

Excavating the genealogies of struggles and of the migrant mob

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I want to thank my interlocutors Kate Coddington, Maribel Casas-Cortes, Anne McNevin and Stephan Scheel for their generous comments and for their attentive reading of *The Making of Migration*. Their critical insights and questions touch upon the main epistemic and political stakes that the book grapple with. Their suggestions, questions and remarks are an incitement to push forward some research pathways that *The Making of Migration* only partially addresses, and to open up new avenues. Maribel Casas-Cortes has nicely captured the main stake of the book speaking about the ‘amplification and problematizing of migration as a potential condition and struggle of and for anyone under any induced vulnerability’. I engage here with the comments that my interlocutors raised by focusing my response along three conceptual threads: choked subjects; genealogy of struggles; migrants’ irreducibility to population.

Choked subjects

The politics of breathing, as Kate Coddington highlights, is one of the main conceptual threads of *The Making of Migration*, as part of a broader reflection on the biopolitical technologies that target those individuals who are racialised as ‘migrants’. As I reiterate throughout the book, migrants are not only left to die in the Mediterranean or deliberately killed at the border. Together with that, migrants are repeatedly choked and forced to live in cramped spaces. In fact, the lack of breathe should be understood both in political and physical terms, as Frantz Fanon remarkably

pointed out by speaking about the colonised subjects (Fanon, 2007): migrants suffocate inside lorries and ferries, and are often stranded in overcrowded make-shift camps; yet, the lack of breathe does also refer to the multiple constrictions and hurdles that migrants face in their attempt to build collective spaces of liveability. In this sense, the politics of breathing is located at the juncture of the racialised migrant body – hampered in its movements – and migrants’ collective infrastructures of livability.

However, being choked is not synonymous with being harmless and reduced to bare life. On the contrary, as Nirmal Puwar cogently suggested in her book *Space Invaders*, the point is to interrogate what happens when some ‘bodies not expected to occupy certain places do so’ (Puwar, 2004: 1). States’ interventions to choke migrants and disrupt their infrastructure of livability are attempts to undermine the formation of collective subjects and to deprive individual migrants of a space to stay and steal their time (Khosravi, 2018). These insights on the politics of breathing as constitutive of migration governmental-ity can in fact be developed further, as Coddington also suggests, by tracing a more robust continuity between colonised populations, the racialised

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migrants' bodies and other contemporary forms of spatial segregation. The 'asphyxiatory application of power' (Salamanca, 2011: 30) that targets the Palestinian population is visibly at stake, though under different guises and through diverse articulations, both in the sheer politics of migration containment and in the more indirect and invisible violence of 'organised abandonment' (Gilmore, 2018).

In this regard, Coddington is right in remarking that the book could have investigated more 'the role of race and colonialism in the embodiment of asylum seekers' as a key aspect of the objectivisation and subjectivation of migrants. One of the main aims of the book is to draw attention to the intertwining of laws, policies and administrative measures through which some subjects are 'migrantised', that is are racialised and governed as migrants (Anderson, 2017). This does not only involve destabilising and de-essentialising 'migrants' and 'refugees' as fixed sociological categories; it also entails taking into account the 'mutability of race' (Davis, 2011), that is the heterogenous and constantly changing processes of racialisation. And the EU politics of migration containment constitutes a productive vantage point for scrutinising how racialising bordering mechanisms change over time. For instance, in 2015 'Syrians have represented the *yardstick of humanitarianism* of the refugee crisis and at the same time the only truly humanitarian subjects' (Tazzioli, 2019: 38). Later on, and in particular since the signature of the EU–Turkey Deal in 2016, they started to be regarded with suspicion, labelled as undeserving refugees and illegalised. Relatedly, the book challenges the dehistoricization of the racialized migrant body as a black body to be rescued. Overall, an analytical sensibility to the heterogenous modes of racialization highlights how 'flexible classifications of difference devised for governing different people' (Lowe, 2015: 32) are enforced nowadays against migrants, and how they were differently enacted on colonised populations.

Towards a genealogy of migrant struggles

The Making of Migration comes to grips with the peculiarity of collective migrant formations,

stressing their irreducibility to traditional social movements and the recursive criminalisation they are targeted by. Ultimately, the worry of a 'migrant mob' haunts our perception of emergent migrant collective subjects. Yet, McNevin aptly observes that more attention should be paid to 'enduring subject forms' and 'populations figured in their own terms'. Anne McNevin's comments gesture towards what in my new book project I define a 'border abolitionist' gaze on the border regime. This latter advances an analysis of the interlocking racialising mechanisms that affect different subjectivities – and not only migrants – and, simultaneously, of the transversal struggles that migrants are part of. *The Making of Migration* is therefore mainly devoted to conceptualise collective formations that are discredited as non-political and criminalised as unruly mobs. However, registering the recurrent evictability of migrant collective formations and the difficulty of finding traces of them in the official archives does not mean disregarding the political spaces that these movements open nor the political legacies and memory they generated across Europe. In fact, the so-called 'migrant crisis' has been characterised not only by a multiplication of borders and violent modes of confinement and expulsion, but also by the rise of migrants' spaces that have reshuffled the political geography of the European space.

As I briefly retrace in the final chapter of the book, a spatial approach to migration, which explores transversal connections between different struggles and migration movements, needs to be intertwined with a genealogical gaze. This involves investigating which collective memory of migration and solidarity movements has been generated and how this latter informs current mobilisations. Tracing a genealogy is not simply tracing a history. If genealogy is conceived as a method that pays attention to singularities and discontinuities in history and aims at both de-familiarising the present, a transformative politics of migration does not erase the heterogeneity and precarity of migrants' movements (Foucault, 1984). Rather, it sheds light on the persistence of migration alongside its temporariness, and interrogates the emergence of collective formations without looking for homogenous subjects.

Mc Nevin's caution against an analysis that ends up putting migrants at the core and, therefore, reifying those subjectivities should be taken seriously. As she argues, this is the deadlock that all scholars who do research 'on migration' face, despite the declaration of de-migrantise migration studies. I concur with McNevin and as, I stated above, the last chapter of the book goes in that direction, by discussing transversal alliances of solidarity. The last chapter, also thanks to McNevin's comment, is now the starting point of my new book project on 'border abolitionism'. Nevertheless, I do still think that the specificity of being racialised and governed as a 'migrant' or as a 'refugee' cannot be totally overshadowed. Indeed, if it is paramount to foreground racialising processes that affect both migrants and non-migrants, it is likewise important to map how migration laws shape and constrain subjectivities according to multiple and specific bordering mechanisms. That is, on the one hand the question 'who is a migrant?' can never be answered once for all and the putative answer will always depends on 'where' and 'when'; yet, on the other hand, the lives of those who are racialised and governed 'here and now' as 'migrants' or as 'underserving refugees' are daily affected and obstructed by those laws and policies. This is what Claudia Aradau poignantly reminds us by explaining how one becomes and remains a 'permanent migrant' by taking the citizenship test (Aradau, 2015): far from ending with the arrival in the 'country of destination', the migrant condition might persist for years, and in many cases it never ends. And if getting the permanent authorisation to stay does solve most of the problems connected with the condition of being a 'migrant', sometimes it is not enough for turning 'migrants' into 'citizens' or into 'mobile persons'. Indeed, transversal alliances can be built only starting from and relying on the legal, economic and social conditions that distinguish migrants from non-migrants.

Migrants' irreducibility to populations

By mobilising and engaging with the term 'multiplicity' and 'the mob', *The Making of Migration*

interrogates the ways in which migrants are depicted, disciplined and controlled not only individually but also as part of collective formations. However, these formations should not be taken for granted: these are not stable collective entities, nor can they easily be analysed as populations. For this reason, the book contends, we need to find a new lexicon to grasp these heterogenous and unstable collective subjects. The idea of tracing a political genealogy of the term 'the mob' is part of this endeavour.

Stephan Scheel's remarks that 'populations need to be enacted as objects of government through knowledge practices (most notably statistics)' definitively capture an important aspect of migration governmentality. In fact, the governing of migration is also a mode of governing through a specific production of knowledge and, as he argues, non-knowledge. I fully agree with this point and I think it sheds light on an aspect that deliberately I did not discuss enough in *The Making of Migration*. Indeed, my response to Scheel's criticism is that it depends on the notion of population we use and as I explain in the book, I draw on Foucault's definition of the object 'population'. Second, it is a matter of whether the term population is mobilised for illustrating how migrants are classified and grouped or, rather, for analysing how they are perceived, depicted and actually managed by both states and non-state actors. In fact, I don't think that a political reading of migration governmentality can be deployed on an epistemic level only.

Plus, the politics of knowledge and non-knowledge that states as well as international agencies such as UNHCR and IOM play out is only one of the many 'knowledges' about migration that contribute to racialise some people as 'migrants' and to turn migration into an object of security and suspicion. The ways in which migrants are represented in the media and are perceived by citizens as well as how they are governed on the ground by local actors, contribute to the 'making of migration', and to a specific citizens' view of the phenomenon. In addition to that, my use of the term 'multiplicity' is not circumscribed to political technologies; in fact, as Casas-Cortes and McNevin have noticed too, it is also oriented at designating how migrants create

collective subjects, which are constantly divided and hampered from consolidating as political subjects. In other words, as it is the case for mobility, even multiplicity is used in the book by stressing the structural ambivalence of the concept: it refers to the dimension of political technologies of migration governmentality but also to the ways in which migrants get organised, and yet, are constantly obstructed from becoming a ‘group’, ‘a social movement’ or, even more, ‘a population’. Keeping such an ambivalence is, I suggest, one of the starting points for politicising migration as what constantly exceeds the state’s conditions of its intelligibility and governability. As Brenna Bhandar and Rafeef Ziadah argue, ‘learning from past resistance’ is not about using the same political template over time but, rather it is a question of navigating ‘a collective repertoire of struggle’ (Bhandar and Ziadah, 2020: 26). Migrant multiplicities are one of the terrains where such a repertoire can be laboriously excavated.

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