Governing mobility in times of crisis: practicing the border and embodying resistance in and beyond the hotspot infrastructure

The European Commission's (EC) choice of the term 'hotspot' for the block's policy response to the 2015 border crisis is revealing. In its general use, the word refers either to an area or position of heightened risk or danger, or to a point on a surface that is of higher temperature than its surroundings. In geology, the term refers to places on the earth's surface where a plume of hot rock in the mantle gives rise to volcanic eruptions. Whether deliberate or not, the use of the word in relation to the management of migration and borders appears to trade on a combination of these ideas and, by implication, a hotspot is a site of both unusual danger and uncontrollable pressure. Quite tellingly, the EC document announcing the hotspot approach never explains or defines the 'hotspot' itself. It is only in the implementation of the hotspot approach that islands and even regions are defined as 'hotspot areas' – a striking example of a governmental technology creating the object which it intends to govern:

> *[A] 'hotspot area' means an area in which the host Member State, the Commission, relevant Union agencies and participating Member States cooperate, with the aim of managing an existing or potential disproportionate migratory challenge characterised by a significant increase in the number of migrants arriving at the external borders* (Regulation (EU) 2016/1624, 2016, Chapter 1 Article 2(10))

The papers in this special issue critically explore this 'hotspot approach' by dissecting its implementation and reverse-engineering the governance logics that underpin it. A seemingly new form of border infrastructure and bordering practice was developed by the EC in response to increased migration across the EU's southern and eastern borders in 2015-16. This 'hotspot approach' was presented as a novel governance mechanism that would bring closer and more efficient cooperation between European agencies and 'frontline' EU member states. The European agencies involved are the European Asylum Support Office (EASO), Frontex (the European Border and Coast Guard Agency), Europol (the EU's law enforcement agency) and Eurojust (the EU agency for criminal justice cooperation). According to the European Agenda on Migration, proposed by the EC in May 2015, under the 'hotspot approach' these agencies work on the ground with the frontline Member States "to swiftly identify, register and fingerprint incoming migrants" (EC 2015). Arriving migrants are then sorted into categories: asylum claimants are processed by EASO, while Frontex "help[s] Member States by coordinating the return of irregular migrants" while the role of Europol and Eurojust is to tackle "smuggling and trafficking networks" (ibid). The hotspot approach therefore represents a further Europeanisation of migration and asylum governance. This is a process that commenced in 1999, when the European Council first agreed to establish the Common European Asylum System (CEAS). Then, in 2010, EASO was established and became operational the following year. Its initial role was to assist and support member-states in the implementation of the CEAS. However, its competence expanded significantly in 2015 with the adoption of the European Agenda on Migration and the introduction of the hotspot approach.

On the ground, the implementation of the hotspot includes the construction or re-purposing of physical infrastructure to serve as reception and processing facilities in places close to the landing sites of large numbers of migrants. These facilities are also themselves referred to as 'hotspots'. So a 'hotspot' has come to mean, simultaneously, the point on the EU's border of supposed migratory pressure, the governance approach for addressing such supposed pressure, and the physical site where arrivals are processed and classified. Physical reception and identification centres have since been set up in Italy in Sicily (Trapani, Pozzallo and Messina), Lampedusa, and Taranto, and in Greece on the Aegean islands of Lesbos, Chios, Samos, Leros and Kos. Their stated purpose is to provide temporary accommodation and rapid processing of asylum claims in order to facilitate their relocation across the EU or the quick return of those whose claims for asylum were denied. However the sites have come to be associated with squalid living conditions, bureaucratic delays and long periods of detention in which people wait in limbo with inadequate access to health care, education and legal advice. By the end of 2019, less than 100 migrants lived in the Italian hotspots. However, in Greece, in 2020 the situation remains acute with 20,000 people living in the Moria camp on Lesbos, a facility intended to house 3,100 (Chapman, 2020).

With these in mind, the contributions to this special issue dissect the hotspot approach in order to unravel the mechanisms of power that are awakened to administer the response to the collective movement of migrants. Managed as a protracted crisis, the EU distributed 23.3 billion euros to member-states over the course of the five years since 2015 for the management and humanitarian protection of asylum seekers and refugees. In this way, the hotspot approach – working in tandem with humanitarian governance logics such as those of rescue, interdiction, humanitarian assistance and long term encampment – has constructed and consolidated the dividing lines between those who deserve protection (refugees) and those that do not (migrants). Five years into its implementation, those arriving and caught up in the hotspot system are still being warehoused where they are not wanted, pushed back to where they came from and constantly moved around at will. With the introduction of fast track asylum procedures and geographical movement restrictions on the islands, hotspots have become spaces where exceptional rules apply and where mobility is explicitly targeted. With an emphasis on 'stemming the flows', individual member-states attempt to quell public fears over the newcomers. As people still arrive on the Greek islands, Italy and Spain, and as the geopolitical tensions feed the spectre of new conflicts in the region, the contributions published here are more relevant than ever.

In this context, and as European institutions adopt an ever-more managerial and instrumental approach to issues related to migration, our special issue makes a timely and critical intervention to established narratives and ideas about the governance of moving populations and borders. By combining a view from below, from the everyday level of implementation and the impact on the lives of those subjected to it, with a view from above and the macro level of governance and state logics, the special issue builds a holistic and critical picture of the EC's approach. This allows the

reader to engage with the racial and colonial assumptions that inform border politics in Europe today. Our collective aim here is to confront and intercept the knowledge produced about the border and tackle the established one-sided approach that treats migration as a 'problem' to be solved at all costs.

In the past couple of decades, Europe has time and again experienced moments of increased migrant mobility, which have in turn caused the continent's national and supranational governance apparatus to go into crisis mode. The digital narratives, language and imagery (Chouliaraki and Georgiou, 2019) deployed during these border crises usually include rickety and overcrowded boats landing on member-states' shores: for example, in the Canary Islands in 2006, when over 30,000 migrants from Africa arrived in a single year[1]; and in 2015-2016 when over 1,000,000 people arrived at the Greek islands of Lesbos, Chios, Samos, Kos and Leros[2]. Similarly, collective border jumps at land borders, such as at the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla, are also a recurring theme. Such moments make the border visible in a way that evokes an emergency. The ways in which authorities respond to this emergency depends, among other things, on who the border-crossers are and how deserving they are perceived to be. These recurring border crises are products of the EU's border policies. They mark moments of rupture in the seemingly orderly governance of the border, warranting specific interventions (Mountz and Hiemstra, 2014; Williams, 2017). Against the backdrop of a decade of austerity, political upheaval and secessionist tendencies, a steep surge in xenophobia, racism and populism has taken place in many EU member-states. As a result, national borders, as everyday means to govern and regulate migrant mobility, are ever-increasingly linked to these rising politics of fear and xenophobia, and discourses of crisis (Bobić and Janković, 2017). This has signalled a proliferation of practices and spaces of confinement for arriving migrants at and beyond the border, including hotspots, transit and reception centres, off-shore, extraterritorial, temporary and mobile detention facilities.

The lockdowns imposed around the world have disrupted our common assumptions and misconceptions around these issues, revealing much deeper patterns and trends in border management. Some of the public health, physical distancing and surveillance measures may seem exceptional, far-reaching and unprecedented. However, they build on pre-existing trends, ideologies, expertise and technologies, and will have future implications for the governance of human mobility and the deterrence of unwanted migration alike. For example, the deployment of police on high streets, neighbourhoods, buses and squares, as well as strategic mobility hubs such as highways, ports, toll and service stations, requiring people to justify their movement, all build on existing trends of *everyday bordering* (Yuval et al. 2017). This refers to *border-work* (Rumford 2008), all those border-related daily and mundane practices (Białasiewicz, 2012; Ozdemir and Ayata, 2017) that target racialised migrant bodies and their movements in everyday life (Johnson and Jones, 2014; van Houtum

1 Migration Trends Across the Mediterranean: Connecting the Dots, pg 45. Available at: https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Migration/StudyMigrants/IOs/IOMTrendsAccrossMediterranean.pdf
2 https://migration.iom.int/docs/2016_Flows_to_Europe_Overview.pdf

et. Al, 2005) and urban spaces (Fauser, 2017; Lebuhn, 2013): the workplace, the bus, our squares, the supermarket. The border is polymorphic (Burridge et al., 2017), highly fragmented (Amoore et al., 2008; Johnson et al., 2011) and ephemeral (Mountz, 2011), and it is performed prosaically every day (Salter, 2008). It is in itself an instrument of power, functioning through the reproduction of hierarchies of class, race and gender (Yuval-Davis, 2013), overwhelmingly marking the experiences of those living on the margins of our societies while often sustaining a humanitarian claim for responsibility over the lives of the most vulnerable among them.

Contemporary bordering practices have incorporated and instrumentalised elements of humanitarian care. The maritime operations of the EU's border agency, Frontex, in the Mediterranean Sea have for the past two decades been presented in the language of humanitarianism and human rights (Perkowski, 2018). The humanitarianisation of border enforcement (Williams, 2015) has emerged as a morally defensible strategy for both states and border patrol agents, despite the rising death toll from sea crossings. In linking these seemingly contradictory objectives, governments encourage indifference to the lives of particular populations (Basaran, 2015) while simultaneously producing the figure of the migrant as a helpless victim in need of rescue (Little and Vaughan-Williams, 2017). Non-governmental organisations are also implicated in the government of borders, as states rely on them to provide technical expertise and training for improving their mechanisms of response, such as emergency preparedness plans and technological solutions for registrations (Andrijasevic and Walters, 2010). In some cases, their presence is deemed necessary in the absence of state authorities or institutions that can provide assistance to those stranded in border areas, detained indefinitely or destitute. The five Aegean islands in particular have become paradigmatic spaces of humanitarian interventions (Dijstelbloem and van de Veer, 2019), where the provision of medical and legal assistance, food and sanitation is intertwined with demands for biometric registration, surveillance and detention.

The linkage of control over migrant mobility and the securitised provision of care to those in need follows the lineage of historical instances when those "from below" saw their demands conceded to, only to then rematerialise in a more sinisterly advanced version of the exploitative status they had risen against in the first place. The response of the EU and its individual member-states to this most recent border crisis is consistent with this history. The hotspot approach is a flexible and ad hoc governance mechanism that categorises migrants and increasingly denies them a stable life and routes to safety. Its obsession instead with fast-track procedures and frameworks, often lying outside formal legislative scrutiny, builds an ever more managerial approach to migration. It also allows states, local authorities and European street-level bureaucrats to blur and obfuscate the lines of accountability and responsibility. Rather than giving people respite from movement, hotspots ensure they keep moving, often at a moment's notice and without their families.

This special issue builds on the fact that the EC hotspot approach is much more than a physical infrastructure at the geographical borders of the EU, one that functions to temporarily contain migrants at the gates. The contributions here distinctly and

decidedly demonstrate that the hotspot symbolises a profound and constant reconfiguration of the relation between rights and territory, and a redefinition of who has the right to have what rights. In this way, the EC hotspot approach provides the foundation for a new relationship between territory and rights. Founded at the intersection of humanitarianism and security (Papada et al., this issue), the hotspot further entangles care and control by creating sociopolitical distancing when geographical distancing is not possible (Pallister-Wilkins, this issue). It reaches far beyond the confines of the walls of the physical infrastructure to contain those on the move without necessarily detaining them (Tazzioli & Garelli, this issue). However, resistance is still practiced every day opposing the hotspot logics (Spathopoulou and Carastathis, this issue), which include the desubjectification, dehumanisation at the border. Subversion is found in radical place-making tactics that create truly safe spaces for migrants (Sparke & Mitchell, this issue).

This special issue offers these five different critical takes on the 'hotspot approach', examining this both as a construct that is compartmentalising and controlling, as well as a source of awe and fear, but also resistance and solidarity. Polly Pallister-Wilkins' contribution powerfully depicts the hotspot as a humanitarian space that rests on the existence of two specific rationalities: the effective management of disaster and the rationalisation of compassion. In relation to the former, Pallister-Wilkins eloquently demonstrates how order is re-established through the logic of sovereign protection: "in the hotspots, the border regime, biopolitical need, a politics of life and access to mobility become intertwined" (p. TBD). For instance, in light of the implementation of the 2015 EU-Turkey statement, hierarchies of mobility interact with particular hierarchies of vulnerability which then produce a further fragmentation of migration categories and allow some to escape the confines of the hotspot. At the same time, the hotspot is not limited merely to the carceral space of the camp but instead forms an entire array of transit points, transport infrastructure and reception facilities including satellite facilities, where the vulnerable are offered protection. Pallister-Wilkins (this issue) gives an insightful account of the co-optation of the extraordinary presence of volunteers wanting to fill the gaps of the institutional support that was meant to be provided by established humanitarian organisations. She meticulously traces and documents how the volunteers' compassion was quickly mobilised in ways that were effective to the management of the 'migration crisis'. In addition, the hotspot rationalises such compassion by regulating the moral force of those employed or voluntarily offering services through procedural, logistic and funding schemes that aim to avoid duplication and to enhance the efficacy of provision as a whole. Both local and transnational, the humanitarian geographies of the hotspot enable the effective management of the crisis and maintain the liberal European order.

Next, Martina Tazzioli and Glenda Garelli (this issue) examine the changing character of the hotspot in terms of formal institutional policy and actually existing practice. Tazzioli and Garelli's central argument is that hotspots should not be seen solely as detention facilities, but as flexible infrastructures of 'containment beyond detention'. Containment cannot be reduced to detention, they suggest, because even when migrants' movements beyond the confines of the hotspots are channelled,

regulated and governed by member-states, the European Commission and its agencies, they are still contained. This applies to arrivals that are granted protected status as legally recognised refugees, but who nevertheless have little say over where they will be permitted to live, as well as to those who are refused protection and channelled away from Europe. Migrants confronted with the hotspot who try to resist its logic are damned if they do and damned if they don't: refusing identification and fingerprinting means lingering in detention for months, while trying to avoid the hotspot process altogether inevitably entails vulnerability to exploitation and destitution.

Tazzioli and Garelli develop their account by tracing the genealogy of border hotspots, going back in time before the introduction of the current hotspot approach. They find not only that the formal role of the hotspot has evolved over time, but also that its practical operation and its impact have diverged from the officially designated functions. Since their introduction, hotspots have changed from "sites for regulating migrant arrivals by sea [to] places for migrants' redistribution on land" (p. 2). They then consider containment beyond detention in two cases: the hotspots on the islands of Lampedusa, Italy, and Lesbos, Greece. In doing so they map what they call the 'spatial productivity' of the hotspots, as new forms of channelled and regulated movement are generated within Europe and new obstacles to migrants' autonomous mobility are created and resisted. Governmental efforts to close down the possibilities for the autonomous mobility of migrants, dubbed 'secondary movements' by the EU, have led, according to the two authors, to the multiplication of 'hotspot-like spaces' at the EU's internal borders, further fracturing the Schengen system of free movement within the EU. However, research also needs to attend to the hotspots' "actually existing geographies, beyond the EU governmental vision and the accounts of the governmental actors involved in their implementation and management".

In our own contribution (Vradis et al, this issue) we introduce and develop the concept of 'pop-up governance' to capture recent transformations in the management of migration in the EU stemming from the implementation of the hotspot approach. We argue that the governance of migration in the age of the hotspot takes place at the intersection of humanitarianism and security mechanisms. Infused with the flexibility and adaptability that characterise both mechanisms, the management of those arriving on the island of Lesbos between 2015 and 2017 was guided by the same logic. A toolkit was eventually developed consisting of ephemeral, practice-based and easily retractable mechanisms that could be promptly deployed anywhere at any given time according to need. These mechanisms are neither the rule nor its exception but they point to a whole new socio-temporal function of governance.

This 'pop-up governance' runs in parallel rather than opposition to the ever-growing consolidation of and cooperation between the relevant EU agencies. The aim, we explain, is to manage what lies outside the realm of the 'normal' Common European Asylum System (CEAS), the 'exceptional flows' of 2015. In other words, the aim is to de-exceptionalise these 'exceptional flows'. At a time when the speed of developments – such as border closures in the Schengen area and reforms in the Greek asylum procedures – is unrelenting, governance and policy have to be swiftly adaptable to the new realities on the ground. This, in the case of the hotspot on

Lesbos, was achieved through the introduction of a form of 'pop-up governance'. From the impromptu and arbitrary differentiation between Syrian nationals to the temporary allocation of people to places, 'pop-up governance' eventually emerged as the improvised response to the emergency on the ground, to the chaos of those first days after the 'long summer' of migration in 2015. The logics of humanitarianism and security were instrumental to this process, as separating and prioritising vulnerable subjects as well as ordering disorder were at the heart of this new form of governance. With a focus on place-specific and narrowly defined tasks at hand, 'pop-up governance' is not opposed to normal governance. It is meant to complement, and to even facilitate it.

The next contribution, by Matthew Sparke and Katharyne Mitchell (this issue), contrasts the top-down geopolitical construction of safe space, which has materialised in the creation of hotspots in the EU periphery, with the bottom-up creation of genuinely safe spaces through geosocial practices of solidarity in Greece. Sparke and Mitchell juxtapose the island hotspots with two grassroots solidarity initiatives, namely the Refugee Accommodation and Solidarity Space at the squatted hotel City Plaza in Athens and the self-organised migrant camp Lesbos Solidarity (formerly known as PIKPA) on the island of Lesbos. In the former case, the authors deconstruct the hotspot geopolitics overall, and justificatory and administrative constructions of safe space in particular. Working in tandem, these have served to actually endanger migrants by territorialising their mobility and subjecting them to unsafe living conditions in the hotspots. In the latter case, these two grassroots spaces have been constituted through actual practices that create genuine safe spaces for migrants, through what the authors call 'geosocial solidarity practices'. These are embodied space-making strategies and struggles that promote migrant agency, autonomy, liberty and resistance. According to the authors, the solidarity activists' understanding of "safe space" is in fact antagonistic to the dominant top-down constructs of migrant safety. For the authors, a safe space is a set of practices that are "distinguished by their mix of transnational but also personal and embodied modes of social justice inspired protection" (p. TBD).

Drawing on critical border and citizenship studies, Sparke and Mitchell challenge the construction of migrants as either threats or victims, highlighting instead their agency and the bottom-up radical place-making efforts currently taking place across Europe. In addition, drawing on critical geopolitics, they employ and further develop the notion of 'geosocial solidarity' to talk about these connections and embodied practices that transcend and resist the border helping to sustain local organising and struggles. Finally, by contrasting these to the EU's disingenuous geopolitical declarations about migrant safety, the authors demonstrate how the concept of, and the need for safe spaces has been deployed in order to territorialise and control migrant mobility, creating additional dangers for them along the way.

Finally, Isla Spathopoulou and Anna Carastathis (this issue) offer a glimpse into how the 'bordered reality' is both imposed and resisted in the Greek territory today. Their paper draws from field research across the country including the islands of Lesbos, Samos and the city of Athens. Spathopoulou and Carastathis introduce the

notion of the ferry, this 'mobile hotspot' that transfers people between islands and the mainland, but while so doing acts as a sorting and channeling mechanism. They conclude their paper with an outline of 'hotspots of resistance': "migrants' own attempts to resist [the border] reality"—that is, a reality comprising "militarised detention centres, racist segregation processes, segregated refugee camps, deportation schemes" (p. TBD). No matter how unfathomably powerful the authorities, the argument goes here, people will always find a way to resist power and its catastrophic decision-making. From an olive grove outside Moria in Lesbos to the town of Vathi in Samos, the authors show us how migrants actively refuse the imposed labelling and distinctions between them, and come together in these informal 'hotspots' despite and against attempts to separate them.

At its core, Spathopoulou and Carastathis' contribution makes the vital argument that we must resist the naturalisation of dividing lines between land, sea, and sky, and the way in which they each in turn become prisons. Their article commences from the physicality and historicity of the hotspot in the Greek islands and mainland. As they convincingly point out, from the prison-camps of Junta dissidents in Greece (1967-1974) to Australian offshore prisons, totalitarian regimes are disproportionately attracted by the remoteness of the islands as spaces to isolate their enemies.

We should not lose sight of everyday acts of subversion and resistance to the increasing and intensified criminalisation of migrants and those that stand by their side. It is in fact imperative to intimately look at these embodied practices of resistance today and to reimagine what a subversion of the border might look like in these days of heightened racism and xenophobia, as exclusionary and nativist discourses rise across the continent. All around Europe, solidarity, care and mutual aid networks provide the tools for common struggles centred around increasing precarisation and shared vulnerabilities between migrants and non-migrants. In this struggle, critical researchers have a role to play by confronting and disrupting the logics and knowledges that shape the border (Loyd et al. 2012; Conlon and Gill 2015), by critically engaging with the racial, patriarchal, and colonial assumptions that underpin the border and humanitarian regimes (Cobarrubias & Casas-Cortes 2014; Garelli and Tazzioli 2013; Carastathis and Tsilimpounidi 2020), and by unsettling categorisations, dichotomies and boundaries (Cabot 2019; Gill 2019). We offer this collection as a contribution in this direction, as a move toward what will hopefully – what has to – be a continuous and reflective dialogue on how best to tackle the systemic structures leading to power excesses such as the 'hotspot approach', and how best to tackle and even reverse its impact.

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