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Transit Migration and Biopolitics of Movement: How Italy Uses Mobility as a Biopolitical Technology of Control to Reproduce Its Position of Transit Country

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ABSTRACT

Migration literature often labels Italy as a transit country, a slippery space migrants cross to reach other destinations further north. Scholars commonly refer to a fixed geography of Europe characterised by comparatively more favourable conditions in destination countries. Higher levels of economic development, migrant networks, and cultural and linguistic ties are often cited as determinants of transit migration. The paper highlights the often-neglected role played by the state in actively reproducing Italy's position as a transit country. Specifically, it employs a Foucauldian framework to analyse the biopolitical strategies used to reach this objective. It builds on Martina Tazzioli's conceptualisation of mobility as a technology of government used by the state to control migrants. The paper goes one step further by framing migrants' enforced mobility in the context of the Schengen Agreement. It argues that Italy keeps migrants on the move, not just to control them but specifically to reproduce its position as a transit country. This goal is realised through two complementary approaches: contributing to EU externalisation of migration management, and promoting migrants' intra-EU mobility, even in the form of irregular secondary movements.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

ANSA: National Agency of the Associated Press
ASGI: Association of Juridical Studies on Migration
CAS: Centres for Extraordinary Assistance
CEAP: Common European Asylum Policy
CEAS: Common European Asylum System
COE: Council of Europe
CPR: Permanent Centres for Repatriation
EASO: European Asylum Support Office
EC: European Commission
ECHR: European Convention/Court on Human Rights
EP: European Parliament
EU: European Union
EURODAC: European Asylum Dactylography Database
FRONTEX: European Border and Coast Guard Agency
HRW: Human Rights Watch
IGO: International Governmental Organisation
IMO: International Maritime Organization
IOM: International Organization for Migration
IOM VHRP: IOM Voluntary Humanitarian Returns Programme
LCG: Libyan Coast Guard
LIBE: EP Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs
MoU: Memorandum of Understanding
MRCC: Maritime Rescue Coordination Centre
MSF: Médecins Sans Frontières
NGO: Non-Governmental Organisation
OHCHR: United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner
SIPROMI: System for the Protection of Holders of International Protection Status and Foreign Unaccompanied Minors
SPRAR: System for the Protection of Asylum Seekers and Refugees
TFEU: Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union
UN: United Nations

UNECE: United Nations Economic Commission for Europe

UNHCR: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

RESEARCH QUESTION AND BACKGROUND

Migration has been at the centre of the European Union (EU) policy agenda for the past decade. Following a progressive increase after the Arab Spring, the number of migrants that reached Europe fleeing persecution, violence, climate change, and poverty peaked in 2015 with more than a million people (UNHCR, 2015). Failure to agree between EU members on how to deal with the migration "crisis" was seen by many as the biggest threat to the EU's survival (Hassel & Wagner, 2016). Emergency rhetoric was embraced across the political spectrum contributing to the securitisation of migration management (Krzyżanowski et al., 2018; de Vries et al., 2016). Politicians created a climate of fear and xenophobia by associating migration with problems like unemployment, the declining quality of the welfare state, and terrorism (Keen, 2023; Boukala & Dimitrakopoulou, 2017). Instead of individuals in need of humanitarian assistance, migrants have been portrayed as potential threats (HRW, 2018; MSF, 2016; Haddeland & Franko, 2022). The image of unruly and endless masses directed towards Europe is widespread in European political and media discourses (Aradau & Huysmans, 2009). In 2011 Italy's Minister of Interior described the arrival in Sicily of migrant populations from North Africa as a "biblical exodus" (Spiegel, 2011). Some of the most recurring terms associated with migration by Italian newspapers include chaos, flows, emergency, and invasion (Milazzo, 2018, Terlizzi, 2021).

A consequence of this narrative has been a shared perception that European states failed to manage migratory flows because they were overwhelmed by the excessive number of arrivals. Outdated and academically questionable descriptions of Southern European countries as the vulnerable "soft underbelly" of the Schengen area were revived (Düvell, 2012; Finotelli & Sciortino, 2009). Italy contributed to reinforcing this discourse to persuade other EU members to share the "burden" of migration (Trauner, 2016). In this context, there has been a relevant extension in the use of the term "transit country", which, before the migration "crisis" was not used to describe EU members (Düvell, 2012). Since the central Mediterranean route has become a key pathway to reach Europe, increasing attention has been paid to migrants arriving in Italy and their further intra-EU movements (Frontex, 2021).

However, explanations of the determinants of Italy's transit position tend to be superficial. De Haas (2011) observes that many empirical studies are descriptive and often rely uncritically on outdated migration theories. These studies place excessive emphasis on structural determinants of migration like geography, wage differentials, migrant networks, or the segmentation of labour markets and draw a fixed map of EU migration journeys.

A significant section of contemporary theoretical literature has transcended traditional paradigms (Aradau & Huysmans, 2009). Drawing from a Foucauldian understanding of power, this literature focuses on the frequently overlooked role played by the state in shaping migration processes (Vezzoli, 2014). Building on Foucault's concept of biopolitics of movement, Tazzioli (2020b) and other relevant scholars argued that states employ mobility as a biopolitical technology to govern migrants. She highlights several functions of mobility, including control, invisibilisation, preventing the formation of migrant collective political subjects, and debilitation (Tazzioli, 2020b).

The paper takes theoretical insights from Foucault and Tazzioli and applies them to the EU geopolitical context to identify overlooked drivers of transit migration. The focus is directed towards Italy, a Southern European state often labelled as a "transit" country. It argues that, in addition to the goals identified by Tazzioli, Italy keeps migrants on the move to reproduce its position as a transit country. This objective is realised through two complementary approaches: contributing to EU externalisation of migration management, and promoting migrants' intra-EU mobility, even in the form of irregular secondary movements. Following the same divide, the analysis looks first at externalisation efforts and then at intra-EU movements. Moreover, the paper categorises individual strategies of biopolitical control through movement into three modes of enforced mobility: forced mobility, subtractive mobility, and autonomous mobility. These categories facilitate the distinction between direct and seemingly less intrusive mechanisms of control to ensure that more subtle methods are not mistaken for state inaction.

RELEVANCE OF THE STUDY

The study addresses a gap in the literature on transit migration and the biopolitics of movement. It extends Tazzioli's insight on the goals states pursue using mobility as a biopolitical technology of government. Using a Foucauldian lens is functional in illuminating strategies of governmentality that have been overlooked in the context of transit migration. Moreover, considering indirect and informal strategies of biopolitical control through movement helps highlight subtle and elusive ways states use to exert control.

RESEARCH DESIGN

The research employs a qualitative, desk-based approach and uses diverse primary and secondary sources to answer the research question. It primarily relies on secondary data. The theoretical framework is informed by academic literature on the biopolitics of movement, transit migration, and the determinants of migration. On the other hand, empirical studies serve to highlight the voice and experiences of migrants. Moreover, the paper leverages grey literature as a key resource. Research produced by the Italian and International humanitarian community shed light on aspects of the migration phenomenon that are often overlooked in official accounts from the EU and the Italian state. Similarly, insights from research institutes and issue-specific think tanks facilitate the analysis of national and EU policies by highlighting their significant features.

Peer-reviewed and grey literature has been selected through a literature review. The research included approximately 80 high-quality peer-reviewed papers and 30 grey literature studies selected for their quality and relevance by searching interdisciplinary and key-issue databases. The complete list of the databases consulted can be found in Annex I.

To select the sources, a set of search terms was developed targeting the main research question, "How does Italy use mobility as a biopolitical strategy of control to reproduce its transit country position?". Additional search terms were crafted to answer two sub-questions "How does Italy use biopolitical strategies of control through movement in its externalisation efforts?" and "How does Italy use biopolitical strategies of control through movement to

promote migrants' intra-EU mobility?". A complete list of the search terms used can be found in Annex I.

Papers were selected among the first 20 search results generated by each search term based on the relevance of the title and abstract or executive summary. Moreover, the scope of the literature review was expanded through a snowballing process which helped to highlight additional relevant sources in the references of papers that emerged from the formal literature review (Hagen-Zanker & Mallett, 2013).

Primary literature predominantly comprises documents from Italian and EU institutions but is supplemented by information from the governments of other EU member states and Libya. These primary sources span a broad spectrum, including laws, regulations, international treaties, diplomatic correspondence, official declarations, and programmatic documents. Seminal decisions from the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) were also considered. Statistical data on migrants' movements was retrieved from databases of the Italian Ministry of Interior, Frontex, the International Organization for Migration (IOM), and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). News sources and investigative journalism offered insights into informal and indirect strategies of enforced mobility not yet explored in academic research.

In the selection of sources, priority has been given to documents published after 2011, when migration to Europe began being problematised as a "crisis" (Casella Colombeau, 2020). However, older sources have been considered if relevant to inform the theoretical basis of the paper or to provide context on the geopolitics of migration management in the EU.

The methodological approach adopted for data analysis is thematic analysis, a widely used qualitative research method. Thematic analysis, as defined by Clarke and Braun (2017), involves "Identifying, analysing, and interpreting patterns (themes) within qualitative data" (Clarke & Braun, 2017, p. 297). This approach is versatile and compatible with numerous theoretical frameworks, including the biopolitics of movement (Lochmiller, 2021).

SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS

The paper aims to investigate Italy's use of biopolitical technologies of control through movement to reproduce its transit country position. However, it is essential to clearly define its scope and limitations.

The study does not aspire to ascertain the relative weight of biopolitical strategies of control through movement against other determinants of migration processes identified in older theories. It also refrains from depicting the Italian state as a monolithic entity striving exclusively to maintain its transit status. Indeed, the state is composed of various subunits, such as regional and local administrations, and outside of it, there are many other relevant actors, like NGOs, citizens, and migrants (de Haas, 2011). These diverse entities may resist the status quo and pursue different goals. The paper recognises the complexity that arises from this multiplicity of actors and goals as a factor that enriches the analysis. However, it argues that the Italian state exhibits a clear inclination toward preserving its transit status, even if this may result from a complex balance of interests.

Moreover, the study does not offer a comprehensive examination of all biopolitical technologies of movement employed by the Italian state to reproduce its transit position. However, it aims to identify and analyse key strategies of control employed by Italy at critical junctures in migrants' geographies of movement. The goal is to illustrate their complementary nature and demonstrate that they are deployed within a coherent framework.

Finally, limitations can be identified in the databases used to access information on migrants' geographies of movement. The irregular nature of certain forms of migration often leads to incomplete data recording since migrants try to elude official authorities. Moreover, the paper highlights that Italy and other EU countries engage in selective non-recording of migrants (Tazzioli, 2020b). Therefore, the data provided by European, Italian, and UN institutions should not be interpreted as precise representations of migration processes to Europe but rather as reflecting general trends.

CHAPTER 2: THEORY AND LITERATURE REVIEW

The paper contributes to the literature on the determinants of migration, specifically on the role of transit states in shaping migration processes. It builds on Foucault's theory of biopolitics and its application in migration studies. The study places particular emphasis on the recent work of Martina Tazzioli, which highlights how and why states use mobility to govern migration. New insight is offered by adapting this biopolitical lens to Italy and by focusing on its distinctive position as a transit country and a member of the Schengen area.

THE DETERMINANTS OF MIGRATION AND THE ROLE OF THE STATE

The second half of the XX century saw the development of numerous migration theories mirroring broader theoretical shifts in the social sciences. While an exhaustive exploration of these theories is beyond the scope of this paper, it is crucial to mention the most significant ones as they provide context for the research. Relevant theories include the *neoclassical theory*, exemplified by the work of Lewis (1954) and Sjaastad (1962); the *new economics of migration theory*, represented by Stark (1984) and Taylor (1986); the *dual labour market theory*, whose main representative is Piore (1979); the *world systems theory*, conceptualised significantly by Petras (1981) and Castells (1989); and the *network theory*, showcased by Hugo (1981) and Taylor (1986). A seminal study by Massey et al. (1993), despite identifying certain complementarities between these theories, recognised the challenges in reconciling their fundamental differences. Substantial disagreements exist on the importance of state action, which is often underrated as a determinant of international migration (Kuschminder et al., 2015). De Haas (2011) notes that differences of opinion on the state's role depend in part on a limited understanding of the instruments states use to manage migration. Strategies that go beyond traditional migration policies are often ignored (De Haas, 2011). He argues that many theoretical models have become outdated, and their uncritical use further exacerbates the risk of underestimating the role of the state (De Haas, 2011). By employing a biopolitical lens, this study aims to shed light on previously overlooked migration management strategies.

TRANSIT MIGRATION

The UN defines transit migration as "migration in one country with the intention of seeking the possibility there to emigrate to another" (UNECE, 1993, p. 7). As noted by Düvell (2012), it is a "blurred and politicised concept" (Düvell, 2012, p. 415) shaped in the 1990s and tied to the EU policies of externalisation of migration management (McKeever et al., 2005). The strengthening of the EU's external borders was complemented by significant efforts to pass the "burden" of migration management to "transit countries" in the EU neighbourhood. States like Libya, Morocco, and Turkey were co-opted to counter irregular migration to Europe (Düvell, 2012). However, since the onset of the so-called European "migration crisis", the term "transit migration" has been increasingly used in academic literature to describe EU member states like Italy and Greece. Despite its common usage finding an academically grounded definition of "transit migration" and in-depth studies on its determinants has proven challenging. Weak academic interest in the topic depends on the receiving country bias of migration research (de Haas, 2011). Explanations of the drivers of transit migration tend to be simplistic and grounded in outdated migration theories (de Haas, 2011). Destination countries are described as being comparatively more attractive due to structural economic, social, and cultural features (de Haas, 2011). Crucially, migration research tends to overlook the state's role in influencing its transit status. The paper aims to address this gap, examining the specific case of Italy. It argues that Italy uses mobility as a biopolitical technology to govern migrants and reproduce its transit position.

FOUCAULT AND BIOPOLITICS IN MIGRATION STUDIES

French philosopher Michel Foucault described biopolitics in his 1976 lecture *Society Must Be Defended* as the management of "the population as a political problem...as a biological problem and as power's problem" (Foucault, 2003, p.245). It embodies the mechanisms through which modern states and their bureaucracies exercise control over populations. A central tenet of the theory is that states regulate life at the biological level (Munro, 2012). In his genealogies of power, Foucault refers to institutions like the prison, the hospital, or the school as spaces where a governing authority subjugates vast populations and enforces specific behaviours (Muller, 2004).

His ideas have been profoundly influential in migration studies since the 1990s. While this paper focuses specifically on the biopolitics of movement, it is relevant to highlight that numerous scholars have used a biopolitical lens to illuminate different aspects of migration processes. Brachet (2016) noted that liberal nation-states extend their power to regulate life beyond their borders. Notably, Giorgio Agamben adopted a biopolitical lens to study refugee camps and described them as “zones of indistinction” where refugees are reduced to “bare life” (Zembylas, 2010; Agamben & Hellen-Roazen, 1998). Other scholars, such as Amoore (2006) and Nguyen (2015), criticised biometric technologies as a form of biopolitical control over migrant populations. Furthermore, Puar (2017) illuminates nuanced strategies of biopolitical control that aim at debilitating migrants without letting them die. Concerning Italy, the Foucauldian lens has been predominantly applied following the migration “crisis” to analyse the operation of carceral spaces, especially the Hotspot centres (Vradis et al., 2020). This diverse body of work is relevant to show the pervasive use of biopolitical technologies in the field of migration. However, this paper focuses specifically on the biopolitics of movement.

FOUCAULT AND THE BIOPOLITICS OF MOVEMENT

While scholars like Walters (2015) correctly highlight that Foucault’s genealogies of power primarily focus on fixed structures, like the school or the prison, it must be noted that Foucault himself, in *Security, Territory, and Population* (1978-1979), identified mobility as an object of governmentality. He argued that modern states seek to “maximising the positive elements, for which one provides the best possible circulation, and of minimising what is risky and inconvenient like theft and disease, while knowing that they will never be completely suppressed” (Foucault, 2007, p. 19). Echoing this notion, most Foucauldian migration studies, consider mobility as one of the many aspects of people’s life that the state regulates through biopolitical technologies of government. However, in line with a recent strand of migration literature, this paper goes a step further and views mobility not merely as an object but as an instrument of governmentality. It argues that keeping migrants on the move can be a biopolitical technology of control. Although less common, this perspective draws directly from Foucault’s *Madness and Civilisation*, where he brings forth the allegory of the ship of fools (Foucault, 1988). He notes that during the 15th century in Germany, municipal authorities would commission boatmen to remove outcasts from the city, a clear

example of carceral mobility serving as a biopolitical form of control. "Confined in the ship, from which there is no escape, the madman is delivered to the river with its thousand arms [...] He is the prisoner in the midst of what is the freest, the openest of routes [...] He is the Passenger *par excellence*: that is, the prisoner of the passage" (Foucault, 1988, p. 11). His conceptualisation resonates with practices like forced repatriations, which EU countries commonly adopt in their efforts to externalise migration management. Moreover, Foucault's insight can help identify more subtle and elusive modes of enforced mobility that tend to go unnoticed.

TAZZIOLI AND MOBILITY AS A BIOPOLITICAL TECHNOLOGY TO GOVERN MIGRATION

Leveraging Foucault's insights, relevant scholars have tried to explain how states use mobility as an instrument to govern migration. Distinguished work from Hiemstra (2013), and Loyd and Mountz (2014) investigates forced transfers of migrants, including deportations, and describes them as forms of carceral mobility. Particularly relevant to this study are those researchers who have shed light on more subtle and elusive strategies of enforced mobility. Martina Tazzioli's genealogies of strategies like migrants' dispersal, commonly implemented by European state authorities, are of considerable value. Tazzioli reveals the colonial origins of dispersal and highlights its primary functions: obstructing the emergence of migrant collective political subjects and rendering irregularised migrants less visible (Aradau & Tazzioli, 2020). Highlighting different functions of mobility, Davies and others (2017) observe that in Calais, the police force migrants out of "spaces of liveability" (Aradau & Tazzioli, 2017, p. 202) with the aim of debilitating them, reducing their capacity to resist and thereby exerting a tighter biopolitical hold over their lives. This paper acknowledges the relevance of these general goals, but it argues that other relevant aims can emerge from context-specific analyses. It claims that Italy, as a transit country and member of the Schengen area, uses biopolitical strategies of movement both to externalise migration management and to promote intra EU-mobility.

MODES OF ENFORCED MOBILITY

Building on the literature on the biopolitics of movement, especially on Tazzioli's research, this paper categorises individual strategies of biopolitical control through movement into three modes of enforced mobility: forced mobility, subtractive mobility, and autonomous mobility. These categories offer a framework for distinguishing between direct and seemingly less invasive mechanisms of control, assuring that more subtle methods of control do not go unnoticed and are not mistaken for state inaction.

The concept of forced mobility, derived from the literature on carceral geographies, refers to forced transfers of migrants (Martin & Mitchelson, 2009; Hiemstra, 2013). It represents the first and most explicit mode of enforced mobility. Spathopoulou (2016) provides an illuminating example of the nature of forced mobility by describing the ferry used by Greek authorities to transfer migrants between islands as a "mobile hotspot". In accordance with Foucault's (1988) observations, means of transportation that usually represent freedom can be repurposed to contain individuals and minimise their agency. This paper focuses particularly on Italy's use of forced repatriations and interceptions at sea.

Subtractive mobility, the second mode, involves state actions that take legal and material terrain away from migrants (Tazzioli, 2020b). It can include both practices of action and intentional inaction (Davies et al., 2017). Practices of migration management in the Calais camp serve as a relevant example. Active measures include police interventions that destroy "spaces of liveability" and force migrants to move (Davies et al., 2017; Tazzioli, 2020b). On the other hand, forms of inaction include the state's refusal to provide migrants with essential services (Fekete, 2018). Notably, they can be complemented by targeted active measures like the implementation of legislation that criminalises humanitarian assistance (Fekete, 2018). This paper highlights Italy's manipulation of its asylum system and EU mechanisms for the relocation of asylum seekers as critical examples of subtractive mobility.

Autonomous mobility, the third mode, constitutes the most indirect and least visible form of state control over migrants' mobility. Tazzioli (2020b) notes that state's selective withdrawal is not necessarily a symptom of policy failure. Migrants may be permitted to move autonomously as long as their geographies of movement are considered acceptable by the state (Tazzioli, 2020b). Control does not need to be constantly exercised at the individual

level. States use statistical information extracted from migrant populations by agencies like Frontex to draw maps of migrants' trajectories, including their desired destinations (Casas-Cortes et al., 2015). The three modes of enforced mobility are not mutually exclusive and are often used in a complementary way. Yet, autonomous mobility deserves particular attention because, being hard to detect, it offers states a veil of plausible deniability. This paper identifies strategies of non-registration and strategic state withdrawal in the Hotspot system and at the French-Italian border as forms of autonomous mobility.

EU MIGRATION AND ASYLUM POLICY

Italy's membership in the EU and the Schengen area has significant implications for the mobility of people as the Schengen Agreement allows the free movement of goods, capital, and people (Walters, 2002). The quid pro quo for the abolishment of internal border controls was the reinforcement of the EU's external borders, thus creating what Malik (2018) called "fortress Europe, a citadel against immigration" (Laube, 2021).

This objective was pursued through the Common European Asylum Policy (CEAP) with initiatives aimed at incentivising EU border countries to strengthen external controls (Trauner, 2016). The Dublin regulation, a vital component of the CEAP, was designed to prevent asylum shopping and mandates that the first EU country entered by a migrant be responsible for processing their asylum application (Carrera et al., 2019). This regulation places an unequal burden on EU border countries, which, due to their geographic position, have to process the majority of asylum applications (Thielemann & Armstrong, 2013). Scholars such as Triandafyllidou and Dimitriadi (2014) argued that the Dublin regulation is designed to keep migrants at the periphery of the EU and prevent them from reaching core countries.

Following the 2015 "migration crisis", Italy, along with other border countries, advocated for substantial CEAP reforms to alleviate their migration "burden" (Reviglio, 2020). However, they only partially succeeded in their objective. The EU primarily acted to strengthen its externalisation policies, establishing Frontex, the European Border and Coast Guard Agency, and signing externalisation agreements with Turkey and Libya (Adamson & Tsourapas, 2019). The paper maintains that Italy enthusiastically supported these EU

externalisation efforts, including through the use of biopolitical strategies of movement. On the other hand, attempts by the EU Commission to relocate migrants from border countries to other EU members have largely failed (Bauböck, 2018). In this context, Italian authorities have been accused by the Commission and other member states of tacitly allowing migrants' secondary movements to obtain their irregular "relocation" to other countries (Della Puppa & Sandò, 2021). The diplomatic crisis erupted when France and other EU countries temporarily suspended the Schengen agreement in 2011 and 2015 (Casella Colombeau, 2020). The paper argues that in response to these critical events, Italy has developed more sophisticated biopolitical strategies of movement to covertly encourage migrants' secondary movements.

CHAPTER 3: ANALYSIS

This analysis contributes to the literature on the biopolitics of movement and transit migration by scrutinising key biopolitical strategies of control through movement employed by Italy at critical junctures in migrants' geographies of movement. Its objective is to demonstrate that these strategies are deployed within a coherent framework. The analysis unfolds into two distinct sections: the first examines Italy's externalisation of migration management, while the second concentrates on Italy's promotion of migrants' intra-EU movements. Moreover, each strategy is categorised into one or potentially a combination of three modes of enforced mobility: forced mobility, subtractive mobility, and autonomous mobility. These categories facilitate the distinction between direct and seemingly less intrusive mechanisms of control to ensure that more subtle methods are not mistaken for state inaction.

ENFORCED MOBILITY AND EXTERNALISATION OF MIGRATION MANAGEMENT

Interception of Migrants at Sea and Pushbacks by Italian Authorities

The first strategy considered involves the interception at sea of migrants by Italian authorities and their forced return to Libya. The strategy falls in the category of forced mobility because, after being intercepted by Italian authorities in the Central Mediterranean, "irregular" migrants were held in a carceral state and forced to return to Libya.

The legal basis for this strategy was the Treaty for Friendship, Partnership and Cooperation between Italy and Libya, signed in 2008 to promote "cooperation in the fight against terrorism, organised crime, drug trafficking and illegal immigration" (Treaty of Friendship, Partnership and Cooperation, 2008). This treaty was central to Italy's externalisation policy towards Libya during the last phase of the Gaddafi regime (De Bono, 2020). As the civil war turned Libya into an undesirable place for migrants, hundreds of thousands tried to reach the EU through the dangerous Central Mediterranean route (Guttry et al., 2018). Despite the diminished capacity of Libyan authorities to cooperate, Italy continued to conduct interceptions at sea and pushbacks. This practice was challenged in 2012 when the

European Court of Human Rights in the *Hirsi Jamaa v Italy* case found that Italy violated the fundamental principle of nonrefoulement (Moreno-Lax, 2012; ECHR, 2012). The Court deemed that Libya was not a safe country and that Italy was knowingly exposing migrants to severe human rights abuses (Papanicolopulu, 2013). Following the Court's ruling, Italy was forced to cease its practices of interception at sea and pushbacks (Reviglio, 2020). Nevertheless, it continued to pursue the objective of forcibly returning migrants to Libya; it simply had to devise more indirect strategies to circumvent the Court's ruling.

Interception of Migrants at Sea and Pushbacks by Libyan Authorities

After 2012 Italy devised a strategy to bypass the ECHR ruling by using the Libyan Coast Guard (LCG) as a proxy. With the support of the EU, it has provided funds, training, and in-kind support to Libyan authorities to intercept at sea and forcibly return to Libya migrants attempting to cross the Central Mediterranean (Pacciardi & Berndtsson, 2022; Council of the EU, 2017). These interceptions and pushbacks resemble those that used to be conducted by Italian authorities and, therefore, can be characterised as forms of forced mobility. The legal instrument designed to circumvent the ECHR ruling is the 2017 Memorandum of Understanding signed by Italy and the UN-recognised Libyan Government (Reviglio, 2020).

In addition to strengthening Libyan Coast Guard's operational capabilities, Italy is directly involved in providing logistical assistance to interceptions at sea and pushback operations (Amnesty International, 2017a). The coordination of search and rescue operations in the Central Mediterranean is organised by the Italian Coastguard Maritime Rescue Coordination Center in Rome (MRCC) (Amnesty International, 2017a). As a signatory of the 1979 Search and Rescue Convention, Italy's priority should be to ensure that rescued people are disembarked in the closest place of safety, which in most cases would be Italy itself (IMO, 1985; Amnesty International, 2017a). Instead, it has leveraged its coordinating role to prioritise rescue missions conducted by the Libyan Coast Guard, which, not bound by the *Hirsi Jamaa v Italy* ruling, can return migrants to its mainland (Reviglio, 2020). Several NGOs have strongly criticised Italy, claiming that the Libyan Coast Guard should not be involved in search and rescue operations (HRW, 2017; Amnesty International, 2017a; MSF, 2017). Notably, Nils Muzinieks, Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe,

claimed that, in his opinion, Italy's support of the Libyan Coast Guard could still amount to a violation of the ECHR's ruling (Muiznieks, 2017). However, Italy has succeeded in formally complying with the *Hirsi Jamaa v Italy* ruling and, despite widespread criticisms, continues to conduct forced returns by proxy as part of its externalisation of migration policy (Minniti, 2017).

Libyan Detention Centres and “Voluntary” Repatriations

The infamous Libyan detention centres serve a strategic purpose for Italy and the EU beyond incarcerating migrants and stalling their journey to Europe. The inhuman conditions in the centres serve to manipulate migrants' decision making, pressuring them to seize any opportunity to leave, even if it means sacrificing their plans to reach Europe. In this context, the IOM Voluntary Humanitarian Returns Programme (VHRP), funded by Italy and the EU, is among the few opportunities to leave (OHCHR, 2022). This strategy involves tacitly accepting inhuman conditions in Libyan detention centres as a form of subtractive mobility and actively promoting “voluntary” repatriations as a form of forced mobility.

The inhuman conditions in Libyan detention centres have been comprehensively reported by the humanitarian community (MSF, 2017; Amnesty International, 2017b; UN Panel of Experts on Libya, 2017; OHCHR, 2017). In these facilities, migrants are subjected to torture, sexual and psychological violence, and extortions (UN Panel of Experts on Libya, 2017). Moreover, food and water are rationed, and water, hygiene, and sanitation (WHS) conditions fail to meet minimum SPHERE standards (OHCHR, 2017; Amnesty International, 2017b; Kuehne, 2021). NGOs like Amnesty International (2017b) and Human Rights Watch (HRW, 2017) accused Italy and the EU of being complicit in human rights violations in detention centres because they continue to cooperate with Libyan authorities without asking for adequate human rights protection guarantees. While Italy formally recognises these human rights violations as a critical issue, its commitment to improve oversight, stipulated in Articles 2 and 3 of the Memorandum of Understanding, has not been honoured (Menduni, 2017; Reviglio, 2020; De Bellis, 2020).

Italy's failure to seek improvements in the conditions of detention centres, combined with its support to IOM "voluntary" repatriations, can be explained as taking away terrain

from migrants and forcing them to abandon their plans to reach Europe. Over 60,000 migrants have participated in the IOM Voluntary Humanitarian Returns Programme since 2015 (OHCHR, 2022). A critical OHCHR study questioned the voluntary nature of these returns. It found that migrants are not informed about their rights to claim asylum (OHCHR, 2022). Some are forced to join the program by the guards of detention centres, under the threat of being killed if they refuse (OHCHR, 2022). However, it is relevant to note that for this last point, no evidence points to responsibilities on the IOM side (OHCHR, 2022). Even after signing the agreement, migrants continue to be treated as prisoners. The journey to their countries of origin takes place by plane, where they are escorted by armed guards (OHCHR, 2022). The program is referred to by many beneficiaries as deportation, suggesting that it is perceived as a form of forced rather than voluntary movement.

As for Italy's and the EU's responsibility in the IOM VHRP, it should be noted that the EU finances the program as part of a broader initiative on migration protection and reintegration. Italy's active support for repatriation efforts of migrants detained in Libya is confirmed in Article 2.5 of the 2017 Memorandum of Understanding (MoU, 2017). This section of the agreement has received significantly more attention and funding than those focusing on improving health standards and human rights protection guarantees in the camps (Reviglio, 2020). While humanitarian NGOs rightfully highlight Italy's complicity in human rights violations in Libya and the OHCHR questions the voluntary nature of the IOM VHRP, applying a biopolitics of movement lens reveals that they are complementary parts of a biopolitical strategy designed to externalise Italy's migration management.

Forced Repatriations from Italy

Italy's efforts to externalise migration management include forcibly repatriating "irregular" migrants present on its territory. This strategy is categorised as forced mobility because it involves the forced transfer of migrants to their countries of origin. Although any "irregular" migrant can theoretically be subjected to forced repatriation, Italian authorities primarily target migrants from countries that signed bilateral repatriation agreements with Italy (D'angelo, 2019). Moreover, structural constraints result in a low implementation rate for forced returns from Italy, which in 2021 were only 3420 (Corte dei Conti, 2022).

Before being eligible for forced repatriation, migrants who arrive in Italy must undergo a process of irregularisation. This practice results from EU efforts to minimise safe and legal routes to Europe (Della Puppa & Sanó, 2021). Hotspot centres and asylum applications serve as mechanisms of administrative violence designed to differentiate a minority of deserving migrants from a majority of undeserving migrants that can potentially be deported (Sciurba, 2017; Spathopoulou & Carastathis, 2020; Orsini et al., 2022). In 2018 Italy rejected 81% of all asylum applications, and many other migrants were not even allowed to present an application, although this practice violates the 1951 Refugee Convention (Ministero dell'Interno, 2019; Senato della Repubblica, 2016). Another relevant violation of the Convention is that Italian authorities distinguish between deserving and undeserving migrants essentially on the basis of nationality (D'angelo, 2019). Migrants from Nigeria, Egypt, Morocco, Sudan, and other countries that have bilateral repatriation agreements with Italy are almost automatically selected for forced repatriation (D'angelo, 2019).

The execution of forced repatriations fits in the category of forced mobility. Migrants marked for repatriation are taken into police custody and forcibly transferred from the Hotspots centres to one of the nine Permanent Centres for Repatriation (CPR) (D'Angelo, 2019). The CPR are overcrowded and often inadequate carceral spaces where irregularised migrants are detained for up to 4 months while Italian authorities arrange their forced repatriations (Della Puppa & Sanó, 2021; Camera dei Deputati, 2022). Forced transfers to the countries of origin usually take place by chartered planes, and migrants are controlled by Italian authorities during the entire journey to prevent instances of non-compliance (Vassallo Paleologo, 2019). Despite being Italy's most straightforward strategy of biopolitical control through movement to remove irregularised migrants from its territory, forced repatriation is only applicable to a minority of migrants. Notable limitations of this strategy include its economic cost and, more significantly, political constraints. Countries of origin frequently refuse to repatriate their citizens, often using migrants' lack of identification documents as an excuse (D'Angelo, 2019; EC, 2015a).

INTRA-EU ENFORCED MOBILITY

While the previous section of the analysis focused on Italy's externalisation of migration management, the following concentrates on the promotion of migrants' intra-EU movements. A defining difference between the biopolitical strategies of movement used by Italy in its externalisation efforts and those used in the promotion of intra-EU movements is that in the former case, Italy is largely involved in countering migrants' desire to reach Europe and therefore reduces their agency to a minimum. Conversely, in the latter case, Italy typically offers less resistance to migrants' agency because many of them already contemplate moving through the country to reach other EU member states further north. Moreover, it is relevant to note that in the context of Europe, even when Italy acts to constrain migrants' agency, it often employs more indirect and less detectable strategies of enforced mobility. This is linked to the higher level of public and judicial oversight Italy's government is subject to in the EU compared to the Central Mediterranean and North African regions.

Relocation of Asylum Seekers

Italy's main instrument for promoting migrants' intra-EU movements without violating the Dublin regulation is EU-organized relocations of asylum seekers among member states. This strategy of biopolitical control through movement falls in the category of subtractive mobility, as migrants are pressured to comply by the threat of being excluded from the program, which for most of them is the only chance to move away from Italy while maintaining their asylum seekers status.

Italy has long advocated the relocation of asylum seekers among EU members as a mechanism to mitigate the rigidity of the Dublin regulation. The first relevant proposal in this regard was the European Agenda for Migration, developed by the European Commission in 2015 (EC, 2015a). Based on Article 78(3) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU), the Commission established the Emergency Relocation System, which sanctioned the transfer of asylum seekers from overburdened Greece and Italy to other EU countries (Casolari, 2016). However, due to strong political opposition, the mechanism has only partially been implemented (Morgese, 2020). After the failure of other ambitious

reforms, the current mechanism involves ad hoc voluntary relocations and is coordinated by the Commission (Morgese, 2020).

Both the Emergency Relocation System and the ad hoc relocation mechanism fail to consider migrants as subjects with agency since they don't have a say in their destination (Morgese, 2020; de Vries et al., 2016). The EU's stance is well represented by a 2018 European Commission communication to the Parliament, according to which "There is a clear consensus that [...] applicants should not have a free choice as to the Member State in which they apply for international protection" (EC, 2018, p. 16). The Commission argues that granting such an option would damage the most "attractive countries" as they would receive a disproportionate number of applications (EC, 2016d). The only proposal for a relocation mechanism that considered migrants' preferences was presented by the European Parliament Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice, and Home Affairs (LIBE) in 2017, but it never passed (EP, 2017). Migrants' compliance is granted by the threat of being excluded from the program (EC, 2015b). The prospect of losing their only chance to engage in intra-EU movements without violating the Dublin regulation is a form of subtractive mobility, specifically a threat to take legal and material terrain away from migrants. While efforts to reform the Dublin regulation and to facilitate agreements for the relocation of asylum seekers are currently seeing a revival, no relevant actor has proposed to include migrants' preferences as a factor in the relocation process.

Manipulating Italy's Asylum System: Law 132/2018

Among the Italian legislative measures designed to promote intra-EU mobility, the most significant has been the notorious Law 132/2018. While it should be noted that minor aspects of the law have been revised by the following governments, it still has an extremely relevant impact on the Italian asylum system (EC, 2021; ASGI, 2020; Semprebon, 2021). It falls into the category of subtractive mobility because it both drastically reduces the number of migrants eligible for international protection and lowers the standards of Italy's asylum system, thereby taking legal and material terrain away from migrants. This legislation significantly worsened the living conditions of migrants in Italy, and one of its key goals was promoting irregular secondary movements.

Law 132/2018 contains a specific provision that makes asylum procedures significantly more restrictive by abolishing the so-called "humanitarian protection" category. This status was applied to migrants in need of protection that did not meet the criteria of the two higher forms of protection recognised by EC Directive 2004/83: refugee status and subsidiary protection (Campomori, 2019). Villa (2018) argued that the reform led to the irregularisation of approximately 70.000 migrants, who were expelled from the reception system. The reform had a twofold effect, depriving them of basic provisions and minimising their chances of long-term integration in Italy by eliminating access to Italian classes, psychological assistance, and vocational training (Campomori, 2020). Other provisions of Law 132/2018 are not as direct but result in similar consequences by reducing the standards of assistance provided in reception centres.

To understand these changes, it is necessary to briefly outline the dual nature that characterised Italy's reception system even before Law 132/2018. The System for the Protection of Asylum Seekers and Refugees (SPRAR) provided relatively high-level services, and according to Directive 2013/33/EU, it was intended to become the only reception network in the shortest possible time (European Parliament and Council, 2013). However, most migrants were accommodated in a parallel reception system called Centers for Extraordinary Assistance (CAS). The CAS was initially envisioned as a temporary and emergency solution, and as the ECHR found in *Tarakhel v. Switzerland*, it is inadequate in terms of services and safety (ECHR, 2014).

Law 132/2018 contributed to exacerbate existing issues. It led to the suppression of the SPRAR, which many humanitarian workers considered migrants' only hope for integration (Cresta, 2018). In practice, the SPRAR was downsized and renamed System for the Protection of Holders of International Protection Status and Foreign Unaccompanied Minors (SIPROIMI), targeting only a fraction of the previous beneficiaries (Giannetto & Roman, 2022). Asylum seekers were transferred to the CAS, where they are expected to wait up to two years while their application is being processed (Colombo, 2019). Moreover, the reform cut CAS's funds, decreasing per capita expenditure from €35 to around €20 per day (Semprebbon, 2021). Compared to the old SPRAR, access to language courses, cultural mediators, and legal services is limited, while psychological support has been eliminated (Semprebbon, 2021). Many migrants, faced with the perspective of waiting for long periods in centres designed as emergency solutions, are indirectly pushed to leave the system and

become irregulars (Brekke & Brochmann, 2015). NGOs and civil society groups opposing Law 132/2018 stepped up to provide vital services to CAS residents, but their efforts have been largely insufficient to compensate for the state's withdrawal (Pontiggia, 2021).

The official aim of Law 132/2018 was to reduce expenditures on migrants' welfare (Perocco & Della Puppa, 2023). Moreover, according to Tazzioli, taking terrain away from migrants is functional to disperse them and make them less visible. To these relevant explanations, this paper adds the objective of promoting migrants' secondary movements. Law 132/2018 aims to make Italy a less attractive destination than other EU states by downgrading the quality of its asylum system and restricting access to it. The Commission has long identified differences in the asylum process and standards of asylum systems as catalysts for secondary movements. Moreover, this view was confirmed in a seminal study on Eritrean transit migration in Italy by Brekke and Brochmann (2015). Since the 1990s, the EU has promoted a process of harmonisation of national asylum systems to disincentivise secondary movements (EC, 2015a; Briasco & Di Felice, 2017). While former SPRAR centres were well above the EU minimum standards, the Commission has criticised Law 132/2018 as a step in the wrong direction (EC, 2021). By failing to implement Directive 2013/33/EU, Italy actively reproduces its transit country position. This is not only confirmed by statements from the Commission and other EU countries but crucially by a public declaration from the Italian Minister of Interiors that promoted Law 132/2018. Causing a minor diplomatic incident, he referred to the secondary movements produced by the reform as a political success (Indelicato, 2019; Colombo, 2019). Overwhelming evidence reveals that Italy manipulates its asylum system in part as a form of subtractive mobility designed to facilitate migrants' irregularisation and their secondary movements to other EU countries.

Autonomous Mobility at Italy's Southern Border

The most subtle approach used by Italy to promote irregular secondary movements involves not implementing EU mechanisms designed to keep migrants in the country of first entry. The paper highlights this tendency by looking at two critical junctures of migrants' journeys: this sub-section focuses on Italy's southern border, while the following concentrates on its Alpine border. This strategy falls in the category of autonomous mobility because the state exercises control over migrants through selective withdrawal. By refraining

from interrupting migrants' journeys, Italy reproduces its transit position. Its approach is informed by the knowledge, based on statistical information extracted from migrant populations, that their desired geographies of movement are compatible with Italian interests. State withdrawal is often complemented by the targeted use of more direct modes of enforced mobility. Empirical evidence reveals that after being released from Hotspot centres, migrants are often informally nudged to continue their journey towards other EU countries.

According to the Dublin regulation, Italy must actively counter secondary movements (EC, 2016d). This includes gathering and uploading biometric data of all migrants reaching its shores to the EU's asylum fingerprint database (EURODAC) and detaining or deporting irregular migrants (EC, 2015a). However, the Commission and other Schengen members have accused Italy of neglecting its commitments (EC, 2016c; EC, 2015a; D'Angelo, 2019). Before 2015, Italy's selective withdrawal involved not uploading migrants' biometric information to the EURODAC and irregularly releasing thousands of migrants on Italian territory (Trauner, 2016; D'angelo, 2019). Not having their biometric information registered in the EURODAC, migrants could stay under the radar and had a strong incentive to continue their journey further north, with the prospect of applying for asylum in more "attractive" countries (Brekke & Brochmann, 2015). To grasp the magnitude of this phenomenon, it's sufficient to note that in 2013 none of the Schengen countries that received the most asylum applications (Germany, Sweden, and Austria) were located at the external European borders (Eurostat, 2023a). In 2015 the Commission introduced the Hotspot approach to address this issue (Casolari, 2016). Under the new system, registration and uploading of migrants' biometric data to the EURODAC continue to be conducted by Italian authorities but under the supervision of Frontex and European Asylum Support Office (EASO) personnel (Casolari, 2016). The Italian Prime Minister and his Foreign Affairs Minister publicly criticised this measure as a threat to Italy's sovereignty but later accepted to implement it as part of a quid pro quo which saw the EU supporting Italy's externalisation efforts in the Central Mediterranean (Repubblica, 2015; Lania, 2015).

While the Hotspot approach led to a near-complete reporting of migrants' biometric data, Italy has continued to use withdrawal to promote secondary movements, albeit under a thin veneer of legality (EC, 2016b; EC, 2016a; Neville et al., 2016). After being registered in the EURODAC, most migrants are irregularised within a few days of reaching Italy and based on EC Returns Directive 2008, they have no right to stay in the EU (EC, 2008).

However, only a minority leaves the continent (Fontana, 2022; Orsini & Roos, 2017; Della Puppa & Sanò, 2021). Most irregularised migrants receive a document, written only in Italian, which informs them of their "deferred expulsion" and requires them to leave the country, usually within a week and by their own means (de Vries et al., 2016; D'angelo, 2019). After this, they are released from police custody and allowed to move autonomously (Debarge, 2016; D'angelo, 2019). Italy's official position is that they should voluntarily take an international flight home (Palazzotto, 2016; Debarge, 2016). However, no one really expects them to do so. Migrants registered in the EURODAC cannot successfully apply for asylum in other EU countries, but many still opt to leave Italy illegally, hoping for a better future in their desired destinations (Maiani, 2019; Fontanari, 2021; Brekke & Brochmann, 2015; Vianelli, 2017). This trend is evident from the increased number of migrants which are registered in Italy but are later found in other EU countries. In 2016, 64,844 of these migrants were detected across the EU, an increase of 1460% from 2008 (Eurostat, 2023b).

Few relevant empirical studies confirm that in southern Italy state withdrawal is not absolute. After being released from Hotspot centres, migrants are often nudged to continue their autonomous journey towards other EU countries. While Italian authorities officially deny promoting secondary movements, the similarity between scholarly accounts suggests this is a significant phenomenon. In a comprehensive investigation of the Italian reception system, Palazzotto (2016) argues that police authorities in Sicily do not merely release migrants from Hotspot centres but take them to train stations in order to facilitate their northward movement. Similarly, fieldwork conducted by Denaro (2016) in Catania reveals that the police let irregular migrants access the central train station and tacitly allow an established humanitarian and smuggling network to facilitate their secondary movements (Denaro, 2016; Fontana, 2020). Moreover, D'Angelo (2019) notes that when migrants' presence around main train stations begins to cause concerns among local citizens, the police simply shift to releasing them in front of smaller train stations (D'angelo, 2019). His findings highlight Italian authorities' efforts to avoid drawing excessive attention to these irregular practices. Moreover, the study by Davies and others (2017) directly implicates the Italian police in the promotion of secondary movements. Some of the migrants they interviewed claimed that, after being released from Hotspot centres, they were given maps, explained how to reach other EU countries, and informed that they were not welcomed in Italy. Clearly, this type of pressure is very mild. It would not be sufficient to force migrants to move against

their will. However, it can be effective when directed at migrants with a propensity to secondary movements.

While this paper pays considerable attention to secondary movements, it must be noted that not all irregularised migrants continue their journey to other EU countries. Many remain in Italy and enter the informal labour market, often becoming victims of exploitation (Carchedi et al., 2015). This phenomenon is well-documented and has attracted the attention of NGOs, the Italian judicial system, and the national government (Talani, 2019). It can be explained in terms of Italy's structural need for low-paid workers, particularly in the agricultural sector (Castles, 2002; D'Angelo, 2019). Typically, migrants choose to stay in Italy and engage in informal work as an alternative to pursuing secondary movements. However, for some irregularised migrants, working in the Italian informal labour market is functional to earn enough money to continue their journey northward (Düvell, 2012).

Autonomous Mobility at Italy's Alpine Border

Italy's tacit acceptance of secondary movements is apparent at its Alpine border. Migrants gathering in mountainous areas a few kilometres from the border are easily identifiable as aspirant Dubliners (Tazzioli, 2020a). While the Dublin regulation mandates states to actively prevent secondary movements, Italian authorities have no interest in investing resources to enforce a norm they regard as contrary to Italy's interest. Therefore, they selectively withdraw, allowing migrants to move autonomously towards their desired destinations. However, Italy's informal strategy has been at the centre of relevant diplomatic crises, which led to the temporary suspension of the Schengen agreement in 2011 and 2015. In response to these critical events, Italy has developed more sophisticated methods to hide its complicity with Dubliners. For this purpose, its withdrawal is never total. Targeted interventions are employed to invisibilise migrants and to discipline vocal NGOs while permitting secondary movements.

Italy is often criticised by its Alpine neighbours, France, Switzerland, and Austria, for turning a blind eye to irregular border crossings (Alkopher & Blanc, 2017). Even when border police from one of these countries successfully intercept irregular migrants, Italian cooperation is minimal. After being handed over to Dubliners, the Italian police seldom arrest

them; instead, they often release them a few kilometres from the border (Tazzioli, 2020a; Casella Colombeau, 2020). Based on personal and anecdotal evidence, Italian officers know that migrants are willing to try crossing the border numerous times until they succeed (Filippi et al., 2021). France has been among the most active countries in devising strategies to counter Italy's lax border control (Casella Colombeau, 2020; Tazzioli, 2020b). With migration to Europe being constructed as a "crisis", French politicians and media increasingly highlighted the danger of secondary movements from Italy (Pascouau, 2011; Erlanger, 2011). Tensions peaked in 2011 when France unilaterally suspended the Schengen agreement on its border with Italy (McClure, 2012; Triandafyllidou & Dimitriadi, 2013). It was the first time since the treaty became part of the EU *acquis communautaire* in 1999 (Castella Colombeau, 2020). A second suspension occurred in 2015, with the participation of France and six other countries (Alkopher & Blanc, 2017). Both events had a strong resonance at the EU level because the freedom of movement between member states is generally seen as one of the fundamental achievements of the European integration process (Corriere della Sera, 2016; EC, 2016d).

Following the so-called Schengen crisis, destination countries and the Commission escalated their pressure on Italy to counter secondary movements (Colombo, 2019). In response to the growing hostility, Italy restructured its approach by limiting the visibility of illegal border crossings rather than preventing them. A symbolic gesture of goodwill was the dismantling in 2016 of the informal refugee camp in the small town of Ventimiglia on the Italian side of the border, which was portrayed by French media as a symbol of the border crisis (Chastand, 2011; La Voce, 2016). Through a targeted use of forced mobility, migrants were removed from Ventimiglia and transferred to a reception centre in Taranto in Southern Italy (Minca et al., 2021; Tazzioli & Garrelli, 2020). Given its success, this practice has been routinely implemented since 2016. In Taranto, migrants are not held in a carceral state; instead, after being identified, they are released (Tazzioli, 2018a). Most migrants return to the French border in a matter of days and attempt the passage in less visible areas (Tazzioli, 2018b). The objective of Italy's strategy is not to contrast secondary movements but to make them less visible while at the same time containing the risk of a new diplomatic crisis with France.

Italy's selective withdrawal has tacitly allowed non-state actors to enhance migrants' agency and facilitate border crossings. Crossing the mountainous border between Italy and

France, especially in the winter, can be extremely dangerous (Tazzioli, 2020b). Due to migrants' lack of adequate training, clothing, and knowledge of the area, their attempts to cross the border can sometimes result in fatalities (Tazzioli, 2020b). Although these incidents are relatively infrequent, they have a profoundly negative impact on Italian and French public opinion (Vergnano, 2021). Considering these challenging circumstances, Italy tacitly allowed the functioning of two mountain refuges, the Fraternalità Massi and the Casa Cantoniera, in the Susa valley, which, after 2016, has increasingly become a relevant mountain route used by migrants to reach France (Del Biaggio et al., 2020). The refuges provided material assistance and valuable information on how to cross the border (Filippi et al., 2021).

The decision taken by Italian authorities in 2021 to shut down the Casa Cantoniera may seem to contradict the goal of tacitly promoting secondary movements. However, this strategy strikes a delicate balance between facilitating secondary movements and preserving good diplomatic relations with France. Italian authorities can only afford to look the other way if humanitarian action is discreet. In this case, a targeted intervention has been used to discipline an overtly outspoken NGO. It is not a coincidence that of the two refuges only the Casa Cantoniera was closed. The shelter was located on occupied premises, and the volunteers working there were very vocal about the political implications of their humanitarian activities (Rivoluzione Anarchica, 2021; Vergnano, 2021). Their open support for an anti-border ideology and opposition to Law 132/2018 attracted the attention of the Italian press (Massenzio, 2018). On the other hand, the Rifugio Massi was less vocal, and this tendency has strengthened after the closure of the Casa Cantoniera (Storer & Torre, 2022). Volunteers from the Rifugio Massi claim they have been careful not to be confrontational with the government because they fear that if the Rifugio Massi were to close, there would be no one else to help the migrants (Storer & Torre, 2022).

Closing the Casa Cantoniera primarily functioned as a symbolic gesture, signalling Italy's opposition to secondary movements without actually deterring them. It is worth noting that this targeted intervention did not diminish migrants' access to support from local NGOs. The migrants who were hosted in the Casa Cantoniera at the time of the police raid were not arrested; instead, they were transferred to the Rifugio Massi through a form of forced mobility (Filippi et al., 2021). Moreover, the capacity of the Rifugio Massi expanded from around 20 to 70 people, making up for the loss of the Casa Cantoniera, which used to accommodate approximately 60 migrants (Filippi et al., 2021; La Stampa, 2023). The Italian

state has no interest in making it more difficult for migrants to cross the border with France. Nevertheless, in the aftermath of the Schengen crisis, it has focused on ensuring that secondary movements don't attract undue attention, which could potentially exacerbate relations with France. Facilitating migrants' autonomous mobility remains a crucial biopolitical strategy of control employed by Italy, but when needed, it is complemented by more direct modes of enforced mobility, such as forced transfers.

CHAPTER 4: CONCLUSIONS

The paper aimed to investigate how the Italian state uses mobility as a biopolitical technology of control to reproduce its transit country position. Drawing upon Foucault's theory of biopolitics, this research contributes to the literature on transit migration and the biopolitics of movement. It offers new insights by tailoring this biopolitical lens to Italy's distinctive position both as a transit country and a member of the Schengen area. The study critically examined key biopolitical strategies of control through movement employed by Italy at critical junctures in migrants' geographies of movement. The research highlighted their complementary nature and argued that they are deployed to reproduce Italy's transit position. Each strategy was categorised into one or potentially a combination of three modes of enforced mobility: forced mobility, subtractive mobility, and autonomous mobility. These categories facilitated the distinction between direct and seemingly less intrusive mechanisms of control to ensure that more subtle methods were not mistaken for state inaction.

The analysis comprised two distinct sections: The first section focused on Italy's use of biopolitical strategies of movement in its externalisation of migration management. It observed that in its externalisation efforts, Italy is largely involved in countering migrants' desire to reach Europe and therefore reduces their agency to a minimum through direct and coercive strategies of enforced mobility. Significantly, all the strategies analysed contained elements of forced mobility. The 2008 Friendship, Partnership and Cooperation agreement enabled Italian authorities to intercept migrant boats in the Central Mediterranean and forcibly transfer migrants back to Libya. After the ECHR condemned this practice as refoulement in 2012, Italy circumvented the ECHR decision by signing a Memorandum of Understanding with the UN-recognised Libyan government, which enabled the Libyan Coast Guard to conduct similar interceptions at sea and pushbacks, acting as a proxy for Italy. Forced mobility is used on Italian soil as well. Migrants from countries that have bilateral repatriation agreements with Italy are almost automatically selected for forced repatriation. The most complex strategy analysed in this section combined elements of subtractive mobility and forced mobility. Italy's reluctance to take concrete measures to improve conditions in Libyan detention centres is a form of subtractive mobility, while its support for the IOM Voluntary Humanitarian Returns Programme effectively leads to forced movement.

The second section of the analysis centred on Italy's initiatives to promote migrants' intra-EU mobility, including irregular secondary movements. In promoting intra-EU mobility, Italy typically offers less resistance to migrants' agency because many of them already contemplate engaging in secondary movements. Moreover, it is relevant to note that in the context of Europe, even when Italy acts to constrain migrants' agency, it often employs more indirect and less detectable strategies of enforced mobility. Italy's main instrument for promoting intra-EU migrant movements without violating the Dublin regulation is the EU-organized relocation of asylum seekers to other member states. In such programs, migrants lack the agency to influence their destination. This strategy of biopolitical control through movement falls in the category of subtractive mobility, as the fear of being excluded from the program often motivates compliance. However, the most relevant strategy of subtractive mobility considered in the paper was Law 132/2018. It both drastically reduced the number of migrants eligible for international protection and lowered the standards of Italy's asylum system, significantly impacting migrants' living conditions and promoting irregular secondary movements. Finally, the most subtle approach used by Italy to promote secondary movements involves not implementing EU mechanisms designed to keep migrants in the country of first entry. This strategy falls in the category of autonomous mobility because the state exercises control over migrants through partial withdrawal. By refraining from interrupting migrants' journeys, Italy reproduces its transit position. However, withdrawal is never total and can be complemented with more direct modes of enforced mobility. Empirical evidence reveals that after being released from Hotspot centres, migrants are often nudged to continue their journey towards other EU countries. Similarly, in Italy's Alpine region, targeted interventions are employed to invisibilise migrants and to discipline vocal NGOs while permitting secondary movements.

The paper focused on Italy's use of mobility as a biopolitical technology of control in its efforts to shape migration processes. It paid particular attention to indirect and subtle biopolitical strategies that, despite having a pervasive influence on migrants' lives, are often mistaken for state inaction. Future empirical research should strive to further incorporate migrants' lived experiences to better understand how states influence their lives by keeping them on the move.

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APPENDIX

Academic and grey literature was identified by searching the following databases, Google Scholar, LSE Library Search, SCOPUS, International Bibliography of the Social Science, Web of Science, HeinOnline, and Border and Migration Studies Online.

The research terms were selected in relation to the main research question, “How does Italy use mobility as a biopolitical strategy of control to reproduce its transit country position?” and the other two sub-questions “How does Italy use biopolitical strategies of control through movement in its externalisation efforts?”, and “How does Italy use biopolitical strategies of control through movement to promote migrants’ intra-EU mobility?”. Table 1 shows the research terms used to identify relevant literature in English and Italian.

Table 1

Mobility to reproduce Italy’s transit position	Mobility in Italy’s externalisation efforts	Mobility to promote intra-EU movements
(Foucault, Tazzioli) Biopolitics of movement, migration, Italy	(EU, Europe, Italy) (externalisation, outsourcing) of migration (management) to (Libya, Northern Africa)	(Italy, EU, France) (Schengen Agreement, Dublin regulation, country of first entry principle, secondary movements) migration (crisis)
(drivers, determinants, theories) of (transit) migration	Fortress Europe and Italy (external) borders (management, control)	(Italy, EU) (migrants, refugees, asylum seekers, international protection, humanitarian protection) (relocations, expulsion, repatriation, detention, hot spot system)

(state, structural factors) role in migration	(Italy, EU) (repatriations, treaties, agreements) with Libyan (government, coast guard, militias, Fezzan mayors, Gaddafi, Al Sarraj, Haftar)	(Italy France, Italy Switzerland, Italy Austria) (migrants, asylum seekers, refugees, irregular, illegal) border (crossing, passage, transit, (NGOs, State, Police)
(Italy, Southern European countries) transit country (status, definition, position)	Libya detention centres (Amnesty International, UNHCR, IOM) (torture, inhumane conditions) repatriation (program, agreement)	(Italy, EU, Europe), (migrants), (informal, illegal) geography (of migration), (force, enforce, push, encourage, favour, facilitate, criticise, condemn)
	(Italy, Libya, EU) (search and rescue, push backs, interception at sea)	