Economic insecurity -> claim for income support -> online account and claimant commitment -> behavioural recording and administrative responsiveness -> designation of non-compliance -> sanction or deduction -> reduced capacity to sustain life.

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation has shown that welfare conditionality can cause hardship, destitution, and disconnection from support, especially for vulnerable groups (Watts et al., 2014). It has also documented how inadequacy in Universal Credit can make it harder for low-income households to meet essentials and re-enter work after setbacks (Porter & Johnson-Hunter, 2023).

This is where the theory sharpens.

The subject is no longer only poor, ill, unemployed, disabled, or burdened by care. The subject becomes administratively intelligible as responsive or unresponsive, committed or non-compliant, active or sanctionable.

Universal Credit becomes Onoptic where the digital interface becomes practically unavoidable, behavioural requirements become conditions of subsistence, alternatives are ineffective, non-compliance produces material deprivation, and structural difficulty is translated into individual failure.

Need is being reformatted as performance whenever subsistence depends on continuous digital responsiveness and administratively recognized compliance.

TABLE 2. ADMINISTRATIVE ENCLOSURE AND DIFFERENTIAL ONOPTIC INTENSITY

Case	Infrastructural medium	Condition of access	Field affected	Analytical status
Kenya NIIMS / Huduma Namba	Integrated identity and biometric registration	Technical identity as potential condition of public recognition	Public services, documents, civic life	Emerging Onoptic formation
Aadhaar-linked welfare	Biometric authentication and record linkage	Successful technical verification of entitlement	Food, welfare, pensions, public distribution	Domain-specific Onoptic arrangement where exclusion and weak alternatives converge
Windrush	Documentary proof and distributed status verification	Proof of lawful status through required documents	Work, housing, banking, services	Hybrid Onoptic arrangement
Universal Credit	Digital account, claimant commitment, sanctions	Ongoing administrative responsiveness and behavioural compliance	Income support and social reproduction	Hybrid digital-conditional arrangement with variable Onoptic intensity

The cases are not identical.

Kenya shows how unequal access to foundational identity can become unequal access to public life.

Aadhaar shows how technical verification can become a condition of welfare entitlement.

Windrush shows how lawful belonging can become insufficient when it cannot be translated into documentary proof.

Universal Credit shows how social need can be reformatted as a field of continuous administrative performance.

Their shared possibility is precise:

A right, need, status, or lived reality may cease to be sufficient unless it can be translated into the technical grammar through which an institution is prepared to recognize it.

SECTION

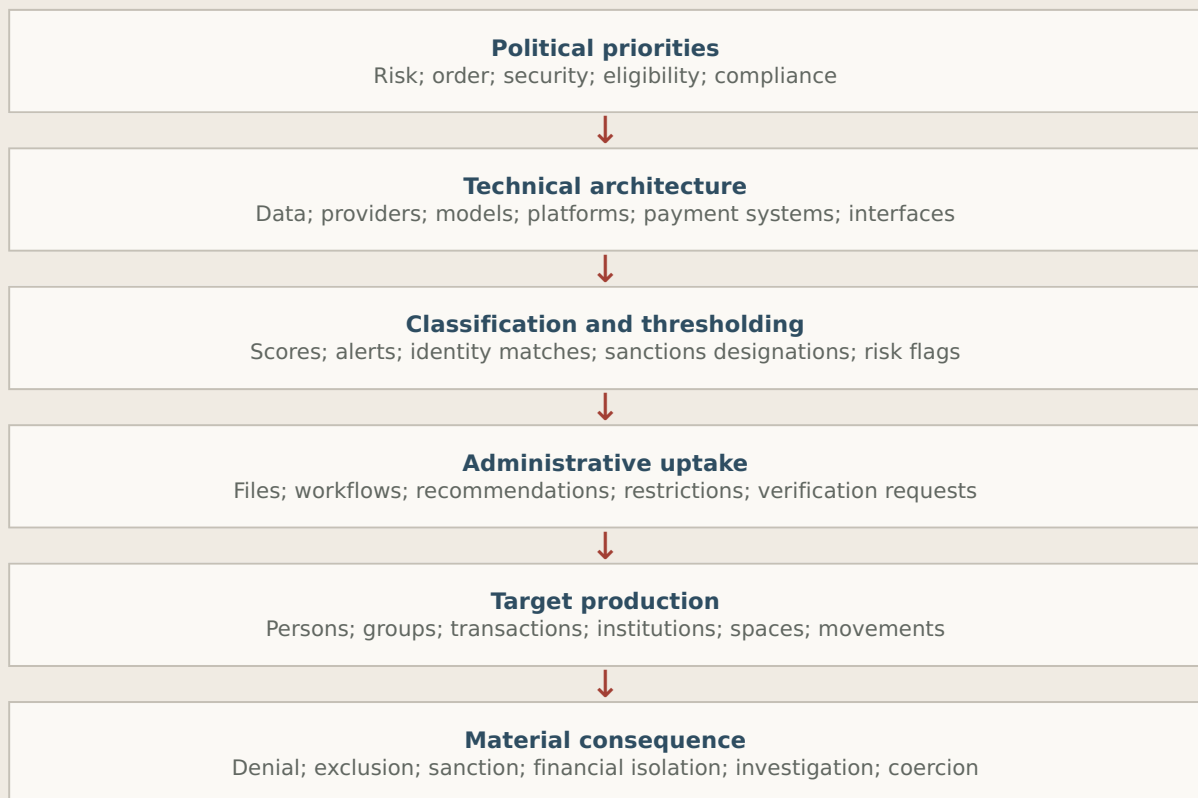
8. Infrastructural Coercion and the Chain of Justification

Code does not arrest a person. An algorithm does not imprison a person. A database does not physically stop someone at a border.

Institutions do.

Officials, police, border agencies, banks, employers, landlords, service providers, and administrative bodies produce material consequences.

But infrastructure can prepare the target, the threshold, the justification, and the timing before visible intervention begins.



Responsibility does not disappear across this chain.

It fragments.

The official may say the system required the action. The provider may say it supplied only a tool. The bank may say it followed compliance requirements. The state may say a technical process produced the outcome.

Infrastructural coercion fragments responsibility across the chain through which classification becomes intervention.

8.1. Legitimacy Fracture

A legitimacy fracture begins upstream.

A classification may be discriminatory. It may be opaque. It may be unlawful. It may be epistemically defective. It may be institutionally unaccountable.

When that classification enters the chain of public authority, later decisions inherit its defect.

A compromised classification may still operate as authority. That is precisely why it becomes a legitimacy fracture.

The legal consequence of a defect will vary across jurisdiction, causation, independent review, remedy, and the specific basis of a decision. Not every later action automatically becomes void.

The conceptual point is narrower.

A compromised classification cannot validate itself merely because an institution adopts it.

8.2. Derivative Burden of Justification

When a legitimacy fracture becomes visible, institutions that rely on the classification inherit a derivative burden of justification.

They must show that their action rests on an independent, reviewable, proportionate, and legally defensible basis rather than on the presumed authority of the technical output.

This principle becomes especially important in welfare eligibility, migration control, sanctions screening, risk scoring, predictive policing, financial exclusion, and AI-assisted administration.

8.3. Latent, Disclosed, and Remedied Fractures

A defect may exist before anyone can see it.

A legitimacy fracture can therefore take three forms:

1. Latent: The defect remains concealed by opacity, secrecy, complexity, or lack of access.
2. Disclosed: Audit, litigation, whistleblowing, technical review, public investigation, or institutional dissent exposes the defect.

3. Remedied: Institutions correct, invalidate, redesign, or legally constrain the relevant classification or decision.

Weak contestability does not refute legitimacy fracture.

Weak contestability explains why legitimacy fractures can persist without remedy.

The fracture is not born only when it is recognized. It is being produced whenever defective classifications begin to shape material action.

SECTION

9. De-Societalization, Homovictimus, and Self-Dispossession

De-societalization does not mean that society disappears.

It means that the state can govern in society's name while society loses practical influence over the operational reality through which the state governs.

Two chains begin to separate:

Society -> representational legitimacy -> state

and

Infrastructure -> classification -> operational reality -> state decision

The first chain legitimates the state.

The second increasingly shapes its conduct.

De-societalization occurs when the state derives legitimacy from society while society no longer functions as the constitutive interlocutor of the state's operational reality.

Elections, courts, legislatures, parties, public debate, and appeals may remain formally active. Yet their capacity to influence data architectures, thresholds, procurement relations, classification systems, and technical conditions may weaken.

Representation survives.

Its operational reach hollows out.

9.1. Homovictimus

Homovictimus is not the data double, the dividual, or Homo Sacer.

The data double is a technical representation. The dividual is a fragmented subject within systems of control. Homo Sacer identifies life captured through sovereign abandonment.

Homovictimismus identifies another condition.

Homovictimismus: readable to survive, classifiable to belong, constrained in the conditions of objection.

The fuller definition remains necessary:

Homovictimismus is the subject compelled to become legible, classifiable, and processable in order to sustain social existence, while losing the infrastructural conditions through which agency, objection, and alternatives can remain effective.

Law may formally persist. Rights may remain on paper. Yet the practical conditions for recognition, access, payment, mobility, and participation can narrow through compulsory infrastructural inclusion.

Homovictimismus is not powerless in every sense. Subjects resist, litigate, evade, organize, expose harm, create alternatives, and contest classifications.

But resistance does not abolish mandatory legibility.

Both can operate at once.

9.2. From Habitat Loss to Self-Dispossession

The most consequential loss in Onoptic conditions is not always immediate exclusion.

It is the loss of authority over one's own institutional reality.

A person may know that they are hungry, lawfully resident, disabled, unemployed, caring for a relative, unable to travel, or entitled to a benefit. But that knowledge may become institutionally weak when it conflicts with the account produced by a database, document requirement, biometric threshold, risk score, claimant record, or administrative platform.

The subject is not merely represented by the system.

The subject is dispossessed of the authority to represent their own life.

This is not a psychological claim. It does not mean that persons lose consciousness of themselves or cease to narrate their own experience.

It is an institutional claim.

The person's lived account becomes less authoritative than the system's operational account of that person.

In Aadhaar-linked welfare, a person may be hungry and legally entitled to receive food. Yet failed verification can mean that the system does not recognize them as a person entitled to receive it.

In Windrush, a person may have lived lawfully in the country for decades. Yet inadequate documents or deficient records can produce the person as someone whose belonging remains administratively doubtful.

In Universal Credit, a person may be ill, poor, caring for another person, or unable to access a device. Yet failure to respond, report, or perform in the required format can translate structural difficulty into administrative non-compliance.

The shared structure is clear:

The person's knowledge of life is displaced by the system's knowledge of the person.

This is self-dispossession.

It is not a separate master concept competing with Onopticon, Homovictimus, or infrastructural imposition. It is the experiential consequence of their convergence.

Enclosure separated many people from the material conditions through which they sustained life.

Onopticon increasingly separates people from the authority to define, verify, and contest the institutional reality of that life.

The historical movement is therefore not from land to data in any simple sense.

It is from the enclosure of habitat to the enclosure of self-representation.

SECTION

10. Counter-Legibility, Analytical Boundaries, and Falsifiability

Counter-legibility refers to practices through which subjects, institutions, and communities expose, contest, evade, reinterpret, or partially reconfigure the conditions through which they are made legible.

It can emerge through litigation, technical audit, whistleblowing, public investigation, institutional dissent, collective organizing, alternative communication, tactical opacity, or the disclosure of hidden classification systems.

Counter-legibility does not abolish Onopticon.

It proves that imposed reality is built, maintained, and therefore vulnerable to interruption.

This matters because Onopticon should not be treated as total. No digital system automatically absorbs all resistance. No institution is fully coherent. No classification is always accepted.

But partial resistance should not be confused with structural freedom.

A person may contest a classification while still needing the identity system, welfare platform, payment infrastructure, migration channel, or administrative interface that produced the classification.

10.1. Falsifiability

Onopticon should not become a label for every digital system.

Not every database is Onoptic. Not every AI tool produces imposed reality. Not every public-private partnership constitutes constitutional externalization. Not every financial network creates infrastructural coercion.

An Onoptic arrangement requires evidence that several conditions converge:

1. technical legibility is compulsory;
2. classification forecloses meaningful possibilities;
3. alternatives are weak, formal, or ineffective;
4. contestation, correction, or exit is limited;
5. the system produces actionable targets;
6. institutional outputs shape material consequences.

The theory weakens where research shows that meaningful alternatives remain available, classifications can be inspected and corrected, technical outputs remain genuinely advisory, public institutions retain audit and exit capacity, and affected populations can materially influence categories and thresholds.

Such findings do not show that power disappears.

They may show that the phenomenon is better described as digital administration, public-service modernization, financial coordination, or regulated technical governance rather than Onopticon.

Onopticon should be diagnosed only where technical systems become compulsory environments of recognition, classification, target production, and materially consequential exclusion under conditions of weak contestability.

The purpose of these boundaries is not to soften the theory.

It is to prevent its indiscriminate use.

SECTION

11. Conclusion: Sovereignty and the Ground of Decision

The central problem of sovereignty in the digital age is not simply who owns data, servers, models, or platforms.

The deeper problem is who determines the conditions under which the state encounters public reality.

The Reality Paradigm identifies that problem.

The infrastructural a priori identifies the conditions through which reality becomes visible, processable, and actionable before decision.

Onopticon identifies the logic that imposes those conditions.

English enclosure shows that imposed reality has a material history. It shows how a shared habitat can be reorganized before individuals are directly expelled from it; how prior access rights can become legally insufficient; how the loss of subsistence can become the precondition of labour availability; and how a new world can consolidate through partial and uneven installations.

The administrative enclosure of social reproduction identifies a contemporary transformation. Welfare, food, work, housing, mobility, payment, legal status, and public recognition can become conditional upon documentary proof, biometric authentication, online administration, behavioural compliance, data linkage, and technical readability.

Kenya shows how identity can become a threshold of public life.

Aadhaar shows how welfare can become conditional upon technical verification.

Windrush shows how lawful belonging can become insufficient when it cannot be translated into documentary proof.

Universal Credit shows how social need can become a field of digital responsiveness and sanctionable performance.

These cases do not establish one completed global regime.

They establish a direction.

The world is not imposed only when it is complete. It is imposed wherever a prior reality of access, recognition, and survival becomes conditional upon an infrastructure built elsewhere.

Sovereignty is not exhausted by decision.

Sovereignty begins with the power to shape the ground on which decisions become possible.

The article does not offer a blueprint, policy programme, or technological remedy.

Its task is diagnostic.

It asks what happens before the visible decision; before the sanction; before the denied claim; before the blocked payment; before the loss of food, work, housing, mobility, or recognition; and before the subject understands that a field of possibility has already been closed.

The Reality Paradigm studies neither a completed world nor a distant future. It studies the point at which a new reality is already being installed before society has learned to name it.

SECTION

Appendix A. Conceptual Set

I. Conceptual Ground

REALITY PARADIGM

A framework that asks under what conditions states and subjects encounter the world as intelligible reality.

INFRASTRUCTURAL A PRIORI

The historically constructed technical and institutional conditions that determine what can appear as visible, processable, risky, eligible, legitimate, or actionable before decision.

II. Historical-Material Genealogy

ENCLOSURE

A historical process through which common and customary conditions of access were reconstituted as environments of exclusive property, legal title, and conditional recognition.

HABITAT

The material environment through which life is reproduced, including subsistence, movement, common right, informal exchange, social reproduction, and collective survival.

ADMINISTRATIVE ENCLOSURE OF SOCIAL REPRODUCTION

The process through which welfare, food, housing, work, mobility, legal status, payment, and public recognition become conditional upon technical identity, documentary proof, digital administration, biometric verification, data linkage, or behavioural compliance.

III. Logic of Power

ONOPTICON

The logic of power that pre-processes and imposes the field of reality that enters decision-making.

INFRASTRUCTURAL IMPOSITION

The establishment of a technical-administrative environment as the compulsory condition of recognition, decision, and action.

EMERGING ONOPTIC FORMATION

A partial or developing installation of infrastructures that increasingly make recognition compulsory, alternatives conditional, and public reality dependent upon technical mediation.

ONOPTIC ARRANGEMENT

A determinate operational chain in which compulsory legibility, material foreclosure, weak contestability, and target production converge.

ONOPTIC REGIME

A stable, recurrent, institutionally integrated set of Onoptic arrangements capable of shaping multiple domains of social life.

IV. Operational Mechanisms**MANDATORY LEGIBILITY**

The compulsion to become technically recognizable and processable in order to remain socially, institutionally, or economically operative.

CLASSIFICATION

The placement of persons, events, claims, institutions, or transactions into operational categories.

THRESHOLDING

The point at which classification becomes actionable.

SYNTHETIC OPERATIONAL REALITY

Generated outputs that authorities adopt in ways that shape what institutions treat as relevant reality.

INSTITUTIONAL AUTHORITY THRESHOLD

The point at which a technical output ceases to be merely advisory and begins to shape classification, decision, priority, target, justification, or intervention.

FORECLOSURE

The closure of access, mobility, rights, payment, recognition, or future possibility.

TARGET PRODUCTION

The transformation of a person, group, institution, transaction, movement, or space into an administratively actionable object.

WEAK CONTESTABILITY

The condition in which affected actors cannot adequately inspect, understand, challenge, correct, or exit the system shaping their lives.

V. State Transformations**CONSTITUTIONAL BYPASS**

The functional extension of legally constrained public capacity through private technical intermediaries.

CONSTITUTIONAL EXTERNALIZATION

The durable integration of public functions with external technical infrastructures in ways that fragment responsibility and relocate practical capacity.

DIGITAL CAPITULATION

The erosion of a state's practical capacity to audit, alter, object to, or exit the infrastructures necessary to exercise public functions.

REFLEXIVE DIGITAL RISK

The vulnerability that arises when state infrastructures render the state's own patterns of perception and response technically legible.

VI. Juridical and Political Consequences**INFRASTRUCTURAL COERCION**

The pre-processing of target, threshold, justification, and timing through which administrative, financial, or physical intervention becomes possible.

LEGITIMACY FRACTURE

A break in the justificatory chain created when an upstream technical classification is discriminatory, opaque, unlawful, epistemically defective, or institutionally unaccountable.

DERIVATIVE BURDEN OF JUSTIFICATION

The duty of institutions relying on a compromised classification to establish an independent, reviewable, and legally defensible basis for their action.

DE-SOCIETALIZATION

The operational severance of the state from society's constitutive role while the state continues to derive legitimacy from society's name.

OPERATIONAL HOLLOWING OF REPRESENTATION

The persistence of representative institutions alongside their declining influence over the infrastructures that shape public reality.

VII. Subjective Consequence and Analytical Limit**HOMOVICTIMUS**

The subject compelled to become legible, classifiable, and processable in order to sustain social existence while losing the infrastructural conditions through which agency, objection, and alternatives can remain effective.

SELF-DISPOSSESSION

The experiential consequence of imposed reality in which a subject's own account of life becomes institutionally less authoritative than the technical, documentary, or administrative account produced by the system.

COUNTER-LEGIBILITY

Practices through which subjects, institutions, and communities expose, contest, evade, or partially reconfigure the technical conditions through which they are made legible.

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