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## **Containment through Mobility. Migrants' spatial disobediences and the reshaping of control through the Hotspot System.**

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### **Abstract:**

This article deals with the modes of (contested) control that are at play at the Mediterranean frontier for containing, dividing and disciplining unruly mobility. Building on ethnographic research conducted on the island of Lesbos and of Lampedusa, it focuses on the implementation and the functioning of the Hotspot System in Greece and in Italy, analysing beyond the fences of detention centers and by looking at the broader logistics of channels, infrastructures and governmental measures deployed for regaining control over migration movements. The article argues that more than control in terms of surveillance and tracking, the Hotspot System contributes to enforce forms of containment through mobility, that consists in controlling migration by obstructing, decelerating and troubling migrants' geographies - more than in fully blocking them. The article takes into account migrants' refusals of being fingerprinted, showing how migrants radically unsettle the association between seeking refuge and lack of choice, enacting their right to choose where to go and claim asylum.

**Keywords:** hotspot; mobility; control; Mediterranean; asylum; containment.

### **Introduction:**

The map of Europe has been redrawn considerably over the last three years as a result of the “turbulence of migration” (Papastergiadis, 2000) and the restructuring of border assemblages, even in the light of the economic crisis which affects more than others Southern European countries. Looking at the moments of encounter and clash between migrants and the mechanisms of control, the cartographic visualisation of the European space that emerges is one crisscrossed by channels<sup>1</sup> and what I call “trouble spots”, corresponding to critical border-zones in which states mobilize prompt governmental interventions. The very temporary presence of people who have arrived in Europe to seek asylum is presented by European agencies like Frontex as a human burden that impacts on those critical sites, generating a sort of reiterated border-stress for member states. The “hotspot approach” as a response for “managing exceptional migratory flows”<sup>2</sup> was first introduced in the *European Agenda on Migration* in May 2015, and in September of the same year the first hotspot opened on

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<sup>1</sup>- “Opened” by migrant movements or managed by states for controlling those movements.

<sup>2</sup>[http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/european-agenda-migration/background-information/docs/2\\_hotspots\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/european-agenda-migration/background-information/docs/2_hotspots_en.pdf)

the island of Lampedusa: the previous “centre of first aid and hosting” in Lampedusa was renamed “hotspot”. In the span of few months, other hotspots had been activated in Greece (Chios, Kos, Lesbos, Leros and Samos) and in Italy (Pozzallo, Taranto and Trapani). The hotspot is the most recent attempt by the EU to streamline and europeanise - see standardise - techniques and procedures for identifying and selecting migrants (Bigo, 2014; Geddes, 2007; Guild, 2006; Huysmans, 2000). Yet, it would be misleading to see the Hotspot System as the actualisation of the Europeanisation of controls; rather, the materiality of the hotspot-infrastructure shows and enforces the role of frontier-line member states - Italy and Greece - as spaces of migration containment, shedding lights on the political frictions between the EU and these countries. Indeed, the Hotspot System is formed by as a set of procedures and infrastructures for regaining control over autonomous migration movements and, simultaneously, for monitoring and putting pressure on Greece and Italy, concerning their obligation to identify migrants. However, I do not focus on hotspots per se here; rather, this paper draws attention to the specific “hold” over migrants’ lives to the peculiar modes of government of migrant mobility that are at stake at European border-zones.

The two mutually related arguments that I want to push forward here in relation to the forms of control at the margins of the state are the following ones. First, by shifting the attention from detention infrastructures to the procedures and techniques through which migrants are partitioned and channeled, we realize that what is at stake is not a politics of control in the sense of surveillance and constant tracking of migrants movements. Rather, analysing hotspots as part of a broader “political technology” (Foucault, 2000) for disciplining unruly mobility, what emerges is a generalized strategy of *containment through mobility*. By containment through mobility I refer to the fact that migration movements are obstructed in their autonomy not only by generating immobility and conditions of strandedness, nor through constant surveillance but through administrative, political and legal measures that use (forced) mobility as a technique of government. Containment refers to the ways in which migrants’ movements and presence are troubled, subjected to convoluted or hectic

movements and to protracted moment of strandedness. Thus, containment can involve both spatial and temporal hindrances that end up in troubling migrants' stay and mobility.

Second, I bring attention to migrants' refusals against the geographical restrictions imposed on them concerning the place where to claim asylum, contending that more than contesting control as such they posit freedom (of movement and choice) and asylum as non-oppositional terms. Refusing the spatial traps of the Relocation Scheme and of the Dublin Regulation, they undermine the image of asylum seekers as subjects who cannot but accept protection at any condition, enacting practices of spatial disobedience.

The hotspots can be seen as spatial crystallisations of the EU's attempt to regain control over migration movements, through "flexible" and temporary measures. This image of critical EU entry-points is well encapsulated in Frontex's definition of the hotspot as "a section of the EU external border or a region with extraordinary migratory pressure and mixed flows that require reinforced and concerted EU-Agencies support to the affected member states".<sup>3</sup> Hotspots should be seen as chokepoints of mobility disruption for capturing and slowing down migration. However, to be object of criminalisation and of measures of containment are not only migrants' movements and presence but also practices of spatial disobedience enacted by migrants while claiming asylum. What appears "intolerable" to the states is that asylum seekers refuse to comply with the restrictive conditions established by EU asylum and migration policies, enacting and claiming freedom of choice - about the place to stay and about where to move.

Such a gaze on hotspots works as a lens through which grasping modes of migration containment through mobility - conceiving mobility as a technique of government - and migrants' spatial disobediences against the restrictions imposed by the EU politics of asylum. This paper contributes to critical literature on migration controls that considers unruly mobilities as practices that exceed the spaces and the tempos of governmentality put into place for containing and disciplining them (De

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<sup>3</sup><http://frontex.europa.eu/pressroom/faq/situation-at-external-border/>

Genova, 2013b; Mezzadra, 2011; Papadopoulos, Stephenson, Tsianos, 2008). In relation to this, the article will bring attention to the ways in which the hotspot as an “approach” to managing migrant presence and movements has spread across the territory beyond the officially designated hotspot facilities. The essay proceeds in four steps, dealing with migration controls from different but mutually related angles that illuminates modes of containment through mobility. In the first section the article engages with a reconceptualisation of the notion and the practices of migration control beyond disciplinary techniques and surveillance. Then, it focuses on the temporality of control, highlighting the frantic and accelerated pace that characterises the process of migrants’ status determination in the hotspots<sup>4</sup>. It moves on by looking at the forms of containment through mobility that are connected to the Hotspot System and at the spatial multiplication of (unofficial) hotspot-like spaces across the territory. In the final section the essay centres on the contested political and geopolitical framework in which the hotspot approach is situated and on the asymmetrical negotiations between Southern European countries and the EU. It brings attention to migrants’ spatial disobedience, that is to the refusals on the part of many migrants to comply with the spatial restrictions imposed by the Dublin Regulation and by the EU Relocation Scheme. As I will show, through these refusals, migrants do actually posit asylum and practices of freedom as two mutually interdependent terms that cannot be disjoined from each other.

The data and information that I present here are in part the results of the fieldwork I conducted between 2015 and 2017 in Greece (Lesbos and Chios) and in Italy (in Sicily and on the island of Lampedusa, and in the cities of Como and Ventimiglia), while in part stem from an analysis of the EU documents.

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<sup>4</sup> Between July 2015 and February 2016, conducting interviews with local authorities, Frontex officers, migrants and humanitarian actors such as Doctors Without Borders.

### *Control beyond surveillance:*

“Hotspot” is not a term that designates migration control hubs only (Kastrinou, Neocleous, 2016). The nomenclature of the hotspots had been firstly used in the Nineties in literature on criminology (Braga et al. 1999) and then had been adopted by the EU for designating “logistical hotspots”<sup>5</sup> of crime. More recently, it has been employed by EU agencies for indicating the sites used by migrant smugglers and traffickers, and the crucial junctions of smuggling networks that work as attractive magnets for migrants. In the joint Europol-Interpol report “Migrant Smuggling Networks” (May 2016) “hotspot” gains central stage, partly superseding the terminology of “routes” and “flows”. In fact, the image of the “network” that is currently prevailing in description and in risk-analyses produced by states and by Frontex ultimately conveys a reference to spatial knots and hotspots. The topology of corridors and routes cannot be taken separately from that of choke-points where migrant journeys are subjected to diversions, stops and changes: “although key migratory routes were identified as main corridors for migrant smuggling [...] a further diversification of routes is expected [...] New hotspots may emerge in response to these changes”.<sup>6</sup> On this point, this article builds on Steve Opitz and Ute Tellmann’s considerations on border-zones that require to be investigated not as sites criss-crossed by flows but, on the contrary, as “regulative spaces”. This involves exploring the “constitutive role of these territories in “managing, establishing or operating what we term global dis/connectivity [...] there are no flows that precedes the zone” (Opitz, Tellmann, 2012: 267).

Therefore, hotspots are not narrowed to sites of control but, rather, include junctions with high intensity circulation and critical places in the logistics of migrant crossing, be the logistics of control put into place by states, or the relatively autonomous logistics of smuggling and migrant crossing. “Hotspot” actually involves a broad reconceptualization of the border as such: indeed, the border

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<sup>5</sup> “Socta. Eu serious and organised threat assessment”, p.1.

<sup>6</sup> Joint Europol-Interpol Report, “Migrant smuggling networks”, p.5.

reframed as an hotspot is an image that circulates across governmental narratives, beyond migration, for designating critical sites that require prompt and ad-hoc interventions. Thus, the hotspot highlights transformations in the ways of representing the border: this latter is less figured as a line than as a pinpointed site of crisis in which rapid interventions are required (Coward, 2015).

Governing migration through hotspots entails a reconceptualisation of the very notion of “control”: indeed, control is not about constant monitoring activities and border surveillance. Control is on the one hand enforced through punctual sites and moments in which migrants are identified and that, however, must be situated within a landscape of channels and infrastructures for containing, partitioning and disciplining mobility (Mezzadra, Neilson, 2013). On the other, an analysis of the functioning and the impact of the Hotspot System enables seeing that control is about disrupting migrant autonomous movements forcing them into paths of confinement - produced by legal conundrums, spatial restrictions and administrative violence. Thus, a gaze on the Hotspot System leads us to reframe control in terms of heterogenous modes of containment that aim at disrupting, constraining and indirectly channelling migrants’ mobility and spatial presence. Related to this, control is about the multiplication of exclusionary partitions and categories used for dividing up migrant multiplicities and preventing access to the channels of asylum.

On this point it might worth recalling Gilles Deleuze’s definition of control as a continuous activity that “gives the position of any element within an open environment at any given moment” and in which “what counts is not the barrier but the computer that tracks each person’s position and effects a universal modulation” (Deleuze, 1992: 7). Control is not narrowed to disciplinary and direct monitoring of the individuals. It refers to the potential localisation and traceability of bodies across space and over time that can be made by matching the algorithm of the fingerprints stored in the Eurodac database with migrants’ data that can be captured by police officers in any place in Europe. The government at distance and via digital traceability is certainly an important aspect of the ways in which migrants are controlled (Ajana, 2013; Amoore, 2013). However, the methodological shift

from the barrier to the computer tracking at a distance, and from numbers establishing the position of individuals in space to codes “that mark access to information of reject it” (Deleuze, 1992: 5) does not allow us to account for effective “hold” over migrants’ lives taking place through the multiplication of exclusionary partitions and hierarchies of refugee protection and mobility.

Foucaultian expression “*omnes et singulatim*” (Foucault, 2009, 1994), which designates the action of government over singular conducts and populations, helps us to grasp the way in which the individualised “hold” enacted on any migrant through mechanisms of identification and control is achieved in relation to a certain politics of great numbers, aimed at differentiating migrant status. As William Walters has shown, “the humanitarian border” (Walters, 2011) is a non-pastoral political technology that target migrants both on an individualized basis and as part of groups.

In this paper I bring attention to modes of control that do not consist in identifying nor in tracking migrants movements. This consists in what I have called above “containment through mobility”, meaning by that the ways in which (forced) mobility is used as a technique for regaining control over migration.

An exclusive focus on migrant traceability and on control as code misses to deal with practices of migration governmentality predicated upon the production of hierarchies of lives, asymmetries of mobility and exclusionary partitions. While migrants are all subjected to identification procedures that are conducted in a standardised way, after being fingerprinted upon disembarkation, they are partitioned and a more individualised “hold” is exercised on them. The control over migrant movements is not exclusively the result of the clash between the body of the migrant and the technical devices employed for collecting their biometric data; they depend on variable criteria (e.g. nationality) and on the relationship between singular migrants and the migrant multiplicity – namely, the approximate number of migrants who at a certain moment are allowed to stay in the country and the exclusionary partitions upon which the asylum system is predicated (Tazzioli, 2016a).



People can be hampered from staying in a place or might be forced to move. In this way, control is not about detention, nor about monitoring at distance: modes of containment through mobility obstruct and decelerate migrants' geographies and force migrants to undertake convoluted geographies. Containment should be distinguished from spatial confinement: the former, in fact, is not narrowed to the latter; it can consist in modes of spatial disruptions and diversions, legal impasses as well as temporal suspensions that can entail direct physical restrictions or not. Moreover, containment allows us to move beyond the opposition between exclusion and inclusion: a politics of containment does not entail keeping migrants out nor immobile. Rather, containment can involve forms of economic exploitation and incorporation, and can be enacted also by keeping migrants on the move.

### ***The Temporality of Control:***

The partition of migrants “in real need of protection” from “bogus refugees” is conceived as the primary goal of the hotspots and as a procedure that national authorities should undertake in the quickest possible way. In Greece, the temporality of migration control has been subjected to convoluted alterations. Until the end of 2015, migrants who landed on Greek islands were quickly identified in the hotspots; although the registration was not compulsory, it was the condition for migrants to get a temporary permit of one or six months to transit through Greece and to take the ferry to Athens. The inside-outside circulation through the hotspots was relatively quick and migrants did not usually remain more than a few days on the islands. A first relevant exception was made by a huge group of Pakistani migrants – about 200 people - who in November 2015 refused to be fingerprinted, remaining blocked on the island. The situation rapidly changed with the progressive closure of the Greek-Macedonian border, which caused the blockage of thousands of migrants at the border crossing point of Eidomeni. On November 19, Macedonia put into place highly selective restrictions, allowing only Syrians, Iraqis and Afghans to cross the border. Then, in February 2016, Afghans were also denied to entry Macedonia and consequently the number of people stranded in

Eidomeni increased exponentially in few days. On March 8 the Greek-Macedonian border was officially closed for all nationalities, and thus Greece was transformed from a space of transit to a space of containment. In the face of such a massive blockage of refugees in Northern Greece, Greek authorities decided to *decrease the speed of migrant circulation* on the islands in order to alleviate the pressure of human bodies at the border with Macedonia.

In Italy, those considered eligible for protection are transferred to hosting centres where they have to wait while their asylum claim is processed; all the others who are registered in the national database as “irregular entries” are instead taken to detention centres or given a decree of expulsion. However, in order to grasp what I call the *hotspot-effect* - the effects of containment generated through the implementation of the Hotspot System - we cannot narrow the attention to the moment of first identification and partition that takes place inside the hotspots. The increased rate of rejection of asylum applications over the last three years across Europe indicates that the majority of migrants who are allowed to claim asylum then become illegalized subjects on the territory.

Hotspots work by enforcing a *preventative exclusionary humanitarian threshold*. As soon as migrants arrive in the hotspot, they are divided by the national Scientific Police under the supervision of Frontex, between those who are given the possibility to lay their asylum claim and the others who are quickly illegalised and treated as economic migrants. Hence, the hectic speed of the hotspot machine does not function by swiftly channeling refugees across the territory or by finding a space for them. Rather, those who remain preventively outside the humanitarian channels become “illegal” migrants and potentially constitute cheap labour force on the territory. As Nicholas De Genova has explained, becoming deportable is not only the consequence of illegalization but is also “provides an apparatus for sustaining” migrants’ vulnerability “inasmuch as it is deportable, becomes an eminently disposable commodity” (De Genova, 2004: 161; see also Andersson, 2014).

Preventive denial of access to the asylum system has been an ordinary procedure in the hotspot of Lampedusa, where for about six months between October 2015 and March 2016 migrants coming

from West-African countries and from the Maghreb region were illegalized “on the spot”, soon after being fingerprinted (Garelli, Tazzioli, 2016a). The racialized partitioning between migrants eligible for protection and those preventively denied of the right to claim asylum has been predicated mainly upon migrant nationality (Sciurba, 2017). Nationality has not been the only criterion underpinning this biopolitical sorting of migrant multiplicities and it has been combined with what I call a *politics of numbers*. Among the two nationalities that used to be illegalized “on the spot” there were Nigerians and Gambians who in the second half of 2015 represented the highest two nationalities of migrants arriving in Italy by sea. During the first months of 2016, Gambians and Nigerians formed, respectively, 10% and 15% of the migrants arriving by sea, becoming the two highest nationalities in absolute terms and the highest two among migrants who are not eligible for relocation.<sup>7</sup> The temporality of migration control in the Italian hotspots followed an *accelerated pace* with respect to previous procedure of selection and identification in the Centres of First Aid and Hosting (CPSA). It is important to remark that, however, the relative rapidity of control through sorting essentially concerned the sorting between migrants who are taken into the exclusionary channels of the asylum and those who are dropped out of the mechanisms of protection and are officially, but not effectively, removed from the Italian territory.

Nevertheless, the swift temporality in place for partitioning migrant does not correspond to the average time of migrants’ permanence in the hotspots. In fact, migrants are not usually transferred from the hotspots within 72 hours – the time established by Italy for finalising the identification procedures. On average, they remain there for two-three weeks or longer, while Greek hotspots have become choke-points of protracted wait, where migrants end up in staying one year or more, until when their asylum claim is processed.

The temporality of control in the Italy and in Greece has been modulated at different paces; yet, despite differences, the hotspot system should be situated within a rationale of control that is under-

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<sup>7</sup><http://data.unhcr.org/mediterranean/country.php?id=105>

pinned by a *check-pointed* temporality. Migrants are targeted and identified in specific sites along their route to and across Europe that do not always correspond to national border-lines. On the vessels, after being rescued by the Navy or the Coast Guard, migrants are subjected to a pre-identification procedure, that is to say they are registered by Frontex officers who are on board, and divided by nationality, and suspected smugglers are removed. Soon after landing, they are fingerprinted in the hotspots or in other detention centres or at the port; then, in the cities or on public transport migrants are often subjected to more or less sporadic identity checks, as well as in transit-points.

### ***Migrants' Spatial Disobediences:***

The extended permanence inside the hotspots is partly due to the limited places available in the hosting centres on the national territory. Yet, in part, it is also the incalculable side-effect of migrants who, aware of the consequences of the Dublin Regulation, have refused to be fingerprinted. This was the case of about 250 Eritreans who arrived in Lampedusa, some of them in November 2015 and others in early December, who adamantly refused to be fingerprinted by the Italian police. Over the span of a few weeks this silent individual dissent became a collective concerted refusal. On December 17, the migrants organised a march in the streets of Lampedusa and a sit-in chanting "No fingerprints. We want freedom. We want to move out of the camp".<sup>8</sup> They carried on their collective struggle against identification inside the hotspot until January 6, when they replicated the public protest by remaining for two nights outside the main Church of Lampedusa. Despite the media visibility they gained, the temporality of the visibilized struggle and the temporality of control split apart. The "hold" exercised directly and indirectly on migrants by the police and by the managers of the cooperative that runs the hotspot actually extended far beyond the punctual moment of the visible collective protest. By that, I don't want to suggest that migrant conducts are pervasively

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<sup>8</sup>I was on the island when the protest happened. Migrants gathered in front of the church and then marched in the streets demanding to speak with the Mayor of Lampedusa. Finally, they were taken back by force to the hotspot. <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-europe-migrants-lampedusa-fingerprint-idUSKBN0U02H720151217>

and unrelentingly monitored, since practices of control are instead quite discontinuous and based on what I call a *check-point based temporality of monitoring*. After that the spotlight of media visibility switched off, only those who were in touch with the migrants detained in the hotspot were informed about the consequences and developments of the collective refusal. In less than one month, migrants who took part in the public protest were transferred to Sicily ten by ten, in order to divide the group, and fingerprinted there by force<sup>9</sup>.

This collective refusal, which has been replicated in other hotspots across Italy, highlights the “in-corrigibility” (De Genova, 2010) of migrants up against the spatial restrictions imposed on them by the EU, at the same time keeping on claiming asylum. Their spatial disobedience was presented by local and national authorities as untenable because their claim could not be easily accommodated into the narrative of humanitarianism and it brought to the fore the disjuncture between seeking refuge and accepting protection. The majority of the migrants who refused to give their fingerprints were mainly Eritreans, and so eligible for the Relocation Programme. Yet, against the institutional channels of Relocation that allocate eligible migrants to a given member state, the group of migrants in Lampedusa, like many others, enacted the right to choose -that the humanitarization of migration denies to them, presenting asylum seekers as subjects who cannot but accept to be protected, even to the price of their autonomy about where to stay and claim asylum. What for the migrants in question is a non-negotiable right that they do not have by law but that they take and enact, refusing to be fingerprinted, for states and humanitarian actors it is an unbearable demand that disrupts the oppositional couple between allegedly “economic migrants”, and people seeking asylum. The image of a subject seeking refuge by autonomously choosing where to go appears as a contradiction in terms and, at the same time, as an politically untenable icon. Being refugees, ac-

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<sup>9</sup> All information that I reported in this section on the functioning of the hotspot of Lampedusa are the result of my fieldwork and of the interviews I conducted with international organisations, such as UNHCR and of the conversations with activists networks in Sicily. Moreover, part of the information about the Italian hotspots can also be found in reports published by Amnesty International (<https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/campaigns/2016/11/hotspot-italy/>) well as Italian NGOs.

ording to a governmental and humanitarian perspective, entails a “we cannot do anything but accept” condition, insofar as it requires that the subject has not other possibility than agreeing on the terms of protection that is granted to him.

### ***Containment through Mobility:***

Control over migrant movements is enacted only on a spatially and temporally punctual basis. On the contrary, migrants are potentially traceable all the time, not only at distance – via radar and satellites – but also through the fingerprints that are collected and then stored in the European database EURODAC. It is precisely at and through these diverse *hot spots* - among which the proper “hotspots” are only a peculiar materialisation - that migrants become potentially traceable at any moment. More importantly, taking the hotspots as part of a broader landscape of infrastructures and measures for disciplining movements, (forced) non-autonomous mobility appears as one of the effects of containment generated on migrants’ lives. After the relatively extended period of detention inside the hotspots, migrants are forced to erratic geographies and are governed by keeping them on the move.

After being registered in the hotspot of Moria in Lesbos, before that the EU-Turkey agreement came into force (March 19, 2016), migrants used to take the ferry to Athens and there they were free to move on; but at the same time were also discharged from humanitarian assistance, being relatively uncontrolled, at least until they reached the Greek-Macedonian border (Eidomeni). In Italy, after being identified in the hotspots, migrants are transferred to hosting centres that are spread across the territory; thus their mobility is channeled and controlled after the phase of the hotspot in a more structured way than in Greece. Yet, once in the hosting centres most of the migrants have remained stranded there for about one year or more. Some of the migrants transferred in these centres escape after few days, disappearing, (although remaining always traceable as they have already been fingerprinted) with the silent and implicit agreement of Italian authorities that, ulti-

mately, have no interest in keeping migrants in Italy. Moreover, among the people who have been identified inside the hotspots, those who are denied of the possibility to claim asylum are illegalized on the spot and receive a decree of expulsion.

In the place of a primary focus on EU documents and official declarations about the hotspot system, in this paper I have shifted the attention to the effective modalities and techniques through which migrants are classified, divided and labelled upon disembarkation. I propose here a further move in order to grasp the effects of containment through mobility generated on migrants' movements and presence, also through the dissemination of hotspot-like sites. Indeed, the functioning of the hotspots, has in a way been replicated across the territory. Police stations in many Italian towns, and in particular in Milan, have been transformed into informal and unofficial hotspots, asylum-traps for migrants: indeed, when migrants go there in order to lay down their asylum claim, they are blocked there and asked to fill in a paper ("*Foglio notizie*") and to answer a series of questions concerning the reasons for their arrival in Italy and those for staying – “why did you come to Italy?”, “which route did you take and where did you pass through?” “Where do you want to stay in Europe and what are your plans?”. On the basis of this paper and of the answers provided, the police decide whether the migrants will be allowed to claim asylum or not; if not, they are given a decree of expulsion that establishes that the person must leave the country by his own means. In these disseminated hotspot-like spaces migrants are not monitored nor they are subjected to so much individualised controls. Instead, they are checked - mainly according to racialized criteria - and are hampered from the asylum channels or forced to undertake convoluted geographies in order not to be deported or forcibly returned from Northern Italy back to the South.

Border crossing points have started to work as hotspot-zones of control and partition at the same time. The rail station of Ventimiglia, at the Italian-French border, has become a kind of urban hotspot at which most of the migrants who try to reach France are temporarily blocked by the police, with some of them being arrested and transferred by force to detention centres in the South of Italy

– Bari, Catania - and to the hotspot of Taranto (Tazzioli, 2016b). July 2016, Ventimiglia: the first forced transfers by bus of “undisciplined migrants”, from the French-Italian border to the hotspot in Taranto, 1200 km from Ventimiglia, took place. In September these internal deportations became a weekly routine, and the same measure was extended to Como, the closest Italian city to the Swiss border: migrants who are pushed back from France and Switzerland are then taken by the Italian police to South of Italy, not with the final goal of blocking them in Taranto but by lengthening and diverting their journeys<sup>10</sup>. It would be misleading to look at internal transfers through the lens of detention, as well as in terms of abandonment. On the one hand, migrants are not kept inside the hotspot. After being fingerprinted and identified again, they are released: both the humanitarian and the security “hold” over migrant lives withdraw. On the other, they are not properly governed through abandonment, as this would imply an original condition of being taken into account or protected. Migrants are obstructed in their practices and temporality of migration through modes of “containment beyond detention” (Garelli, Tazzioli, 2016b): their autonomous movements are subjected to repeated hindrances. Yet, more than blocking migrants paradoxically these modes of government force them to manifold rerouting and to a condition of permanent mobility: migrants are kept on the move.

Many succeed in going back to Ventimiglia and Como in few days, but at the same time the autonomy and the temporality of migration movements is subjected to disruptions and diversions. A focus on informal hotspot-like spaces enables seeing that the functioning of the Hotspot System cannot be disconnected from states’ attempts to regain control over migrant secondary movements. By taking migrants back to South of Italy, Italian authorities have put into place a tactic of deterrence – aimed at discouraging migrants from restarting their journeys – complicating migrants’ convoluted geographies across Europe. The enforcement of the hotspot approach across the Italian

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<sup>10</sup> The reconstruction of the forced internal transfers from Como and Ventimiglia has been done interviewing the Red Cross and the catholic organization Caritas in the two cities - between November 2016 and January 2017.



territory and beyond the Southern European outposts has contributed to the multiplication of *preventative border-zones* in the cities and in different sites, where many migrants are impeded from claiming asylum and are illegalized before that their demand is processed. In this way, the Hotspot System has further increased the selective and exclusionary tightening of the channels of the asylum.

Restrictions do not concern solely the outcomes – a low rate of success – but, more importantly, the access to the very procedure of asylum. If we take the hotspot's function of a preventative frontier that hampers migrants from accessing the asylum procedure, we can actually speak of a multiplication of "hotspot-like" border-zones across the territory that in Greece have been in a way institutionalised with the implementation, in June 2016, of the asylum pre-registration procedures coordinated by UNHCR and EASO in different sites. Registration hubs are located within the boundaries some Greek cities, like Athens and Thessaloniki, and migrants are transferred there for registering – giving their personal details and nationality – and have to wear a bracelet upon which is marked the hour and the date of their registration. Pre-screening is officially carried out to assess whether there are migrants who are eligible for family reunification or for relocation. Yet, the pre-registration hub is the place in which migrants are approached by IOM officers who try to convince them to make a "voluntary return", as well as being a place for counting migrants: thus, pre-registration hubs work as hotspots exercising forms of *humanitarian control*. Migrants who landed on Greek island after the implementation of the EU-Turkey Deal in 2016 are subjected to "geographical restrictions", which means that they have to wait on the islands for their asylum application to be processed and cannot be transferred to the mainland. In this case, containment turns out to be a mode of spatial confinement and, at once, a technique for moving migrants away. In particular, on Greek islands migrants have to match the admissibility criterion which had been introduced in 2016 for de facto excluding as many migrants as possible from the channels of the asylum and in re-

sponse to migrants overloading the asylum system, applying in masse in order to avoid being deported to Turkey.

By introducing such a preliminary step - the admissibility procedure - during which migrants are only asked “would Turkey be a safe country for you?”, even those migrant nationals who would very likely obtain the refugee status , such as Syrians, in this way can be preventively denied from claiming asylum and become deportable to Turkey. Yet, far from being a rapid and smooth process, migrants’ forced return to Turkey depend on Turkey’s approval and, moreover, migrants’ appeals against the deportation decision slow and jam the process. Yet, in the meanwhile, they are moved from one hotspot to another one: thus, forced mobility is used as a technique for disciplining migrants waiting to be deported. As remarked by the manager of Souda camp - a refugee camp built by Greek authorities in Chios due to the lack of places inside the hotspot - “we loose the trace of many migrants: those who do not pass the admissibility step, are usually arrested and put here in a police station here in Chios for few days. Then, they had been transferred to Lesbos”<sup>11</sup>.

### ***The Differential Spatial Segregation:***

In order to grasp the functioning of the Hotspot System it is necessary to situate it within the current Mediterranean geopolitical context, taking hotspots as the *detentive crystallisations* of political agreements and of border strategies for slowing and disrupting migrants’ journeys across Europe more than for blocking or detaining them. As Jenna Loyd and Alison Mountz point out, “migration management, and its geographical articulation on islands, involves persistent reconfigurations of sovereignty, particularly evident during times of crisis over human migration” (Loyd, Mountz, 2014: 24). The island of Lesbos is one of the critical sites where such a reshaping, transforming at the same time the role of the island and the functioning of the hotspot, has been ostensibly visible

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<sup>11</sup> Interview with the manager of Souda Refugee camp, July 2017.

and rapid. The signature of the EU-Turkey agreement has triggered tangible spatial changes on the Greek islands and in the very functioning of the hotspot. Indeed, in just one day – from March 18 to March 19 – Lesbos was transformed from a sort of registration pit-stop where migrants used to stay for no more than few days before leaving to Athens by ferry, to an island of protracted confinement. Yet, if Lesbos is today a space-frontier working as a site of preventive deportation does not mean that a homogenous “hold” over migrant lives is at play. By entering the hotspot, and trying to reconstruct in a coherent narrative the fragmentary information collected by humanitarian organisations working inside the centre, the *multi-fenced spatial configuration* of Moria highlights the *mechanisms of differential segregation* that are at play there. The system of concentric cages that characterises the spatiality of the hotspot and the limits to circulation for certain migrants - who are detained in the prison which is inside the hotspot - correspond to the migrants’ level of perceived “dangerousness”; while those who are labelled as “vulnerable” are placed in the inner cages of the hotspot - in sectors A, B and C. In this sense, hotspots work through a twofold spatial trap for the migrants: on the one hand those who accept being fingerprinted have not other choice than to claim asylum in Italy; on the other, those who refuse to give their fingerprints are not transferred to the mainland and remain detained in the hotspot. Therefore, the *twofold spatial trap* is actualised into a strategy of containment within the South of Europe. Such a spatial containment takes place according to a logic of spatial invisibilization, opposed to some extent to the “border spectacle” (De Genova, 2013; Cuttitta, 2012) that was in place before the start of Mare Nostrum. While migrants’ presence is narratively spectacularized – through the media that frame it in terms of “crisis” – actually migrants are spatially invisibilized, that is to say they are removed from public view and the procedures of identification and selection are made out of the spotlight. Moreover, migrants are swiftly divided, in order to prevent the possible formation of a collective political subject (Aradau, 2016); in many border-zones and informal transit-points of Europe migrants are in fact the target of a politics of scattering and dispersion, as soon as any sort of collective struggle emerges.

### ***Europeanisation of Migration Controls ?***

The hotspot approach has been presented by the European Union as “an immediate action to assist frontline Member States in meeting the challenges presented by high migratory pressures at the EU’s external borders”.<sup>12</sup> The support that is given to Italian and Greek authorities is represented by the constant monitoring of identification procedures by Frontex and EASO in order to check that all migrants are fingerprinted with the promise that those eligible for relocation will be sent to other European countries, in order to alleviate Italy and Greece’s *humanitarian burden*. The failure of the Relocation Scheme has contributed to craft the hotspots as EU islands inside national territories: the hotspot as a sort of *excised EU border-zone* in which European agencies control how migrants are identified, channeled and divided according to the EU’s standards. The hotspots constitute the inverse image of the offshore processing centres at the pre- frontiers of Europe, being in fact EU zones of control internal to member states. More than the Europeanisation of migration controls, the Hotspot System has marked a substantial irruption of the European Union, via EU agencies, into Greece and Italy’ sovereignty in the field of identification procedures, marking what the editors of this special issue call “spaces of asymmetrical negotiations” (Eule, Loher, Wiss). National authorities are actually in charge of both identification procedures in the hotspots and of transferring them to hosting or detention centres; indeed, the fingerprinting of migrants is also technically carried out by the Greek and Italian Scientific Police. However, the huge presence of EASO, Europol and Frontex officers inside the hotspots as well as at the ports where migrants are disembarked, marks a significant change in the ordinary practices of migration management in the countries of first arrival. It is important to notice that the percentage of migrants being fingerprinted has rapidly increased, peaking at 98% in Italy in the second half of 2015, in comparison with 63% during the first half of the year, that is before the opening of the hotspots, and only 37% if we consider fingerprints sent to

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<sup>12</sup> “Explanatory Note on “Hotspot” Approach.” <http://www.statewatch.org/news/2015/jul/eu-com-hotspots.pdf> (last access, December 10, 2016).

Eurodac. Until September 2015, Italy used to allow some migrant nationalities, in particular Syrians and Eritreans, to escape without being identified; yet, as it has been stressed by the Head of the Scientific Police in Rome, “with the presence of Frontex inside detention facilities, both Italy and migrants have been deceived by the European Union, which has put direct pressure on us to fingerprint everybody, also with the use of force if needed”.<sup>13</sup> In Greece the majority of migrants were not fingerprinted before the implementation of the hotspot system, and the fingerprints taken were not sent to Eurodac. Instead, with the transformation of the existing detention centres and centres of first hosting into hotspots, and more radically after the signing of the EU-Turkey agreement, migrants are not allowed to leave Greek islands without being identified.<sup>14</sup>

The current reshaping of migration governmentality across Europe and the establishment of migration infrastructures for channelling, decelerating and identifying migrants, must be read against the backdrop of the twofold (produced) crises, that is the economic crisis and the crisis of the EU border regime. As Bernd Kasperek has observed, what emerges is “a new pattern of governing Europe: in ever more policy fields, a declaration of a crisis, of an emergency, legitimates the intervention of European institutions, be it the Troika in the case of the Euro-crisis, or Frontex in the case of the “refugee crisis.” (Kasperek, 2016: 13; see also Bojadzijeve, Mezzadra, 2015). The multifarious migration infrastructures – formed by state-controlled migration channels across Europe and by *identification-knots* such as the hotspots – have been built by member states in order to respond to the arrival of war escapees, with the twofold aim of preventing secondary movements and channelling and controlling mobility. Although member states have to some extent acted in a relatively autonomous way, striving to get rid of migrants – letting them circulate and go elsewhere, or hampering them from entering – the EU has tried to impose a “Troikaization” (Heller and others, 2016)

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<sup>13</sup> Interview with the Scientific Police at the Home Office in Rome, 21 January 2016.

<sup>14</sup> The number of fingerprints sent to Eurodac from Greece in September 2015 was about 8%, while in January 2016 it reached 87%. (Rapporto Hotspots. Il Diritto Negato, Oxfam, May 2016).

of border controls, not Europeanising these latter but rather surveilling the activity of the most affected countries, such as Italy and Greece. The EU border regime architecture envisages the disciplining at once of unruly mobility and EU Southern states, that appear more and more as the spaces-frontiers of Europe.

***Conclusion: the unbearable twofold claim of asylum and freedom.***

By flagging up that what is seen as “refugee crisis” actually reveals the crisis of the EU border regime, we should be attentive in not overlooking that it is also a crisis of the migrants who are stranded or pushed back at the borders of Europe, and who die in the Mediterranean before reaching the European territory. The multiple and mutually connected crises are far from being a zero-sum game. Indeed, if we can speak of a crisis of the border regime, this latter is however characterised by a constant reshaping and restructuring of the mechanisms of capture put into place for obstructing, slowing down and disciplining or channelling unruly mobility. That said, migrants’ refusals against the obligation to give the fingerprints and the reluctance on the part of many migrants in entering the Relocation Scheme should not be regarded only as destituent practices of resistance, nor as mere attempts to dodge controls. Engaging in a methodological approach that refuses to look at migration through the lenses of the State, these are practices of freedom that are criminalized and disqualified as incompatible with the moral economy of the asylum regime and the geographic restrictions imposed by the Dublin Regulation. The fact that migrants’ spread refusal of the Relocation Programme has been defined “outrageous”<sup>15</sup> by the President of the European Commission Jean-Claude Juncker shows that, if one deals with migration by “seeing like a State” (Scott, 1998) what is unbearable is less migrants’ acts of refusal as such, than the freedom of choice - about where to stay and claim asylum - that migrants enact and claim at the same time.

By refusing the tempos and the (restricted) spaces dictated by EU migration policies, migrants engaged in practices of spatial disobedience, by moving on autonomously instead that inside the slow

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<sup>15</sup><https://www.rt.com/news/365674-eu-turkey-deal-juncker/>

and restricted channels of Relocation. More precisely, migrants posited *asylum* and *freedom* as two terms that do not exclude each other and, rather, cannot be assumed disjunctively. Indeed, asylum seekers are equated by states and humanitarian actors with subjects who, as in need of protection, cannot but accept the conditions and limitations imposed by national migration laws and by the asylum regime. Being at the height of migrant “outrageous” claims and refusals, involves engaging in rethinking asylum through (migrant) practices of freedom, and not in opposition to it.

Looking at the hotspots as chokepoints of mobility disruptions for capturing and decelerating unruly mobility means mobilising an analytical gaze which posits as irreducible the relative ungovernability of migration and the resolute geographies of movements that states constantly try to channel and discipline. Migrants’ spread refusals against the restricted geographies of asylum enforced by the Dublin Regulation highlight that the dimension of contested control concerns less detention and surveillance than the nexus between claiming asylum and migrants giving up their autonomy of mobility. Moving beyond the spaces and the moment of detention, the main form of (contested) control appears to be the effects of containment generated *through* (forced) mobility.

The hotspot approach can be grasped in its effects of containment that it generates in the light of the crisis of the EU border regime and of the Dublin Regulation: Southern European countries are in friction with other member states and with the attempt by the EU to transform them into spaces of migration containment. The hotspots turn out to be spatial traps both for migrants and for Southern European countries. By following the controls over migrants enacted through the (official and unofficial) hotspots, what emerges is a map of Europe formed by check-points and border-zones where migrants are temporarily blocked but that is ultimately South-North oriented. Such a map of the spaces and infrastructures of control in Europe would in fact represent channels of mobility heading to Northern Europe. However, focusing exclusively at spaces of control, we risk of overshadowing the modes of containment through mobility through which migrant autonomous movements are obstructed and decelerated.

Migrants spatial disobediences against the fingerprinting procedure and the exclusionary channels of the Relocation Scheme should not be seen (only) as ways for dodging identification procedures and techniques controls. Rather, they stage as nonnegotiable a politics of asylum predicated upon migrants' practices of freedom - not only as freedom of movement but also as a right of choice about the place to stay.

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