

## **The politics of migrant dispersal.**

### **Policing and dividing migrant multiplicities**

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#### **1. Introduction**

Few weeks before the most recent eviction of the Calais jungle, which took place on October 24, 2016, French media brought attention to the “strategy of migrant dispersal” enacted by the French government for “decongesting” Calais and drastically reducing migrants’ presence in the area. The dismantlement of the jungle in 2016 was the last of many repeated evictions in the Calais area made by the French police, in collaboration with French NGOs since 2003. The other spectacularized eviction of the jungle took place in 2009: at that time there were about 1000 migrants there, while in 2016 different estimations made by NGOs, activists and French authorities considered that between 6000 and 7000 migrants have been displaced from the jungle site. This paper does not focus on the Calais jungle as such nor on the “border spectacle” (De Genova, 2013) staged by states’ authorities to evict migrant encampments. Rather, it comes to grips with the politics of dispersal that is enacted on a regular basis to trouble and police migrants and in particular migrant multiplicities (temporary migrant groups), both at the internal frontiers of Europe and in urban contexts. By “migrant multiplicities” I refer here to temporary collective formations of migrants from different nationalities, and more precisely to migrants who gather in border zones, such as Calais or Ventimiglia. Measures of migrant dispersal also take place through police measures and municipal decrees enforced for scattering migrants across the territory, preventing that collective migrant formations can consolidate and last in time.

Over the last few years the politics of migrant dispersal has emerged in state decrees, police documents and practices as a planned strategy for governing and policing migrants across Europe, particularly in France and in Italy. Marc Bernardot has highlighted the police tactics for controlling migrants, dispersal measures which have been put into place in Calais since 2008 for “insecuritising, see hampering collective formations” - exercising in this way what he calls a specific “technique of hold” over migrants (Bernardot, 2009: 60). However, as Karen Akoka and Olivier Clochard have demonstrated, the impact of dispersal strategies is not only on the migrants but also on the citizens: indeed, by scattering migrants across the territory, migrants’ presence is

substantially invisibilized and rendered less perceivable to the locals. The nexus between dispersal and invisibilisation has been constantly enforced in Calais: through the repeated evictions of the jungle, migrants “have not decreased in number”, rather, “they got dispersed and this way they became less visible” (Akoka, Clochard, 2009: 86).

Indeed, it is important to stress the partial continuity in the modes of governing “unauthorised” migrants’ presence and of dividing migrants’ temporary groups in critical border-zones. However, since 2015 practices of migrant dispersal - both through direct and indirect spatial and policy measures - have gained central stage in Italy and in France. There, national authorities have engaged in “emptying”, see “unclogging” critical border zones as well as in dismantling migrant informal encampments. Thus, this paper is focused on the present **migration** context, and highlight the increasing use of measures of dispersal as a way for regaining control over unruly mobility. Yet, far from positing this as something totally anew, it shows a partial continuity first, with techniques of dispersal deployed for policing and dispersing migrants that were enacted by state authorities and humanitarian actors over the last decade. Second, the paper also points to the need of situating “spatial tactics” (Coutin, 2018) for policing migrants within a much longer colonial genealogy of dispersal strategies adopted for targeting and disciplining colonial populations. Scattering migrants across spaces, by forcing them to enact convoluted geographies, is a mode of government that acts upon singular individuals and, simultaneously, upon migrant multiplicities, that is upon temporary collective formations that are targeted as potentially dangerous “migrant mobs” (Tazzioli, 2016).

This paper engages with the nexus between spatial strategies of dispersal and the policing of migrant multiplicities. It is structured around two main arguments. First, it contends that tactics of migrant dispersal should be analysed beyond the effects of destitution and of spatial removal, considering them as ways for preventing and disrupting the emergence of collective subjects and, at the same time, for dismantling migrant spaces of life (“*lieux de vie*”). In fact, a focus on migrant dispersal enables bringing to the fore how migrants are governed as part of potential collective formations - by dividing them - and, at the same time, how these latter are actually disqualified as non-political subjects. Second, it shows that strategies of migrant dispersal constitute the often neglected and overshadowed aspects of **migration** governmentality, that are not in opposition to more spectacular and muscular border enforcement practices but, rather, are usually played out simultaneously by states (Agier et al. 2017). In particular, strategies of dispersal keep migrants on the move, forcing them to divert their routes or to undertake the same journey multiple times. Methodologically, the paper shifts the attention away from the the scene of “**migration** crises” (Allen et al. 2017) - enacted for instance through violent evictions - toward more opaque and

regular humanitarian-police operations of migrant dispersal. How are migrants' lives and migrant as potential groups managed beyond the staging the border spectacle ? How does the border spectacle of forced migrant evictions and push-back articulate with less visible and mappable modes of policing through dispersal ?

The analysis on dispersal that I present here is the result of an analysis of state documents municipal decrees and newspapers, articulated with the data and information collected through an ethnographic work that I conducted in France - in Calais, Marseille and Paris - and in Italy - in Ventimiglia - between September 2015 and May 2017. This paper is centred around three mutually related aspects: first, dispersal as a tactic that contributes to take terrain away from the migrants, making hard for them to stay in a place and to build autonomous spaces; second - and as a main argument of the paper - dispersal as a tactic enacted not only for getting hold on singular conducts but also for dividing migrants collective formations; third, dispersal as a tactic the generates forced and convoluted hyper-mobility.

Accordingly, the article proceeds in three steps. In the first section I consider how tactics of migrant dispersal have been enacted in France both through official transfers of migrants from border-zones to detention centres and hosting centers, and in a more indirect way by hampering them from staying in a space and by taking terrain away from them. Then, the central section of the paper shows that strategies of migrant dispersal should be read within the frame of measures apt at dividing migrant multiplicities, taking into account both the Italian and the French context. The final section centres on the effects of forced hyper-mobility that the politics of dispersal generates on migrants.

## **2. The colonial legacies of dispersal:**

Governing migration through dispersal and dissuasion is not a new strategy. In fact, its genealogy traces back to the colonial government of “unruly” populations (Cosemans, 2017; LeCour Grandmaison, 2005). Scholars have explored, from a postcolonial perspective, modes of spatial segregation that have been adopted in European cities for confining former colonised populations (Blanchard, 2011).

Notably, dispersal as a spatial strategy of governmentality of former colonised populations had then been used in France for managing the presence of Algerian people in Paris: in the Fifties and in the Sixties dispersal has been one the main spatial measures for governing Algerians in French cities, in order to avoid concentrating them in the same neighbourhoods, as this could have provoked cohesion and political alliances against French authorities (De Barros, 2005; see also Blanchard,

2011). Importantly, dispersal strategies have been enacted in simultaneity with measures of spatial concentration and segregation: the twofold dynamic of concentration and dispersal, -grouping and dividing - has been the main spatial strategy for disciplining colonised and formerly colonised population in urban contexts. This has been deeply documented by the historian Fabien Sacriste who has shown how the Algerian population was disciplined by the French authorities through a mix of centripetal and centrifugal spatial strategies of grouping and displacement at the same time during the war of independence in Algeria (Sacriste, 2014): grouping camps (*camps de regroupement*) where many Algerians had been transferred to were not in alternative to urban dispersal strategies but, rather, they were complementary to these. A colonial genealogy enables grasping that dispersal strategies cannot be analysed only in terms of spatial disciplining but necessitates to be politicised by focusing on the attempts to neutralise emergent collective subjects and potential struggles: as Matthies Rigouste has poignantly observed, spatial strategies of segregation and dispersal were ‘at the same time in charge of hampering the free organisation of the bidonville as a territory of resistance and of autonomisation’ (Rigouste, 2012: 25).

Bringing attention to the partial historical continuities between the government of migrations today and the government of former colonised populations, it is worth noticing that in France, Adoma, a cooperative created and supported by the French Minister of Interior in 1956 to solve the housing problem of the Algerian population, has become today one of the leading actors of the migration reception system in France. Significantly, one of the main hosting policies towards Algerian families in France adopted by Adoma in the Sixties and in the Seventies was the politics of dispersal, that is currently employed for dealing with the presence of migrants on the national territory. Such a colonial genealogy of dispersal allows highlighting that police measures enacted for scattering across space minorities and unruly populations play on the twofold level of managing people’s conducts and of neutralising and dividing potential collective formations.

### 3. Enacting dispersal

Dispersal practices are not even peculiar to the field of migration governmentality: these strategies have been largely employed in urban plans: urban studies literature dispersal policies are analysed as strategies for managing marginal populations and minorities (Feitosa et al., 2012; Ryan, 1973). Simultaneously, dispersal has been adopted as a policy measure in the penal system (Libelling et al., 2012) and in contemporary labour policies for managing and disciplining workers (Neilson, 2012). Migrant dispersal as a spatial strategy of governmentality is currently enacted for regaining control on what the European Union calls “secondary movements”. Yet, instead of using such an expression

I speak here of migrants' intra-European movements and of unauthorised migrants' presences in Europe. Indeed, "secondary movements" is a term that is employed by the EU and by the UNHCR to designate the convoluted and erratic routes that migrants undertake across Europe as an outcome of the spatial restrictions imposed by the Dublin Regulation. Hence, "secondary movements" reinforces the image of migrant linear routes, moving from one point to another, while those movements that do not respond to this geographical pace, are disqualified as "secondary".

While the politics of migrant dispersal has been quite present in the debate and in the statements made by migrant support groups, to date in the academic scholarship it has remained a relatively marginal theme. Or better to say, it is a topic that has been tackled by few scholars mainly in relation to the UK refugee context (Stewart, 2011). Jonathan Darling has provided a compelling and critical analysis of the UK migrant dispersal policy, retracing its emergence to the late Nineties and pointing to the effects of destitution that it generates on asylum seekers (Darling, 2011; 2016a). As Darling explains, the production of "enforced immobility of asylum seekers through dispersal" (Darling, 2016b: 236) is a central asset of the UK refugee governmentality and consists in allocating asylum seekers to different cities across the country. Similarly, Nick Gill has highlighted that "one of the most noticeable trends in asylum seekers' incarceration in recent years has been the extent to which asylum seekers are increasingly moved between detention centres" (Gill, 2009: 187). In this sense, we can speak of state measures of (forced) internal relocation put into place in order to avoid big concentrations of asylum seekers in the main cities. Moreover, the UK dispersal policy essentially targets asylum seekers and thus, it consists in transferring and scattering across the country people who are inside the official and "legal" channels of the asylum system.

Thus, while state programmes of dispersal envisaged for managing and distributing asylum seekers have been object of study, - what remains quite unexplored is the way in which migrant dispersal, considered here a *spatial strategy of migration governmentality*. This paper comes to grips with spatial strategies of dispersal that are put into place for disciplining unauthorised migrant presence and movements in critical border zones. By that, I mean migrants who are not part of the institutional channels of the asylum, because they decided not to claim asylum - refusing "the humanitarian drive that wants to manage the life of the others" (Furri, 2018) - or because they had already been denied of the refugee status. Relatedly, the paper brings attention to tactics of dispersal that are enacted through indirect police, administrative and law measures that hamper migrants from settling in certain spaces or push them to undertake convoluted geographies. Starting from such a

take on dispersal, I use it as a lens for grasping the peculiar hold exercised over migrants as singular individuals and as part of temporary collective formations.

Dispersal has become a tenet of migration governmentality strategies adopted by French and Italian authorities to regain control over unauthorised migrant movements and presence. One year after the eviction of the “jungle”, the French authorities released a document entitled “Evaluation of the actions of the police in Calais and in the Dunkerque area”. There, dispersing migrants is described as one of the main tactics adopted for regaining control over unruly mobility. Significantly, dispersal is presented in connection with (disrupting) *migrant encampments* and with (disrupting) *migrant temporary groups*: “in order to avoid that permanent camps are reconstituted [...] the strategy that has been pursued consists in multiplying the interventions of the police for dispersing the migrants” (p.17). Yet, to be at stake is not a single dispersal strategy. Migrants are scattered across the territory and spurred to move away from critical border zones through heterogeneous tactics: through forced transfers; or by persuading them to claim asylum in France and move to hosting centres; or through indirect modes, which consist in making migrants’ life and permanence impossible in certain places. I take into account here these three tactics of migrant dispersal, that in many contexts are often played out simultaneously, bringing particular attention to police measures apt at taking terrain away from the migrants in France. These latter are tactics of dispersal that hamper migrants from settling, that is trouble and make hard their presence, producing what Walters and Luthi convincingly called “cramped spaces” (Walters, Luthi, 2016) and, at the same time, *cramping* migrants’ presence and mobility as such. The production of cramped spaces contributes to choke mobility, that is to undo spaces of liveability and to repeatedly harass migrants, in their movements and presence.

As far as forced transfers of migrants are concerned, these have become a common practice both in France and in Italy for removing migrants from critical border-zones such as Ventimiglia to detention centres. Between 2015 and 2017, after dismantling temporary encampments in Calais and arrest migrants who were gathering in the street or in the industrial area of the city, on a regularly basis the French police has taken migrants to detention centres located out of the region. This police practice started well before the last eviction of the Jungle: for instance, in 2015 migrants apprehended in Calais were often transferred to detention centres in southern France, and particularly to Marseille. From there, after being kept in detention for few days the migrants were normally released and then, with their own means, they used to get the train to go back to Paris or to Calais. Many of them did this forced counter-route to Marseille multiple times.

Simultaneously, migrants have also been object of what I call *the traps of humanitarianism*. Through such an expression I refer to the ways in which humanitarian actors, discourses and interventions have been mobilized for convincing migrants to move from Calais and from Paris to hosting centers, from where they had been deported or returned by force to Italy or to the first EU entry country, on the basis of the Dublin Regulation. More precisely, humanitarian actors have encouraged migrants to claim asylum in France, pushing them to give up their project of reaching the UK or discouraging them from the attempt to remain in France without being fingerprinted. In practice, migrants have been pushed to move from Paris and Calais towards reception centres for asylum seekers, named *Centres of Hosting and Orientation* (CAOs), that until the end of 2015 were called *Centres of Rest* (“*Centres de Repit*”). Such a state strategy falls under the rubric of “*mise à l’abri*” which literally means “putting (migrants) in a shelter”. In reality, operations of *mise à l’abri* turned out to be modes of “geographical fixation” (Foucault, 2016: 233): the huge majority of the migrants who had been evicted from Calais and from informal encampments in Paris had been forced to give their fingerprints in Italy or in other European countries. Thus, on the basis of the Dublin Regulation, they risked being forcibly transferred to the first EU country they entered. In other words, claiming asylum meant for many of them risking to be removed from France. This became more blatant with the opening of new hosting centers, called PRADHA, in early 2017: these latter are used to host migrants who are in the Dublin Procedure, imposing on them restrictions in terms of freedom - what is technically called by French authorities procedures of “*assignation à résidence*”.

Hosting system - getting a temporary accommodation - asylum procedure and identification mechanisms are strongly connected to each other: in order to get a place inside a CAO, migrants need to give their fingerprints as soon as they arrive, and within one month they have to decide whether laying their asylum claim or leaving the hosting center. The multiplication of CAOs - that are currently more than 550 - responds to the need of taking migrants away, although only temporarily, from big urban centres and critical migration zones, such as Calais, and not for enabling migrants to settle in France as refugees. The French Asylum Office at the Ministry of the Interior confirmed to me declaring: “we are aware that the most of the migrants who move to CAOs in the end won’t stay here, since they will escape again. This is what can be called migrants’ *evaporation rate*, which consists in the estimated percentage of migrants who disappear, as they escape before the asylum procedure comes to an end. In the end, if migrants they decide to leave the hosting system is their choice, we cannot force them to claim asylum in France.



Notably, in critical border-zones - such as Ventimiglia and Calais - as well as in cities like Paris, migrants are not object of an accurate count; rather, there are only approximate statistics produced by spotting migrants in the street or in crucial places, like at the rail stations. In fact, "it is difficult to estimate how many new migrants arrive in Paris per day. Yet, we can say that the number oscillates between 50 and 70". Similarly, in Ventimiglia the Red Cross stressed to me that the number of new arrivals cannot be actually given in an exact way - as only the migrants who accept to go to the temporary hosting centre run by the Red Cross are effectively counted. "What we can say, is that despite the huge fluctuation in numbers, from week to week, there is always a considerable bunch of people who arrive every day at the station, I would say around 100 on average". The politics of dispersal contributes to render migrants' presence more elusive: by scattering migrants across the territory, it becomes more and more difficult to get a sense of how many they are. Therefore, national authorities regain control over intra-European migration movements not only through the implementation of identity checks nor by tracking migrants (e.g. controlling their displacements) but also by making their presence more unaccountable. Through dispersal and by dividing multiplicities, states try to temporarily decrease the number of asylum seekers hosted in reception centres and, in a way, to lose their traces.

In this sense, the partial lack of statistics about the actual number of migrants on the territory about the *evaporation rate*, are not considered by the authorities as a gap to fill in but, rather, as constitutive of the political technologies for governing migration movements and unauthorised presences. In other words, the opacity at the level of numbers and the actual difficulty to come to grips with migrants' percentage of flight do not only depend on technical limits in counting on migrants in places like Calais; on the contrary, letting migrants disappear from statistics is one of the ways in which migrants' unruly presence and mobility are disciplined. Administrative violence and what I call *humanitarian removals* from critical border-zones - have been put into place simultaneously. This means that both the police and humanitarian actors, such as NGOs, play an active role in inducing dispersal. The third strategy of dispersal - together with forced transfers and the *humanitarian removals* towards CAOs - that I focus on, consists in more indirect modes of spatial scattering. This is the effects of material-spatial restrictions, administrative hindrances and legal conundrums that migrants are subjected to. In order to grasp how migrant dispersal is enacted, we cannot narrow the attention to the institutional channels of forced and non-forced transfers. The indirect modes of migrant dispersal, take place also through repeated violences committed by the police to hinder migrants from staying and from building spaces of life where transversal alliances and collective formations could also emerge.



In 2017, Human Rights Watch published a report to denounce police's brutality against migrants in Calais and the effects of a widespread tactic of dissuasion. Since the last eviction of the "jungle", police's raids for ruining migrants' spaces, have taken place on a daily basis: in fact, they have been object of physical attacks - e.g. targeted with pepper spray - and at the same time even the material conditions for survival are dismantled, such as any form of shelter - tents and sleeping bags are also destroyed by the police (Human Rights Watch, 2017). Migrants are hampered from staying and subjected to a wearying strategy of dissuasion: they are pushed to leave Calais, as this latter becomes a sort of hostile environment. By using such an expression, I want to recall the UK's immigration policy to create a "hostile environment" for migrants: beyond deportations, migrants are target of tactics that undermine space liveability for migrants through administrative, police and law measures. As Anya Edmond-Pettitt has rightly stressed, in places like Calais "the hostile environment principle is spreading", that is politics of dispersal (Edmond-Pettitt, 2017: 24). As I will show in the next section, beyond harassing migrants individually, strategies of dispersal target migrant multiplicities - that is temporary groups which are usually criminalised as "mobs" - aiming at disrupting the consolidation of collective formations. In fact, as Claudia Aradau has remarked, this is actualised by hampering migrants from staying in the Calais area, both by "undoing of the very conditions of liveability" of the migrants and through "the destruction of conditions of collectivity" (Aradau, 2017: 7).

If we move the attention beyond the spectacular moments of violent evictions, the politics of migrant dispersal in Calais is mainly enacted by taking terrain away from the migrants. Such a withdrawal of terrain which concerns both the level of rights and the material ground - e.g. impossibility for migrants to settle, to build encampments; and attack to infrastructures of refugee supports. In fact, migrant dispersal takes place through and in simultaneity with police interventions apt at obstructing and dismantling the production of spaces of life. Nevertheless, these are far from being long-term solutions, as reported by official documents: "actions of migrant dispersal and measures apt at transferring migrants to hosting centres (*"mise à l'abri"*) reduce the number of migrants who are on the territory: however, they could not hamper the persistence of residual migrant gatherings" (p.7). Thus, migrants' persistent presence, together with the repeated formation of migrant groups, is something that states cannot get rid of, representing what Nicholas De Genova has persuasively called the "in corrigibility" of migration: "politics", he argues, "is about the crisis that ensues from the abrupt and troublesome appearance of that which officially does not exist, cannot be counted or recognized, and makes unruly claims that are essentially unintelligible within

the order of the police: *Here we are, we're illegal—come and get us ... but if you do, we'll come right back!*" (De Genova, 2010: 111).

Similarly, although on a more sporadic basis, even in Paris migrants are subjected to a sort of centrifugal forced move: informal encampments are constantly evicted and in this way the migrants are de facto pushed out of the city. The multiplication of migrant encampments built near to rail stations and metro stations (such as Stalingrad), as well as at Porte de LaChapelle, is continuously obstructed by the police that, in collaboration with local NGOs, coordinates operations of humanitarian *mise à l'abri* encouraging migrants to move to hosting centres out of Paris. Measures of dispersal have been enforced jointly with actions for hampering migrants from settling, putting big stones on the ground, as material deterrence elements.

Yet, far from stopping their increase in number, migrant encampments have multiplied in Paris: tactics of direct and indirect expulsion from the city have rather been adopted for wearing out migrants and temporarily wiping out migrants' spaces. As a matter of fact, during his visit to Calais in early June, the French Minister of the Interior Gerard Collomb declared to the media that the French government will send 150 additional policemen there, in order to avoid that "Calais and Dunkerque become places of fixation for the migrants and that other jungles could multiply" on the territory. In this regard, the use of the term "jungles" at plural is significant, I suggest, as it draws attention to the proliferation of migrant informal camps across Europe. Strategies of migrant dispersal are deployed for regaining control over unauthorised presences and movements. However, what does "control" mean and which modes of control are enacted over migrants through strategies of dispersal ? I want to suggest that in critical border zones, such as Calais or Ventimiglia, control is not enforced in terms of surveillance and it is not so much grounded on individualised screening; rather, to be at stake are strategies for regaining control over migrants' geographies and spaces of life: states are frantically trying to discipline migration not by constantly tracking them but, rather, by wearing migrants out, pushing them to 'disappear' - becoming invisible - and hampering the formation of migrant spaces.

### **3. Dividing up potential collective formations:**

Up to now, this article has illustrated how strategies of migrant dispersal have been enacted by French authorities both through direct transfers, as well as through more indirect tactics that consist in taking terrain away from the migrants, obstructing or making impossible their presence in places such as Calais. Yet, the main argument of this paper is that we need to shift attention from dispersal per se, as tactic for policing migration, towards dispersal as a spatial strategy for preventing,

disrupting and dividing migrant collective formations. Dispersal is one of the main tactics deployed for regaining control on migrants as part of collective subjects that are however criminalised and labelled as “migrant mobs”. Far from being homogenous or stable groups, migrant multiplicities are temporary collective formations: for instance, migrants who live together in informal encampments, or migrants who get organised for not being evicted or in order to cross the border. In fact, dispersal can be seen as a sort of reactive spatial strategy aimed at defusing migrant temporary collective formations that are feared as potential political subjects. In Calais, as it has been remarked by Michel Agier et al., the politics of *mise à l’abri* has allowed the state to examine asylum claims on an individual basis “avoiding in this way the mass-effect that constitutes a for collective claims” (Agier et al. 2017: 187).

In the media as well as in institutional documents, migrants’ temporary collective formations are usually depicted as disorderly multiplicities formed by an indefinite x number of individuals. The existence of collective formations is dismissed in favour of images of messy groups of migrants, that are named as “mobs” or as “swarm”. Famously, the ex-Prime Minister of the UK, David Cameron, spoke about “swarm of people” in relation to the migrants who gather in Calais trying to cross the Channel. Here I bring attention to the “politicality of migration” (Mezzadra, 2017), and more precisely to temporary migrant collective formations that are disrupted, neutralised and divided through dispersal measures. Potential and actual migrant multiplicities are targeted both by police measures and by legal decrees. In fact, in many cases migrant dispersal is enacted with the explicit purpose of obstructing, defusing and preventing the establishment of migrant groups in the urban context or in border-zones.

The cities of Ventimiglia and of Calais represent two migration spaces where the connection between dispersal strategies and disruption of migrant multiplicities as potential collective subjects is particularly visible. In Calais migrants have been repeatedly obstructed both from gathering and from creating visible encampments. On July 11, 2014, the municipality of Calais enforced an anti-grouping local decree for preventing migrants to settle in groups in the area. Three years later, in March 2017, the municipality passed a new decree establishing a perimeter that delimits the spaces where gatherings are not allowed: “considering the regular, persistent and massive presence of individuals and groups in the Dunes industrial zone to give food to the migrants [...] and considering that these gatherings engender tension among migrant ethnic groups [...] all abusive, protracted and repeated occupations of the the Dunes industrial zone are forbidden”. In meanwhile, the establishment of public showers for the migrants had been denied for months by the municipality despite the Court obliged local authorities to do that, as showers have been considered

a “pull-factor”, that is an element of attraction for the migrants to come to Calais: showers, water access points, temporary shelters and stable food distribution sites are all considered as potential *points of fixation* for the migrants. For this reason, in September 2017 the municipality and the prefecture of Calais reluctantly accepted to activate mobile showers and water points in order to avoid that these latter could function as points of fixation.

It cannot pass unnoticed that to be criminalised are both migrant multiplicities and migrant support networks that engage in acts of solidarity with the migrants. Spatial strategies of migrant dispersal have been enacted on the basis of anti-grouping decrees and food distribution bans. In this way, both the visibility and the persistence of migrant groups - as possible source of disorder as well as of temporary political alliances and struggles - are simultaneously tackled by the authorities through dispersal. Hence, methodologically, how can we analyse tactics of migrant dispersal without “seeing like a state” (Scott, 1998), that is without replicating a governmental gaze on migration? As I mentioned above, tactics of dispersal adopted for dividing and neutralising migrant collective formations should be seen as modes for regaining control over migrant struggles and over transversal alliances, between migrants and citizens.

At the French-Italian border, in the Italian city of Ventimiglia, the police has repeatedly tried to divide, scatter and diffuse migrant groups - made both through police operations and through municipal decrees - aimed at dismantling any autonomous migrants’ spaces and emerging struggles. Nevertheless, by speaking of Ventimiglia as a critical border-zone it is important, as Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson remark, not reifying borders taking these latter as immutable objects of study or as things (Mezzadra, Neilson, 2013). Thus, against the risk of essentialisation of frontiers, it is fundamental to situate the emergence and transformations of some spaces as (critical) border-zones with a historical perspective. Ventimiglia can be considered an ambiguous frontier: since the suspension of Schengen by France in June 2015, it has become a “though” frontier, although only for some people among those who want to cross it. Indeed, despite the suspension of Schengen in principle applies to everyone, in reality the French-Italian border is enforced on the basis of racialised criteria: the police checks and stops people on the train and on the motorway that connect Italy to France through racial profiling, and European citizens are not controlled. Since June 2015, the city of Ventimiglia has been in fact an unequal frontier where migrants seeking asylum in Europe remain stranded - and from where they are eventually pushed back.

Tracing the history of a border could also involve tracing the fragmented and elusive history of *migrants’ frontiers*. That is, instead of assuming border controls as a starting point, we can map out the opening and the closures as well as the functioning of a such a border from the standpoint of the

temporary migration spaces created and of the modes of captures, dispersal and division that migrants have been subjected to. To put it differently, this means retracing a history of a border bringing attention to collective experiences, episodes, spaces and struggles that remain partially overshadowed in the state's narrative of border-zones such as Ventimiglia. In June 2015, with the support of locals and also of activist groups coming from other cities, migrants blocked at the border managed to create a safe space in a pinewood, between the main road connecting Ventimiglia to France and the cliffs, where the police was not allowed to enter and from where they tried every day to cross individually and at times also in small groups. This autonomous migration safe-space was not simply a place where migrants used to gather. The group of about 150 people formed a sort of temporary collective called "The migrants of Ventimiglia for freedom". The flyers that the migrants gave to the locals and to the tourists who were crossing the French-Italian border over summer flashed out the importance for the migrants staying in group and to show their collective drive: "we remain stand, and we claim our rights as refugees while we are suffering of precariousness and errancy. The EU and the entire world are looking at us. We fight by ourselves and we stay united as we were one person only, in order to get our freedom. We address all migrants, who are in Ventimiglia, Calais, Rome and Paris, to tell them that we should not cross the border on the sly". This police free-zone resisted for three months, until September 30 2015, when it was violently evicted by Italian authorities. However, the mayor of Ventimiglia significantly stated: "we did not evict the migrants, we evicted the camp". On the one hand, through such a declaration he responded to the criticisms made by migrant support groups that denounced the violent operation; yet, on the other, he recognised that, in the end, migrants' presence could not be eradicated once for all.

Importantly, both in Calais and in Ventimiglia, as well as in many other French and Italian towns, measures for hampering and dispersing migrant collective formations have been put into place on the basis of anti-vagrancy and anti-gathering local decrees adopted on purpose. Calais, Paris and Tours in France, Ventimiglia, Gorizia, Bari, in Italy: these are only some of the cities where the dispersal, see dividing and neutralisation of migrant multiplicities take place on a daily basis through the implementation of anti-gatherings local decrees. Instead of addressing migrants as a targeted population - as this could be criticised as a discriminatory measure -, local decrees implicitly refer to migrants including them into the broader category of "vagrancy". In this way, migrant temporary groups are situated within a series of historically criminalised conducts - vagrants, vagabonds, poor, mob - and, at the same time, the existence of collective formations, that

is of temporary migrant groups is not even mentioned. Hence, that what is at stake in the politics of dispersal are struggles over potential or actual migrant multiplicities that are in fact discredited as non-political. More precisely, these latter are considered a problem of public order and the presence of any collective formation is addressed in municipal decrees in terms of unruly conducts or as gatherings corresponding to an indefinite number of individuals, with no specific composition.

Collective subjects that are not reducible to population nor to the the people have been historically criminalised and targeted by exclusionary measures; at the same time, they also remain fundamentally under-theorised, with important exceptions (Aradau 2015; Brighenti, 2016). This is the case not only in the field of migration studies but also in political theory and in International Relations, where the “(in)security of individuals – as in the case of human security – or of ethnic groups, societies, nations, states or the environment” got primary attention, while “an important articulation of collectivity – the mob or the crowd” is missing (Aradau, 2017: 6). Temporary collective subjects not reducible to populations or to the people can be considered “ambiguous multiplicities” (Brighenti, 2016) : the lack of conceptualisation of these latter has clear colonial legacies, as Frantz Fanon observed in *The Wretched of the Earth* pointing to the indistinct character through which colonised subjects as groups were addressed by the French - as “yellow multitudes” (Fanon, 1963: 7).

Such a take on the politics of migrant dispersal enables bringing to the fore the effective processes of making and unmaking of the migrant mobs, as targeted and criminalised temporary collective formations that from state’s point of view can potentially become disorderly subjects. The dispersal of (potential and actual) migrant multiplicities often take place by targeting directly migrants’ encampments and by criminalising practices of solidarity that locals engage with, giving hospitality to the migrants, or any kind of logistics or humanitarian support (Fassin, 2017; Fekete, 2009). A case in point is represented by Ventimiglia, where measures of migrant dispersal have been facilitated by the enforcement of multiple municipal decrees - in July 2015, in August 2016 and in March 2017 - that forbid citizens to give food to the migrants (Webber, 2017). Significantly, these decrees do not justify food distribution bans by depicting migrants as dangerous subjects per se but, rather by pointing to potential hygienic-health emergencies that would risk to put migrants in danger: the presence of “non-authorized persons who give food to the migrants”, the decree enforced in July 2016 says, “could give rise to food toxic-infection [...] and given the hygienic-sanitary emergency, it is necessary to act in an urgent way, adopting preventive measures”.

Hence, the *fear of migrant mobs* is not explicitly mentioned in these decrees - neither in the anti-vagrancy ones, for preventing migrant grouping, nor in those banishing food distribution; rather, all these documents officially point to the need of protecting migrants, against hygienic and sanitary risks, or they speak about public security at large, without even mentioning migrants. Yet, the decrees in question have been enforced for allowing the police to enact measures apt at preventing, criminalising and disrupting both migrant groups and solidarity networks. This clearly emerges from political declarations: “it is not appropriate” the Director of the Italian Police declared to the media “to create the conditions for migrant to gather, although we understand migrants’ legitimate desires to cross the border”. Over the last two years, migrants blocked in Ventimiglia have tried to cross the border also in groups, and they have been dispersed by the police: beyond pushing them back, both the Italian and the French police tried to scatter them, arresting some and hoping that the others would get lost on the mountains. In this way, migrant gatherings are prevented; and, at the same time, by dismantling the material conditions of living and the logistics of migrant support migrant collective formations are neutralized and disrupted. Although the municipal decrees then had been cancelled, they contributed to create an hostile environment both for the migrants and for the citizens acting in solidarity with them.

#### **4. Keeping migrants on the move:**

Strategies of migrant dispersal can appear, at a first glance, as in opposition to modes of spatial confinement and detention, that have actually shaped the European migration context. Indeed, since the Nineties, we can speak of a “Europe’s camps”. However, it would be misleading to consider dispersal and confinement as two opposite techniques of migration management that respond to radically different rationales of governmentality. Rather, building on works that traced historical and political connections between the government of colonised populations and contemporary migration governmentality, it is important to highlight the heterogeneity of spatial strategies through which states try to regain control over unruly mobility. Yet, it is more than a question of mere coexistence of different political technologies: dispersal is at times used for avoiding the “side-effects” that measures of spatial confinement can trigger. This recalls Michel Foucault’s reflections on the criminalisation of popular classes: the risk of segregation and detention is that the “potential formation within the sequestration itself of a kind of counter-force, a counter-collectivity that might threaten the institution itself” (Foucault, 2016: 213).



Focusing on the current **migration** context, dynamics of concentration and dispersal, and of forced gathering - as it is the case of refugee camps - on the one hand, and forced scattering on the other, are simultaneously played out in order to regain control over migrants, avoiding at the same time that migrants can organise collectively or that locals can build alternative infrastructure of hospitality. What are the effects of dispersal on migrants lives ? Are migrants dispersed in order then to be put in detention? Although migrants who have been evicted from Calais or dispersed at the border in Ventimiglia have often been transferred to detention centres, they have not been kept in detention for long time or taking spatial confinement as a goal per se. More precisely, I was to suggest that through dispersal, migrants are governed by keeping them on the move, that is by forcing them, in an indirect or in a more direct way, to undertake convoluted geographies. In other words, through measures of dispersal - that also divide and diffuse migrant multiplicities - states try to regain control not by blocking migrants or by considering that they won't come back, but rather, by disrupting their movements and dismantling the material conditions for staying in a place - what I called above tactics for taking terrain away from the migrants. Migrants are kept on the move, and are paradoxically entrapped in a sort of forced uneven hyper-mobility (Fontanari, 2016; Picozza, 2017). Hyper mobility means, concretely, that migrants are often put in a condition of enacting convoluted geographies, and diverting their routes, or, in other cases, that they have to undertake the same route multiple times.

After being dispersed and eventually divided as a group, migrants are often moved by national authorities far away by from the contested border-zones. Since summer 2016, the Italian police organise weekly forced transfers from the city of Ventimiglia to the hotspot of Taranto, in southern Italy, 1200 km away from the French-Italian border. Once being identified and kept in detention for few days inside the hotspot, migrants are released and they take the train to reach Ventimiglia again. As it emerges from the interviews that I conducted in Ventimiglia, many migrants did the Ventimiglia-Taranto forced journey, and then came back for about eight or ten times. Thus, far from being removed from the territory or being kept in detention, migrants ultimately moved across the country, being bounced back and forth, both through forced institutional transfers and by themselves, trying to go back to placed from where they have been dispersed. Hence, mobility appears to be not only an object of control but also a technology of government (Tazzioli, 2017): migrants are worn out by dispersal measures that trigger uneven and convoluted mobility. More than stopping or channelling "unauthorised" intra-European movements, state authorities engage in a politics of dispersal that aims at regaining control over migrants by disrupting their autonomous geographies, diverting their routes and forcing them to undertake the same journey more than once.

Thus, dispersal is as a spatial strategy which, contrariwise to what official documents argue, is less adopted for distributing migrants across the territory as such than for troubling movements and dividing collective formations. In other words, migrant dispersal is not a question of territorial distribution but, mostly, a political technology for obstructing migrants' presence, targeting both individuals and temporary multiplicities: more than fixing migrants to a specific remote location, dispersal policies generate convoluted hyper-mobility.

Dispersal strategies do not have an impact on migrants only. Rather, they make migrants (more) invisible in the public space for certain periods of time: migrant dispersal is not enacted by national authorities only for regaining control over unruly mobility but also as a specific political strategy for staging migration as a problem. In other words, dispersal strategies do not target migrants only; to some extent, they also address the citizenry. In fact, the staging of migrants' hyper-visibility and the border spectacle enforcement that are at stake in many migration contexts, should not be seen as the opposite pole of spatial strategies that produce temporary invisibility. On the contrary, temporary invisibilisation - enacted by dividing migrant groups and scattering them across the territory - and hypervisibilisation, - which is produced through the staging of migrant's invasion or by concentrating migrants in enclosed zones - are both played out as part of the "migration crisis" state's narrative. However, making migrants invisible does not obviously mean getting rid of their presence: on the contrary, the return of the (same as well as other) migrants dispersed across the country cannot be avoided.

### *Conclusion:*

At the time of writing, on November 22, 2017, in Marseille about sixty underaged migrants from different nationalities formed a temporary collective and occupied a church in order to demand a safe place to stay and access to fundamental rights - such as education and health support. One day later, the municipality of Marseille offered to them a temporary solution. Yet, migrants refused, arguing that they would continue the occupation of the church, as the offer made by local authorities would have entailed being transferred to different hosting centres across the country and being divided as a collective. Two days later, in order to evict the church, the municipality proposed to give to all of them the same accommodation in a hosting centre in Marseille: the migrants finally accepted, declaring that, however, they will continue to monitor that no strategy of dispersal and division could be enacted by the police in the next future. Hence, the struggle of this temporary migrant collective formed in Marseille for claiming the right to a shelter and education has been at the same time a struggle against dispersal and against any measure apt at dividing them.

Focusing on the present migration context, this paper has shed light on dispersal measures and decrees adopted in France and in Italy for disrupting and dividing migrant multiplicities, showing the effects of convoluted mobility that these engender. As I have illustrated in relation to Calais and Ventimiglia, strategies of migrant dispersal take place through and in combination with actions for dismantling migrants' spaces (*lieux de vie*), by hampering them from settling and from building collective environments. Through spatial strategies of dispersal, states try to regain control over unauthorised mobility, taking terrain away from migrants and hampering collective formations to emerge. Nevertheless, despite the "politics of exhaustion" (Ansems De Vries, Welander, 2016) put into place by states in combination with dispersal tactics, migrants' presence cannot be wiped out: indeed, migrants often come back to the places from where they have been evicted, and new migrants arrive. On this point, the catchphrase "*We are not going back*", repeatedly uttered by migrants in Ventimiglia, and that has widely circulated across Europe, being used by migrant collectives, reveals migrants' inextricable presence and desires that are temporarily actualised also through the production of collective spaces (*lieux de vie*) "which is always in excess of their regulation by governmental regimes" (Scheel et al. 2015: 85). Hence, it is not only a question of migrants' presence as such; rather, this latter is knotted with the recursive formation of temporary migrant multiplicities that are irreducible to stable groups or to populations and that are targeted and criminalised by states as potential collective political subjects. In this sense, an open-ended politics that challenges dispersal measures adopted for dividing migrant collective formations is predicated on material infrastructures of migration support put into place both in border-zones and in urban contexts. The *crimes of solidarity* that some citizens have been accused of, bring to the fore practices through which the politics of migrants dispersal has in part been short-circuited, hampering that migrants' spaces and collective formations can be further dismantled.

This paper has shown that the politics of migrant dispersal is not a recent political technology; an rather, it should be traced back to urban plans and police measures for governing unruly former colonised populations and more recently it has been enforced also in the field of penal reforms and labour policies. Although it has not been the focus of this paper, through such an insight I wanted to suggest a potential future research pathway: retracing a detailed history of dispersal as a spatial strategy of governmentality of minorities and of unruly populations enables grasping the continuities and the differences between current modes of migration management and colonial practices of government.

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