"Choking without killing": Opacity and the grey area of migration governmentality

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12 December 2024

Goldsmiths Research Online

Citation

Persistent URL

Versions

Goldsmiths
UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

Over the last five years we have witnessed to an escalation of border violence at the frontiers of Europe and to a "EUropean irreverence" (Stierl, Tazzioli, 2020) towards overt violations of human rights and of the international law: a sheer politics of migration containment has been enacted by the European Union in the Mediterranean Sea, at the land borders and in third-countries, as a result of border cooperation agreements. The intertwining between let-to-die politics and direct killing of migrants has characterised many episodes of blatant border violence, both at the maritime frontiers and on the mainland. At the same time that states continue to stage the "border spectacle" (De Genova, 2013) of migrant invasion, migrants are targeted and injured also by political technologies that "erode" their lives and obstruct their movements (Kublitz, 2016). Indeed, migrants are chocked, cramped and obstructed in their mobility as well as in their attempts to settle: they are repeatedly deprived of a space to stay and their infrastructures of liveability - such as makeshift camps - are often violently dismantled. This paper focuses on border violence mechanisms that intermittently remain under the threshold of political visibility and that are not blatant in their expressions but that, however, do affect and hamper migrants' lives. These modes of harming and obstructing migrants' movements and permanence pertain to a "grey area" of migration governmentality. By grey area I refer to different border controls practices that are fundamentally opaque and change in time, and that affect migrants' lives by injuring, exhausting and chasing them away - more than by directly killing or letting them die.

What about biopolitical modes that generate "the infliction of harm and the attrition of the life support systems" (Puar, 2015: 11)? How to come to grips with the grey area of migration governmentality? How methodologically shall we deal with the opacity of tactics of governing that do neither kill nor empower but disrupt, choke and injure? The article deals with the "grey area" of migration governmentality from a twofold angle. First, it investigates how migrants are turned into chocked subjects by being constantly cramped and chased away. Choking is used in this paper to encapsulate a variety of political technologies that actively disrupt migrants' movements and their infrastructures of liveability, without necessarily killing or letting them die. As I illustrate later in the paper building on Frantz Fanon's work, the chocking of migrants echoes the condition of the colonised subject, who was always short of breath (Fanon, 2008). Second, and relatedly, it takes into account opacity as a key mode of governing migrants' movements that, however, tends to be occluded by analyses that centre on visibility or full invisibility. In so doing, the paper intervenes in critical debates on biopolitics (Minca, 2015; Puar, 2017; Vaughan-Williams, 2011) and in political geography scholarship that

engages with the grey area of governmentality: scholars have dealt with ambiguity (Darling, 2017; Ilcan et al. 2018; Nassar, Stel, 2019; Oesch, 2017), discretion (Gill et al. 2018) uncertainty (Biehl, 2015) and ambivalence (McNevin, 2013), while states' production of opacity remains quite unaddressed in the literature. Building on these works, the paper conceptualises the grey area of governmentality distinguishing it from a zone of indistinction as well as from bare life. Indeed, while the zone of indistinction is understood as a site where ordinary law is suspended and in which differences - between inside and outside, or between bare life and political life - get blurred, the grey area of governmentality is characterised by a multiplicity of biopolitical modes that disrupt and choke migrants' lives without killing or letting them die.

The widespread opacity which underpins state's knowledge production on migration is constitutive of modes of governing by chocking and cramping migrants. In fact, the production of opacity is not a side effect of migration governmentality: there is no linear state narrative to find out nor transparency to claim behind the veil of opacity. Rather, engaging with opacity means taking it as an analytical lens for investigating in-depth the grey area of governmentality. As I will show later, opacity is at stake in states' knowledge production on migration enshrined in local decrees, in administrative measures and in the data collected, non-collected and shared at the border. While scholars, building on the work of Edouard Glissant (1997), have analysed how opacity might be used by individuals as a tactic of resistance against control (Blas, 2016; Khosravi, 2018), little has been said about opacity[1] as a political technology of governmentality.

The article is structured in four sections and proceeds as follows. It starts by conceptualising the notion of "grey area" by building on scholarship that questions the biopolitical formula of "making live/letting die" by highlighting modes of governing through choking and injuring. Building on that, the paper contends that the grey area consists of heterogenous political technologies that choke and harm migrants and disrupt their infrastructures of livability. These precarious and mobile infrastructures become visible only (Butler, 2016) In light of that, it moves on by analysing how migrants across Europe are contained and governed by being choked and cramped, with a specific focus on Calais and Ventimiglia. The third section shows that to be disrupted are not only migrants' but also their infrastructures of livability: migrants are hampered from building collective spaces of life. In the last part, the article comes to grips with opacity as a constitutive feature of the grey area of governmentality, analysing how this is played out both in local decrees and through police tactics.

Methodologically the paper combines theoretical reflections about biopolitics and analyses of state documents. Throughout the paper I supplement theoretical analyses with empirical material I collected during my research fieldwork between 2017 and 2020 in the cities of Calais in France and

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[1] Indeed, scholars have discussed power in relation to either visibility or to secrecy (Walters, 2019).

Ventimiglia in Italy. In both sites I conducted participatory observation and interviews with local authorities, NGOs and activist groups; in Ventimiglia I collected testimonies from migrants who had been pushed back to Italy by the French police, and in Calais I interviewed migrants who were trying to make it to the UK, after transiting through Italy or along the Balkan route[2]. Calais and Ventimiglia as border-zones where migrants often get stranded before eventually crossing the border or giving up, and where they are also constantly chased away by the police.

Border-zones like Ventimiglia and Calais are key sites and vantage points for analysing the "grey area" of migration governmentality. Indeed, this paper illustrates, border controls in Calais and Ventimiglia are characterised by bordering mechanisms and modes of containment that constantly change over time. Scholars have written about borders controls in Calais and in Ventimiglia (Ibrahim, Howarth, 2018; Trucco, 2018), about police violence and the militarisation of borders (Gilberti, 2018) and migrant protests (Cantat, 2016; Rygiel, 2011). However, little has been said about the violence enforced by the repeated dismantling of migrants' infrastructures of collective liveability and by police harassment apt at cramping and choking migrants (but see Ansems de vries, Guild, 2018; Welander, 2020)[3]. Migrants' presence is disciplined and hampered not only through blatant violent evictions but also through recursive police, administrative and legal interventions that render migrants' presence unbearable.

The production of grey area beyond indistinction

By speaking of the grey area of migration governmentality and engaging with forms of border violence that are not blatant, I do not oppose literature on the everyday (Das, 2006; Povinelli, 2011) to scholarship which focuses on the so called "border spectacle" (De Genova, 2013; Jones, 2016). In fact, more than insisting on the difference between ordinary violence and the staging of "migration crises" I draw attention to the structural violence of bordering mechanisms that are enacted by obstructing migrants from moving and getting access to infrastructures of support. Tactics of governing that choke and disrupt migrants' lives are under-theorised both in migration studies and in geography literature, as they require engaging with modes of power that are opaque and with forms of violence that are not registered as such. More precisely, even if episodes of daily violence against migrants are at times visibilised in the media - for instance when makeshift camps are evicted - these modes of chocking and harming migrants are not perceived nor conceptualised as border violence.

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[2] Yet, even if the paper partly draws on empirical material I collected during my participatory observation, it is not an ethnography-based article. Rather, I use empirical elements from my fieldwork to complement the analysis of official documents and local decrees.

[3] Few scholars have highlighted the "politics of exhaustion" at stake in places like Calais; yet, they have not analysed how these modes of governing impact on migrants, beyond a generalised destitution. Also, what is missing is a nuanced account of diverse forms of violence.

The concept of "grey area" has been associated in the literature with the temporary suspension of the ordinary law and, following Agamben, with the "indistinction of law and violence" (Agamben, 1998: 33). In this regard, Gregory Feldman explains that "sovereignty and the gray zone are inextricably linked as the latter is a precondition of the former, and the former can only reveal itself fully in the latter" (Feldman, 2019**;** see also Edkins, 2000). Similarly, focusing on the asylum regime, scholars have defined the grey area in terms of "arbitrary judgements and obscure decision-making" (McMahon, 2015) and as a context where refugees are stripped of rights (Tubreta, 2015). A grey policy area is also at play in the asymmetric border cooperation practices and, according to Jean-Pierre Cassarino, this is aptly orchestrated by states in order to maintain ambivalence and opacity (Cassarino, 2020). Overall, claims to transparency against the opacity generated in the grey area underpin migration scholarship (Brouwer, 2010; Monforte, 2016). Instead, this article takes a different track and argues that opacity is not a side effect of governmentality and, at the same time, transparency can also turn into an instrument of border violence. More broadly, I suggest that in order to grasp the grey area of governmentality in its nuances, it should be disjoined from a sovereign gaze that centres on the indistinction of law and violence. This entails forging an appropriate analytics to account for ambiguity, unpredictability and opacity in their specificity - and not as an expression of sovereignty.

The grey area of governmentality encapsulates modes of governing that cannot be grasped through binary oppositions - such as inclusion/exclusion or norm/exception -, and that do not exercise an overt or fully legible violence. Rather, they are heterogenous modes of governing whose peculiarity consists precisely in their blurriness and in being played out in-between full visibility and invisibility, mobility and immobility. Hence, conceived in this way, **t**he grey area should not be confused with a space of indistinction, where the boundaries between life and death, inclusion and exclusion as well as between zoe and bios, get blurred (Agamben, 1998): to the contrary, it is characterised by a multiplication of political technologies, that do often coexist and that are distinct one from the other through tiny differences. Instead, by conflating the grey area with zones of indistinction, analyses that centre exclusively on sovereignty and exception miss to conceptualise its specificity and nuances. Migration, I suggest, constitutes a case in point and a particularly productive terrain for investigating the grey areas of governmentality. This is not because of the apparent exceptional laws through which those who are racialized as "migrants" are governed and let to die; rather, as I will show later, a close scrutiny of the states' hold over migrants' lives sheds light on this range of blurred and uneven technologies of governmentality that can be hardly grasped through the norm/exception paradigm (Tazzioli, 2019).

Geographers have engaged with the notion of "grey space" out of the sovereignty-exception framework and highlighting the dimension of *in-betweenness* that characterises it: as Oren Yiftachel defines

it, "grey space" refers to "developments, enclaves, populations and transactions positioned between the 'lightness' of legality/approval/safety and the 'darkness' of eviction/destruction/death" (Yiftachel, 2009: 6; see also Sanyal, 2014). The goal of this article is to conceptualise this blurriness further and scrutinise how this array of ambivalent governmental tactics shape subjectivities. Migration governmentality is associated with a panoply of diverse verbs and modes of action: confining, cramping, leaving without any space for breathing and staying, choking, categorising, dividing, shrinking, containing, pushing-back. These actions cannot be contained within the binary biopolitical opposition *making live or letting die* (Foucault, 1998); rather, they require us to expand and revisit our conceptual apparatus for coming to grips with heterogeneous modes of border violence.

In fact, there is a need for concepts and analytics which are adequate for grasping the multiple and violent hold over migrants' lives. Migrants are often turned into choked subjects, that is into subjects who are cramped and suffocated without however necessarily being killed. Chocking as a political technology does not capture all ways in which migrants are controlled and contained. Rather, governing by chocking encompasses a series of political technologies of governing that pertain to such a "grey area", in which violence is enacted without much noise, and without staging any border spectacle. Importantly, paying attention to this has nothing to do with studying biopolitics in its "minor" or "less" relevant expressions: cramping, choking and suffocating are not actions that have less impact on migrants' bodies than other more blatant exercise of power (Dines et al. 2015). Instead, it is a question of grasping biopolitical technologies which are fundamentally under-theorised in the literature, and to explore the effects these have on migrants' lives.

As Daniele Lorenzini has put it, "biopolitics does not really consist in a clear-cut opposition of life and death, but is better understood as an effort to differentially organise the grey area between them" (Lorenzini, 2020). Such a "grey area" is precisely what requires to be unpacked and conceptualised further, beyond any temptation to think it as a zone of indistinction. Indeed, what does it mean to be targeted, shaped and regulated within such a grey area? And how the governing of lives is enacted in ways that do not entail act of making live, killing or letting die? In order to address this question, I engage with literature that has complicated the biopolitical grid through a focus on the Palestinian context (Bhungalia, 2012; Puar, 2015; Salamanca, 2011). In fact, these authors contend that the control and subjection exercised by the Israeli government on the Palestinian population cannot be captured by the binary opposition making live/letting die, nor by exclusive focus on necropolitical power (Mbembe, 2003) and state tactics for "making live" (Foucault, 1998). In light of that, focusing on Calais, Thom Davies and colleagues have called for integrating analyses on biopolitics and necropolitics with the analytics of structural violence (Davies et al., 2017).

This scholarship conceptualises modes of governmentality which echo actions of cramping, choking and dismantling. As Jasbir Puar noticed, "while the distinctions between living and dying are often

recognized [...] maiming, debilitation, and stunting are relatively under-theorized components of these cuts and folds; centering these processes may potentially alter presumed relations to living and dying altogether (Puar, 2015: 6). Similarly to choking and disrupting, harming and maiming do usually remain politically unaccounted and statistically uncounted as part of states' violence. Lisa Bunghalia invites us to look at the flexible tactics through which life and death are sustained in their nuances, and argues that, biopolitics is not reduced to the optimisation of life and death (Bunghalia, 2012). Omar Jabaly Salamanca has introduced the expression "asphyxiatory application of power" (Salamanca, 2011: 30) as a way for designating power's hold over lives in the occupied Palestinian territories. Indeed, asphyxiating is not direct synonymous with killing, nor with let to die, but at the same time it involves some kind of deprivation and life's obstruction.

These analyses focus on a specific context (the Palestinian-Israeli conflict), and, therefore, cannot be directly transposed to other domains; however, I suggest, they shed light on political technologies that work by wearing out lives and dismantling infrastructures of life support (Butler, 2016). In particular, these analyses have the merit of problematising the analytical grid of biopolitics as it has been conceived by Foucault and by the migration scholarship that builds on his work (Minca, 2006; Stierl, 2018; Tazzioli, 2015). Notably Achille Mbembe has pointed to "new and unique forms of social existence in which vast populations are subjected to conditions of life conferring upon them the status of living dead" (Mbembe, 2003: 30). However, by speaking of living dead we fully erase the conflicting dimension of migrant struggles that constantly resist being chocked and cramped. Scholars have rightly unpacked the notion of "life" and stressed that the "making live" is indeed predicated upon the production of differences and hierarchies of lives (Fassin, 2007).

Instead, what those analyses do not theorise is that "grey area" of biopolitical technologies and modes of governing that, as I mentioned above, neither can be fully captured through the "making live" rationale nor through the different nuances of necropolitics - letting die or killing. Cramping, choking and disrupting (migrants) are in fact physical actions more opaque than others which intervene with a clear-cut hold over lives - by letting them die, by killing them or by fostering and keeping them alive. An analysis of biopolitical technologies which wear people out, disrupting their infrastructures of livability (Aradau, Tazzioli, 2020) and stealing their life-time (Khosravi, 2018) has both theoretical and political implications. On a theoretical and epistemic level, it enables stepping out of binary oppositions - such as (politics of) life versus (politics of) death - and looking at which modes of subjectivation and subjection are at play beyond that, producing for instance what I call here "choked subjects". Politically, it allows registering forms of violence that usually tend to remain unaccounted as they are not blatant nor do they directly cause death.

Choking subjects:

The unfreedom of movement and the constant changes in bordering mechanisms put migrants in a condition of being short of breath, "in more than one sense of the word", that is both on a socio-political level and on a physical one, as Frantz Fanon stressed (Fanon, 2008: 226). Indeed, the question of (lack of) oxygen and breath is recurrent in Fanon's work and in his in-depth analysis of the condition of the colonised. In *Black Skin, White Masks* the trope of (the lack of) breathing is repeatedly mobilized to designate the hampered experience of the colonized subjects and their struggle against the occupation: "it is not because the Indo-Chinese discovered a culture of their own that they revolted. Quite simply this was because it became impossible for them to breathe" (Fanon, 2008). The reference to breath is also mentioned by Fanon as a desire and an aspiration of the colonized subject: "the black Antillean, prisoner on his island [...] feels the call of Europe like a breath of fresh air." (Fanon, 2008). The tension between psychological and physical dimension of being short of oxygen is well captured by Fanon: "although it is true that I must free myself from my strangler because I cannot breathe, nevertheless it is unhealthy to graft a psychological element (the impossibility of expanding) onto a physiological base (the physical difficulty of breathing)." (Fanon, 2008). As Fanon remarks in *Algeria Unveiled* the impact of colonization did not concern the territory only: "There is not occupation of territory, on the one hand, and independence of persons on the other. It is the country as a whole, its history, its daily pulsation that are contested, disfigured, in the hope of a final destruction. Under these conditions, the individual's breathing is an observed, an occupied breathing. It is a combat breathing" (Fanon, 1965: 65). "I can't breathe": Fanon's expression became an anti-colonial rallycrying recently mobilised against police brutality by the Black Lives Matter movement in the US and anti-racist coalitions. "I cannot breathe" was indeed the statement uttered eleven times by Eric Garner, a black man who died in New York in 2014 after being apprehended and put in chokehold and suffocated by the police. And, notably, it has most recently become the rallying cry of the Black Lives Movement that vehemently took the street again in May 2020, after that death of George Floyd, a black American who had been choked and killed by a policeman in Minneapolis. Thus, the centrality of (lack of) breath in Fanon's work and in anti-colonial struggles enables tracing out multiple continuities between biopolitical tactics of chocking migrants, the governing of colonised subjects and the racialised violent policing of black people.

Indeed, being choked might mean also being short of breath - without necessarily dying: illegalized migrants often find themselves entrapped in cramped spaces - such as crowded detention centers, in trucks or in vessels. The media images of migrants walking along the so-called Balkan route or blocked at European borders do not allow capturing that migrants move and temporarily stay often by being choked and about to suffocate. Both at sea and on the mainland, migrants' travel conditions are always at the limits of liveability. On October 23, 2019, 39 migrants have been found dead in a refrigerator lorry container in the region of Essex, in the United Kingdom. According to the British

authorities, the migrants died due the overheating and lack of oxygen inside the lorry. In many other cases migrants have been protractedly without oxygen even if in the end they survived. Such a physical lack of oxygen, due to the cramped conditions in which migrants travel or stay, goes together with a broader feeling of being short of breath, that is of being contained and disrupted even if they keep moving.

Migration is a field where such a grey area of undefined political technologies plays a key role. This is not to dismiss the deadly politics of containment enacted by EU member states in the Mediterranean sea, nor the violences perpetrated by the police against migrants at many borders -e.g. at the Turkish-Greek border where women, men and children have been shot by the Greek police in March 2020. Rather, bearing all this in mind, it is a question of widening and rethinking our understanding of border violence on the one hand, and modes of governing lives and mobility on the other. However, unlike population which is harmed and maimed on purpose by the states (Puar, 2015; 2017;), the migration context sheds light on quite different ways of wearing out and governing through cramping and choking. Indeed, as far as migration across Europe is concerned, we are not confronted with a population managed at its threshold or at the biological minimum (Bunghalia, 2011), nor with a national and homogenous population as such. Rather, the migrants that this article focuses on are people on the move, who cross EU internal borders, or who are temporarily settled or stranded in some urban space. Nor it is necessarily a matter of intentional state-led policies apt at harming migrants. Indeed, discussions on state intentionality tend to overlook the multiplicity of actors at stake, conflicting interests among them and modes of governing through partial non-control and non-registration (Rozakou, 2017).

More broadly, linear narratives about state actions should be questioned and complicated in light of much more fractured, uneven and contested assemblages of sovereignty (Mezzadra, Neilson, 2013). Thus, what does choking as a political technology consist of? Migrants are choked along their routes: the incessant hurdling and disruption of migration movements and the dismantling of their temporary spaces of life have been rife across Europe. Along the Balkan route, at the Greek-Turkish border and in border-zones like Calais, Paris, Ventimiglia, migrants have been fiercely harassed, chased away or temporarily confined. Indeed both centripetal and centrifugal modes of choking are at play: migrants are at times entrapped in a convoluted hypermobility, as their infrastructures of liveability are dismantled and they are pestered by state authorities; while at other times they are stranded and confined in cramped spaces (Walters, Luthi, 2016). Thus, migrants' lives are chocked and cramped also by being kept on the move and by being entrapped in a forced convoluted hypermobility: that is, mobility as such appears as a political technology mobilised by states and non-state actors for disrupting and choking migrants' lives (Tazzioli, 2019). If we think of migration containment in terms of disruption

and choking, containment appears as not narrowed to total immobility or spatial confinement as it might imply forcing someone to constantly move away and forbid to settle and build spaces of life.

Over the last few years, EU member states have engaged in building up mobile infrastructures of deterrence against migrants: big stones have been placed in the streets of Paris for preventing migrants from settling; in Greece, many of the migrants who arrived by boat between March and May 2020 had been kept on hold in the port on military vessels. In this regard, the cities of Calais in France and Ventimiglia in Italy are border-zones in which an escalating criminalisation of solidarity and a sheer politics of migrant deterrence have been simultaneously enforced. Indeed, both in Calais and in Ventimiglia the local authorities have criminalised citizens and organisations that bring food to the migrants, in order to discourage people from acting in solidarity with the migrants in transit. In Ventimiglia in August 2016 the municipality enforced a local decree establishing that "food distribution by non-authorised persons would constitute "a real risk of food poising for the migrants"[4]; the ban against volunteers had been in place until April 22, 2017, when the municipality annulled it on the basis that the camp Roja, run by the Red Cross, was not able to provide food to all migrants who at that time were present on the territory[5]. In Calais, over the last four years NGOs and locals have been repeatedly targeted by police interventions and decrees apt at disrupting and criminalising food distribution. As I could also observe during my fieldwork, in order to prevent being interrupted in their activities by the police, local NGOs and activists distribute food in peripheral zones of the city during specific time slots, or by moving around without being fixed in a place.

Hence, migrants are less target of forms of governing at the threshold of life than of modes of governing grounded on disrupting, dismantling and cramping migrants' movements and their infrastructures of liveability. In fact, migrants are often injured and debilitated by police harassment and, however, the "targeting to debilitate" (Puar, 2017: xiv) is not part of a coherent strategy of sustaining populations in that debilitated condition but of a more uneven way of dealing with migrants' incorrigible presence (De Genova, 2010). "Choking" indicates on the one hand the physical cramping and suffocating of migrants - along the lines of an asphyxiatory power" (Salamanca, 2011) -, and on the other the constant disrupting of migrant movements and the dismantling of their spaces of life. This is the case both on the mainland and at sea, where migrants are forced to engage in forms of "parasitic harnessing" (Martin, 2012: 1046) - hiding themselves into stowaways or in lorries - and where the risk of suffocating and of lack of breath goes together with states' undermining the logistics of migrant crossing.

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[4] Decree of the Municipality of Ventimiglia 129/2016.
[5] Decree of the municipality of Ventimiglia 85/2016. Available at: https://www.slideshare.net/eleonora9380/ordinanza-ventimiglia

Importantly, by focusing on multiple modes of choking, interrogations on "life" and "death" as such, are not sidelined or erased; rather, they are re-inscribed within a biopolitical grammar of life disruption. By "life disruption" I refer to the above mentioned modes of choking and harassing that both dismantle migrant infrastructures of liveability and deprive migrants of a space to stay - by chasing them away or by entrapping them into a condition of forced hypermobility. In so doing, the supposed linearity of life/death optimisation that is replicated in works on biopolitics is fractured by modes of governing through life disruption. It is in this sense we can speak of migrants as choked subjects, as they are harassed and obstructed in their movements and stay, and at the same time their infrastructures of liveability are also deeply dismantled. From this perspective, the attention to necropolitical interventions and let-to-die policies should be scrutinized in light of the 'grey area' of unaccounted violences that debilitate and exhaust migrants without necessarily letting them die.   sy
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Dismantling infrastructures of liveability:

Modes of choking do impact not only on migrants as such - on their bodies and movements - but also on their infrastructures of liveability. These include temporary informal encampments, spaces of collective life and, more broadly, the whole logistics that makes their mobility possible. Infrastructures of liveability and makeshifts camps often are not built from scratch; rather they are "appropriated by these people 'on the move' […] that use existing social and humanitarian networks and infrastructures to incorporate the ambivalences of these border-zones as a strategy" (Martin et al. 2019: 16). In fact, both material infrastructures - tents, accommodations, food provisions - and digital connectivity are essential components of migrant journeys. These mobile and precarious infrastructures of liveability are in part the outcome of citizens' solidarity practices that in many places across Europe have been mobilised, opening up temporary shelters, channels of digital communication with migrants and safe spaces. Ultimately, as Judith Butler points out, the centrality of infrastructural support emerges only when we lack it or when this is undermined and when, consequently, it becomes clear that practices of resistance happen from within condition of vulnerability **(**Butler, 2016).

The dismantling of infrastructures of support does not only harm migrants; it also destroys their spaces of collective life and "attempts to remove the capacity of people to create autonomous forms of inhabitance" (Isacker, 2019: 614), as it is summarised by the expression "lieux de vie" (spaces of life) which was written on few tents in the ex-jungle in Calais. Indeed, "lieux de vie" designates both the material conditions of (un)liveability experienced by migrants and social-political spaces that migrants build up. In other words, by naming the place a "space of life", migrants have highlighted that "life" includes much more than biological features or individual infrastructural supports and encompasses also spaces of collectivity and sociality. In fact, the dismantling of infrastructures of liva-

bility appears to have a twofold target: making migrants' lives unbearable and preventing the consolidation of collective formations (Tazzioli, 2017). In this regard, Claudia Aradau has noticed that "police practices do not simply speak to an undoing of the very conditions of liveability, but of the destruction of conditions of collectivity" (Aradau, 2017: 7). And, we could add, these spaces of collectivity are often formed by transversal alliances between migrants and citizens, as it is the case in temporary refuges opened up by locals along migrant routes.

These infrastructures of liveability are far from being stable: on the contrary, what states have called "Europe's refugee crisis", has been characterised by a widespread fierceness against migrants' autonomous spaces and infrastructures of livability, such as makeshift camps and safe shelters. Thus, through the repeated destruction of infrastructures of life and mobility support, migrants end up being choked - even if not necessarily left to die - at the level of their material conditions of livelihood and of the socio-political spaces they created. In so doing, migrants are debilitated not because their life is kept at a minimum threshold but as long as their spaces if life ("lieux de vie") that turn out into unlivable environments and obstacles to the emergence of collective formations.

Lauren Berlant has notably introduced the notion of "slow death" to designate "the physical wearing out of a population in a way that points to its deterioration as a defining condition of its experience and historical existence" (Berlant, 2011: 95). Berlant problematizes both theories focused on sovereign power and the biopolitical analytics centered on the making live/letting die formula, and draws attention to the wearing out as a life condition that affects people in their "activity of self-making" (100). "Slow death" works as a contrapuntal notion to the optimisation of life and death and unsettles binary oppositions between the two. Nevertheless, the wearing out that Berlant talks about should not be confused with the governing of migration by exhausting and choking them. Indeed, first, the wearing out of migration is the outcome of disruptive tactics which actively hamper life and movements, and it is not a defining feature of their existence. While slow death refers to "the condition of being worn out by the activity of reproducing life" (Berlant, 2011: 100; see also Anderson et al. 2019) and on a persistent present, here I turn to political technologies apt at governing by disrupting. Second, by associating wearing out to a mode of slow death, we end up in reinforcing a linear narrative of progressive generalised deterioration. Instead, a focus on migration shows us the racialized and differential way in which governing through disrupting and choking lives is unfolded.

In the cities of Calais and Ventimiglia migrants' presence is subjected to uneven police interventions, apt at harassing and deterring them. In fact, by rendering migrants' lives unbearable, state authorities discourage them from coming back, although as S. a volunteer in Ventimiglia stressed to me "we all know, and the police too, that most of the migrants will come back until when they make it to France". Actually, it is difficult to estimate how many migrants have given up from returning to Ventimiglia after being evicted, since "we can have a rough number of migrants' passages and presence in the

area, but you could never know how many of them had been here already"[8]. If some might give up after few failed attempts to cross, others have done the same journey multiple times, as it has been proved from what reported to local NGOs and activists, as well as what some of them told me: "I have come back to Ventimiglia eight times by now, after being moved away from the zone by the police, so I hope this time I make it to France"[9]. Nevertheless, even if migrants persist in crossing and deterrence measures do not directly work, by constantly harassing and exhausting them state authorities increase migrants' vulnerability. In fact, chocking migrants is about rendering migrants' life unliveable - depriving them of a space to stay and keeping them on the move, as well as by harming and harassing them.

This is particularly visible in Calais, where on the one hand the dismantling of migrants' makeshift camps started in the late Nineties (Agier et al. 2018) and on the other, the last violent dismantling of the so called "jungle" on October 24, 2016, earmarked the beginning of a stricter state intolerance towards migrants' encampments and any persistent trace of their presence on the territory. Indeed, since then the French police had repeatedly dismantled any makeshift settlement and destroyed migrants' personal affairs, such as sleeping bags and blankets. The demolishing of precarious infrastructures of liveability has been carried out together with the tactics of police harassment against individual migrants or small groups: as reported by Human Rights Watch and activists deployed on the ground, migrants were abused chased away with pepper spray (Human Rights watch, 2017). Despite such continuous police harassment, migrants constantly return to Calais. Indeed, two years later when I was conducting my fieldwork there, the estimated number of migrants living in the premises of Calais oscillated between 600 and 1000. Therefore, by violently chasing migrants away and dismantling informal camps, French authorities did not erase migrants' presence nor did they engage in a let-to-die or making die politics. Rather, they turned the territory into an unliveable space for migrants, undermining the infrastructures of life. As K. an Iranian migrant explained to me, "we are constantly chased away as bugs, we cannot take a rest as we know that we might be forced to suddenly escape police raids. Indeed, we stay in a confined space, as we need to be careful of not being spotted, but at the same time we do not have a (safe) space to stay"[10]. Migrants are simultaneously cramped in abject places and deprived of space. Thus, the choking of migrants' lives takes place in Calais through the combination of centripetal and centrifugal move: that is, by cramping and expelling at the same time (Agier, 2017). By defining the politics of exhaustion as the "effects of the stretching over time of a combination of fractured mobility, daily violence and fundamental uncertainty"

[8] Interview with the coordinator of the Red Cross in Ventimiglia, at the camp Roya for migrants transit, which was opened in 2016 by the local authorities and which is run by the Red Cross.
[9] Interview with M., a Sudanese migrant in Ventimiglia, July 2019.
[10] interview conducted in Calais, September 2017.

(Ansems de Vries, Guild, 2018: 2), Ansems de Vries and Guild have fleshed out the impact of border controls on migrants' lives in spaces of transit like Calais. Yet, I suggest, a focus on exhaustion needs to be further explored by investigating the specificities of forms of violence enacted against migrants, without conflating them under the same umbrella. Davies, Isakjee and Dhesi discuss the deprivation of migrants in Calais in terms of "violent inaction" enacted by state authorities through deliberate abandonment: "the structural violence" in Calais, they argue, consists in "producing stark suffering of refugee bodies and the potential for a "slow death". In this way, the state's biopolitical activities have given way to calculated necropolitical inactions" (Davies et al. 2017: 18). Their analysis enables highlighting how migration control are enforced not only through direct police interventions but also through state's deliberate withholding.

In so doing, as this paper also does, they shift the attention from violence as the result of thanatopolitics towards an understanding of violence as the effect of migrants being "kept alive whilst injured through extreme marginalization" (18). However, the protracted deprivation and the cramped spaces in which migrants live in Calais are not the result of state inaction and withdrawing as such but, rather, of repeated police harassment, of local decrees as well as of deterrence measures. In fact, more than opposing action and inaction, I suggest looking at how migrants' lives are disrupted and chocked by state authorities through heterogenous tactics. In fact, abandonment and withdrawing coexist with proactive measures that do not kill or block migrants but debilitate them and disrupt them from building spaces of life. In fact, for transforming Calais into an unliveable place for migrants, huge economic costs, administrative decisions and logistical operations are needed; these include massive police deployment, local authorities who enforce decrees, and anti-migrants infrastructures[11].

Similar spatial biopolitical tactics have been deployed at the French-Italian border, in the Italian city of Ventimiglia and in its premises. There, migrants are harassed by the police as long as they leave durable traces of their presence. As I could observe, the Italian police evicts

In this regard, it is worth noticing that urban neglect and hygienic-sanitary reasons - more than security ones - are widely mobilised for evicting and harassing migrants. As stated in a local decree enforced by the municipality of Ventimiglia in June 2017, migrants are "encouraged to spontaneously leave the shores of the Roja river where they use to camp and to take with them their personal things" in order to allow cleaning operations to take place. Therefore, the hygienic-sanitary discourse is played out in an ambivalent way: migrants are deemed to constitute potential sanitary dangers for citizens, if they gather in makeshift camps in the city; and at the same time migrants chased away with the purpose of protecting them from hygienic threats.

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[11] For instance, in 2017 the mayor of Calais Natasha Bouchart hampered migrants' access to public showers by putting few dumpsters at the entrance. (Other?) Similar measures, apt at obstructing migrants from accessing public services, have been put in place [or specify where similar measures have been put in place].

In Ventimiglia, migrants are choked by being moved away from the city, as part of what can be called internal push-back operations: indeed, many of those who are caught in the attempt to cross the border, are forcibly taken by the Italian police to the hotspot located in the city of Taranto, 1200 km southern of Ventimiglia. As it has been observed by the Italian Association of lawyers for Immigration (ASGI), every week, a bus leaves from Ventimiglia to take the apprehended migrants to Taranto. At the same time, on site they are chocked by police actions that both humiliate and hamper them from moving on: some migrants who managed to cross the border have been cut their shoes off by the French police, and on the Italian side of the border the police systematically evicts informal settlements (Oxfam, 2018). Thus, the choking of migration is enacted through both centripetal and centrifugal moves: migrants are forced to stay and travel into cramped spaces and, at the same time, they are deprived of a space to stay as they are constantly chased away.

This echoes the UK tactic of turning public spaces into "hostile environments" for migrants. "Hostile environment" encompasses both tactics apt at making migrants' lives unbearable - e.g. obstructing their access to work, asylum and welfare - and, at the same time, to enforce migrants' deportation. In this sense, we can definitively speak of Calais as a hostile environment for migrants. However, the designation of "hostile environment" is also associated to the representation of migrants as "threats" (Edmond-Pettitt, 2018) which is certainly in part the case even in Calais. And yet, in border-zones like Calais migrants are not always portrayed as "risky subjects" or "subjects at risk" (Aradau, 2004): rather, they are also targeted by measures that choke and cramp them, and disrupt their spaces of life. Indeed, migrants are directly injured by the police, they are worn out, deprived of a space to stay, and chased away as bugs. At the same time, they are not even perceived as subjects to be protected.

A focus on chocking as a political technologyy pushes us to revisit and problematize the notion of "agency" and how it is used in migration scholarship. Indeed, the representation of migrants tends to be captured within the binary opposition between migrants as victims vs migrants as active subjects (Mainwaring, 2016). Among those who insist on migrants' resistances, the debate revolves around the constitutive excess of migrants' mobility with respect to the border regime (De Genova, 2010; Stierl, 2018) and on the claims that migrants lay through their struggles (Rygiel, 2011). However, the notion of "agency" is taken for granted and applied for designating different migrant struggles, instead of rethinking it by taking migration as an analytical lens. e s.Speaking of migrants as chocked subjects does not mean at all erasing or downplaying migrants' tactics of resistance, refusal and collective struggles. As William Walters and Barbara Luthi have rightly contended, the point is precisely to rethink agency from within cramped spaces and in condition of sheer obstruction: in so doing, we can see "different ways subjects create and endure cramped space as a mode of resistance" and look at "registering agency under unpromising and ambiguous conditions" (Walters, Luthi, 2016: 364).

Relatedly, by insisting on chocking as a political technology of migration governmentality I shed light on the ambivalent character of resistance which, as the next section shows, is neither fully on the side of transparency nor of opacity and invisibility.

Unpacking opacity:

Migrants are turned into chocked subjects, as long as they are deprived of infrastructures of livability and of a space to stay - being cramped in unlivable places or being chased away and evicted. In which way is "the grey area" of migration played out at the level of knowledge production? Does a focus on the grey area of migration enable getting out of binary opposition between knowledge and non-knowledge? Indeed, regime of knowledge does not only refer to what is fully known and calculable but, rather, also to the multiple unknown that sustain the governing of migration (Scheel, Ustek-Spilda, 2019). In migration literature, scholars have scrutinised the opacity in the transmission of knowledge and information to asylum seekers (Borrelli, 2018; Pinelli, 2018) and the strategic ignorance used by street-level bureaucrats (Alpes, Spire, 2014; Eule et al. 2018). Which kind of opacity is mobilised in the "grey area" of migration governmentality? Opacity is not an epistemic notion per se; rather, it is connected to the domain of visibility: something is rendered opaque, that is it is not transparent nor fully visible, without, however, being invisible. Opacity is not necessarily the outcome of a coherent state strategy of obfuscation, nor does it consist in acts of deliberate concealment. Rather, opacity refers to the domain of undecidability which characterises the grey area of migration and its legal blurriness. First, opacity concerns states' interventions: in contexts where migrants are choked, cramped and chased away - like Calais - authorities acts on the basis of very approximate estimates about migrants' presence and also their actions are unaccountable, in particular in terms of numbers. This is the case of the repeated violent police evictions made in Calais - but also in Paris and in Dunkerque[12] - as well as in Ventimiglia: "it is very difficult to have exact numbers of the migrant evicted from informal makeshift; approximation appears as part of the machine of governmentality, nobody is able to provide accurate numbers or a detailed picture, but just an estimate"[13]. In fact, opacity opens up the leeway for unaccountable police interventions.

Second, opacity is experienced by migrants and refugees on a daily basis, as the outcome of unpredictable and blurry local decrees and administrative measures. Following up the analysis on choked subjects, I focus on the effect of opaque knowledge on migrants and how it generates disorientation.

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[12] As it has also been reported in the news, the number of migrants evicted in Paris is a rough estimation and there is often a discrepancy between the number they (who? The police?) expect and the actual one. See for instance: https://www.thelocal.fr/20170707/paris-police-evacuate-2500-from-squalid-migrant-camp. In some cases the opacity regarding the actual number of migrants evicted is of few hundreds: https://www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2020/01/28/un-camp-de-migrants-situe-dans-le-nord-est-de-paris-en-train-d-etre-evacue_6027470_3224.html

[13] Interview with M. An activist based in Ventimiglia and that participates to border monitoring activities. Ventimiglia, July, 2018.

In fact, I take opacity here as the unevenness and blurriness of administrative measures and of local decrees that regulate migrants' presence on the territory. Unpredictability, unevenness and blurriness are the main features of opacity in migration governmentality. The acts of cramping and choking migrants cannot be disjoined from the ways in which these measures are enshrined in local decrees and from how migrants themselves are affected by these latter. The local decrees enforced for hampering and disciplining migrants' presence in different border-zones are frequently changed by the authorities, often through little tweaks that, at first, might be difficult to discern both for migrants and for humanitarian actors.

Opacity generates unpredictability, which has tangible consequences on the migrants: indeed they are deeply disoriented by the rapid and unexpected changes in decrees, laws and policies. The changes implemented might be also quite minimal and, therefore, difficult to notice. The policing of migrants and activists in Calais is a case in point. Since the eviction of the jungle in 2016, many decrees have been enforced by the municipality of Calais with that purpose. For instance, according to a local decree enforced on March 2, 2017, in the area of Les Dunes at Calais - a place in the industrial area of the city, where migrants tend to stay - gatherings are not allowed for reasons of public health and public order[14]. Then, few days later, on March 6, another decree was enforced, adding the industrial area of Du Bois Dubrulles and the central square of Calais - called Des Armes - among the places forbidden to migrants and volunteers' gatherings.

Hence, for migrants it is not only a matter of knowledge - knowing the measures and laws enforced in a certain place - but of navigating the unpredictable alterations of the policies implemented by states. Unpredictability contributes to choking and cramping migrants, and to render their space of life unliveable, by generating confusion and disorientation over what they should do in order get access to support and to the asylum, and what they are not allowed to do. In Ventimiglia opacity has underpinned the ways in which migrants' presence has been managed, dispersed and invisibilised by local authorities. Oopacity is at play in the dispositives of migrant hosting. Indeed, the Roja camp opened in 2016 in Ventimiglia to host the migrants who are trying to cross to France, has been named by the local authorities as a "camp of transit". Such a designation captures the temporariness and fleeting character of migrants' presence in Ventimiglia and reveals the tacit complicity of the Italian government in letting migrants go to France[15].

At the same time, as some Italian lawyers stressed, the designation "camp of transit" is not grounded in the law: "the absence of a legal norm de facto enables the authorities to act in a kind of juridical

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[14] https://www.gisti.org/IMG/pdf/arrete_2017-03-02_calais-maire.pdf

[15] Tacit complicity with migrant crossings does not mean that the Italian police is tolerant with migrants. In fact, in the area of Ventimiglia migrants are constantly chased away and harassed by the police; but police harassment is mainly enacted for hampering migrants from gathering and being visible in the city of Ventimiglia, and not for cooperating with the French police.

and political blurriness and that the camp is not regulated as a stable site but only as a temporary measure"[16]. The opacity which sustains the grey area of migration governmentality is at stake also at the French-Italian border, in the push back operations from France to Ventimiglia: both the French and the Italian polices count and store the data about push-back operations in an uneven way. Indeed, as I could retrace from testimonies collected from migrants and from activists during my fieldwork, some of the migrants pushed back at the French border had been fingerprinted by both the French and the Italians, some others only on one side of the border; some had been given the "entry denial" paper by the French police, others did not; some received the form from the Italian authorities, some did not[17]. Hence, as NGOs doing push-back monitoring activities at the border reported, the functioning of the frontier and the data and knowledge produced, stored and shared about migrant returned to Italy is extremely opaque: "they collect data, and different type of data - biometrics, personal data, the name and nationality provided by the migrants - in very irregular way, in part because national authorities are not interested in keeping track on such a detailed level about what happens at the internal borders, and in part because by producing opacity they are less accountable about human rights violations and law infringement they commit"[18].

Thus, the opacity that underpins the knowledge production about migration governmentality often unveils, I suggest, conflicting and ambivalent interests between different actors - e.g. local authorities, central government, NGOs. However, it does not reveal a failure: indeed, speaking of failure or of gap between governmental plans and the actual implementation of policies means thinking of a linear and coherent state strategy that might or might not succeed. Instead, opacity is the outcomet of heterogenous and divergent interests as well as of the multiple re-adaptations of the border regime to cope with the changed migration context. For the migrants, the chaotic illegibility of administrative measures and the ways? Local decrees concretely are enforced, involves deep disorientation and not knowing what (not) to do.

Conclusion:

What does it mean to critically engage with border violence beyond its most blatant and spectacular expression? How to politicise tactics of governmentality that tend to remain unaccounted as they appear as mere logistic-administrative measures? Coming to grips with the grey area of governmentality involves registering modes of containing and exhausting migrants without necessarily killing them or letting them die. Unlike contexts and moments in which migrants' life is directly at stake,

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[16] Lawyers from the Association of juridical studies on immigration (ASGI) stressed this during online meetings with NGOs that I took part to in July 2020.

[17] This is also the case at the Alpine border: migrants pushed back to Italy are unevely identified by the French police, and only at times the push-back is recorded by the Italian authorities.

[18] Interview with J. and S. of the French NGO Anafe, June 2020.

modes of choking without killing tend to be disregarded and marginalised both in the public debate on migration and in the scholarship, although these are highly widespread across Europe and beyond. Migrants might be cramped and their infrastructures of livability might dismantled without flagrant interventions. And, yet, migrants' lives are highly targeted and affected by modes of choking, as long as they are constantly evicted and deprived both of a place to stay and of their infrastructures of liveability.

Ultimately, a focus on the biopolitics of choking and on the dismantling of infrastructures of liveability enables connecting the governing of migration with broader tactics of displacement and dispossession that have contributed to produce racialised subjects (Bhandar, Bhandar, 2016). As this article has shown, the grey area of governmentality should not be equated with a zone of indistinction in which racialised differences are blurred: on the contrary, we are confronted with a multiplicity of biopolitical technologies for containing and disrupting migration. More than unveiling tactics of killing or letting die behind mode of chocking, it is a question of productively engaging with the grey area and understanding the specificity of those modes of violence. That is, the grey areas should be unpacked and analysed in its opacity, taking this latter as a constitutive mechanism of governmentality and scrutinising the violent impact on migrant lives. By saying that, this article calls for a migration geography research agenda that would forge a new analytic of governmentality to deal with the opacity of political technologies which choke and disrupt without necessarily killing.

The opacity generated in the grey area enhances migrants' uncertainty and disorientation, while governing by chocking and cramping unfolds modes of violence on migrants that remain unaccounted, both in the literature and in the public debate. And yet, border violence and the states' hold over migrants' lives could not be interrupted by claiming for more transparency. Indeed, full visibility and transparency often turn into a trap for migrants, while opacity and partial invisibility might be twisted into tactical weapons for not being detected. Ultimately, the leeway opacity of laws and policies are at times tactically navigated by migrants. Furthermore, by opposing transparency to opacity we end up in positing control and coercion on the side of the latter and thinking that for tackling border violence it is sufficient to unveil the violations of human rights and of the international law. In fact, the grey area of migration governmentality leads us to rethink what both a critical knowledge production and a critique of the border regime nowadays should look like.

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