



The temporal borders of asylum. Temporality of control in the EU border regime

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20 March 2016, Island of Lampedusa: the Italian Coast Guard has just disembarked 130 migrants at the harbour of Lampedusa after rescuing them on the high sea. The personnel of the cooperative that runs the hotspot take the migrants to the centre by bus, escorted by police officers. Once they are inside the Contrada Imbriacola hotspot, they are all identified and fingerprinted by the Italian Scientific Police in few hours. From that moment on, the migrants have been divided and their future destinations will differ. Some of them have been allowed to claim asylum and will be transferred within days to hosting centres on the mainland where they will stay as asylum seekers until their demand is processed. Others, meanwhile, have been illegalized “on the spot”, insofar as they have been denied the right to claim asylum and have been given a decree of expulsion that obliges them to leave the country seven days, although almost all of them will remain “irregularly” in Italy. This story on the southernmost island of Europe is not an exceptional event but, rather, a snapshot of an ordinary scene of migration management in the wake of the implementation of the Hotspot System. Such an ordinary migration scene taking place at the external frontiers of Europe is characterised not only by a series of spatial bordering mechanisms but also by a certain temporality of control, made of specific and uneven rhythms and by a multiplication of temporal borders. This article explores the temporality of control that is currently at stake in the EU border regime.

The Hotspot Approach was launched by the EU in the *European Agenda on Migration* in May 2015 as the main EU's response to the increased number of migrant arrivals by sea. The Hotspot System consists of infrastructures for detention and of a series of procedures and mechanisms for identifying and selecting migrants (Garelli, Tazzioli, 2016a; Kasparek, 2016; Sciarba, 2016). The

hotspots have been devised as “part of the immediate action to assist frontline Member States facing disproportionate migratory pressures at the EU's external border”,¹ hence their location is at critical border-sites. It is important to highlight that the Hotspot System has been conceived in conjunction with the Relocation Programme, which in principles should alleviate Greece and Italy from the “refugees' burden”. The Programme establishes the “transfer of asylum seekers who are in clear need of international protection from one EU Member State to another European state”, where his/her asylum claim will be in fact processed. Yet, only a highly selected migrant population is eligible for the Relocation, since “it applies to nationalities of applicants with an EU-wide average recognition rate of 75% or higher”,² and it is proceeding at a very slow pace.

The accelerated temporality of identification procedures and preventive exclusion from the channels of the asylum is one of the main mechanisms which shape the hotspot-machine in a distinctive way. The *swift pace of control* when combined with the multiplication of *temporal borders* as techniques for further restricting and hindering access to the asylum system, is the EU's border strategy put into place to discipline and respond to practices of migration that could not be regulated through spatial containment. However, such a relative rapidity in the procedures apt to fingerprint migrants and denying the access to the channels of the asylum has as its main consequence that (many) asylum seekers remain stranded in border-zones - waiting the response about their appeal against the denial of the international protection. Migrant movements are slowed down and migrants' autonomous temporalities are disrupted, while at the same time the channels of deportations and forced returns are hastened.

Importantly, the Hotspot System as such should not be read in terms of a radical break with previous or still coexisting mechanisms and infrastructures for identifying and managing migration. Rather, through the hotspots, the European Union has boosted a humanitarian-security mode of intervention that is predicated upon accelerated procedures of preventive illegalization for

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¹ http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/european-agenda-migration/background-information/docs/2_hotspots_en.pdf.

² http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_MEMO-15-5698_en.htm.

restricting the access to the asylum system. Since the opening of the hotspots in 2015, we have witnessed to a multiplication and a frantic variation of temporal borders migrants are subjected to upon landing, which also generated a proliferation of statuses and differential channels of protection, deportation and illegalization.

The opening vignette could be taken from many different analytical angles, such as the “production of migrant illegality” (De Genova, 2004), the economy and the micro-economies of detention (Conlon, Hiemstra, 2014; Belcher, Martin, 2013; Mountz, Coddington, Catania, & Loyd, 2013), the effects of detention on migrants (Gill, 2009), the role of humanitarian and military actors in rescuing and managing migrants (Cuttitta, 2015), the spatial transformations of containment (Mountz, 2015; Williams, 2016) and the embodied temporal experience of borders (Griffiths, 2014). Instead, this paper engages with the what I call the *temporality of control that underpins the working of the EU border regime, which in turn reshapes its strategies for selecting, governing and disciplining migration*. By temporality of control I mean the specific temporalities that are at stake in the techniques and modes of migration governmentality; at the same time, I also refer to the fact that temporality itself plays a crucial role in the reshaping and the enforcement of migration controls. Within the framework of the temporality of control, I introduce the theme of *temporal borders*: these consist in the establishment of deadlines and time limits which impact on migrants’ lives and geographies. Temporal borders, I contend, play a crucial role in regaining control over unruly migration movements. The lens of the temporality of control enables seeing that time is not only object of mechanisms of control - control over time - but also a mean and a technology for managing migrant - control through time. Temporal borders do not supersede spatial boundaries and geopolitical borders, nor they can be analysed as autonomous objects. On the contrary, a gaze on the temporality of control and on temporal borders enables grasping the transformations of the “spaces of governmentality” (Tazzioli, 2015) in the field of migration management; and, conversely, it requires analysing the heterogenous articulations and disjunctions between temporal and spatial bordering mechanisms.

The three arguments that sustain this article are the following. First, I suggest that in order to grasp the restructuring of the EU border regime it is fundamental to investigate the variations and changes in the temporality of control and in temporal borders that are enforced for selecting migration. Second, through this article I show that the current Mediterranean migration context is characterised by a multiplication of temporal borders - set for producing hierarchies of mobility and restricting the access to the asylum, through mechanisms of preventive illegalization - and by an accelerated temporality of control. This latter is not in opposition to nor in contradiction with migrants’ legal limbo and protracted wait inside hosting centres in Italy and in Greece. The temporality of control concerns identification and fingerprinting procedures migrants are subjected to soon after landing as well as the first step of the asylum process. Relatedly, and as a third point, through this article argues that the temporality of control and temporal borders are functional to slow down and disrupt migrants’ autonomous temporalities and geographies of movement, and to hasten at the same time the channels of deportation.

By bringing attention to the current Mediterranean migration context I do not want to suggest that the working of temporal borders is a peculiarity of the Hotspot System. We should also caution against any risk of “presentism” (Walters, 2011) in describing the establishment of temporal borders and the speeding up of identification procedures as something totally new or unprecedented. Temporal restrictions have been important mechanisms in the government of mobility for long time. Rather, I point to the work of temporal borders in governing migration and to their

changes and alterations (Jeandesboz, Pallister-Wilkins, 2016). This becomes particularly visible if we look at the functioning of the hotspots: the restructuring of the EU’s politics of mobility for regaining control over migration and disrupting their autonomous geographies and temporalities of movement, should be read in the sense of a multiplicity of subtle re-assemblages that require in-depth investigation. More precisely, a focus on the functioning of the Hotspot System in Greece and in Italy enables us, firstly, to deal with temporal borders by showing both continuities and discontinuities in the techniques enacted for governing migrants. In fact, on the one hand an analysis of the hotspots makes possible highlighting the centrality played by temporal borders in governing migration. Secondly, with the implementation of the Hotspot System the EU has presented the “swift processing of migrants”³ as a priority, in order to avoid protracted and huge spatial concentrations of migrants in landing spaces or in critical border zones. In reality, as I will show later, not only migrants inside the hotspots are managed by keeping them spatially stranded and suspended in a juridical limbo - with the hotspots becoming in many cases spaces of containment. Together with that, it is worth noticing that the EU and some member states have multiplied temporal borders, that is deadlines that migrants have to comply with in order to be eligible for the Relocation Programme or to access the asylum procedure. Thirdly, the hotspots appear as a lens for seeing that temporal borders have been fostered in the current European context for regaining control over unruly mobility and to discipline asylum claims, restricting the access to the channels of protection.

Investigating the transformations of “border temporalities” (Walters, 2016) in the Mediterranean, this article proceeds as follows. In the first section it makes an overview of the existing literature which tackles temporal borders and temporality in the field of migration governmentality. Then, it provides a theoretical analysis of the ways in which temporality is implicated in the government of migration. Building on the research fieldwork that I conducted in Greece and in Italy, the article moves on by analysing the temporal borders and the temporality of control which are at stake there, and illustrates how the Hotspot System contributes to enforce hierarchies of mobility. This is followed by a section that deals with the desultory temporality of control which is at stake in the government of intra-European migration movements and the forms of spatial containment that this latter engenders. The article concludes by considering the ways in which migrants often come to “jam” the logistics and the temporality of migration governmentality, refusing to be fingerprinted or to comply with temporal borders.

This article is the result of the research fieldwork that I conducted in Italy (Lampedusa, Sicily and Ventimiglia) and in Greece (Lesbos, Chios and Athens) between 2015 and 2017.⁴ This research is characterised by the articulation of data and information

³ [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2016/556942/IPOL_STU\(2016\)556942_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2016/556942/IPOL_STU(2016)556942_EN.pdf).

⁴ I conducted ethnographic research at the hotspots and at the ports of Lampedusa, Sicily and Chios interviewing national police, the Coast Guard and UNHCR’s officers. In Italy I did fieldwork in Ventimiglia, at the French-Italian border and in Lampedusa (December 2015 and February 2016). In Lampedusa I conducted semi-structured interviews with fifteen migrants and five interviews with local NGOs and one with the manager of Misericordia, the cooperative that runs the hotspot. In Greece I interviewed also the European Asylum Support Office (EASO) at Athens headquarters and the Greek Asylum Service (April 2017) which is responsible for processing asylum claims. In Lesbos I interviewed Doctors without Borders and got access to the hotspot on April 21, 2017 via the NGO Mercy Corps upon official request. Inside the hotspot I could interview NGOs officers (8) and I also conducted ten semi-structured interviews with migrants. I also interviewed five migrants in the premises of the camp. In Chios (July 2016 and April 2017) I interviewed UNHCR’s officers at Souda refugee camp and the manager of the camp.

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