

# AUTONOMY OF MIGRATION AND THE GOVERNMENTALITY OF PLASTIC BORDERS

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## ABSTRACT

### *Autonomy of Migration and the Governmentality of Plastic Borders*

Inspired by the autonomy of migration approach, we analyse borders as sites of control and violence but also as migrant praxis, as strategies of escape and rupture. We explore the idea of “bodily borders”, emphasizing that borders shape subjects on the move and are themselves shaped by the embodied experiences of border-crossers. Drawing on Foucault’s concept of governmentality and Malabou’s analysis of the concept of plasticity, we argue that migrations are governed through “plastic borders” that are formed as direct responses to migrant mobilities, using the empirical example of the externalization of borders as an EU policy of migration management. KEY WORDS: autonomy of migration, borders, governmentality, plasticity, externalization of borders, Balkan migratory route

## IZVLEČEK

### *Avtonomija migracij in vladnost plastičnih meja*

Avtorica na podlagi avtonomije migracij meje analizira kot mesta nadzora in nasilja ter hkrati kot migrantski *praxis*, kot strategije bega in ruptur. Pojasnjuje idejo o »utelešenih mejah«, da bi pokazala, kako meje na poti oblikujejo ljudi in so obenem same oblikovane prek utelešenih izkušenj tistih, ki meje prestopajo. Z uporabo Foucaultovega koncepta 'vladnosti' (*gouvernementalité*) in koncepta 'plastičnosti' (*plasticity*), kot ga analizira Malabou, postavi tezo, da današnje upravljanje migracij uporablja mehanizem »plastičnih meja«, ki so oblikovane kot neposredni odziv na mobilnost migrantov, kar pokaže tudi na empiričnem primeru eksternalizacije meje kot evropske politike upravljanja z migracijami.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: avtonomija migracij, meje, vladnost, plastičnost, eksternalizacija meja, Balkanska migracijska pot

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## INTRODUCTION

Borders are about the exertion of control, but they are also about the active subjectivity of those crossing them. Fixating solely on the power of control and domination risks, as emphasized by theorists of the autonomy of migration (AoM), “reinforc[es] the spectacle of the border” (Mezzadra, Nielson 2013: 267) and diminishes the relevance of migrant movement. In this article we analyse contemporary practices of bordering in the European and the larger global context by adopting the autonomy of migration approach, viewing borders as contested sites of struggle where the nation-state attempts to maintain its sovereignty and fictive “homogenous ethnicity”. We recognize borders as sites of social relations that are constituted by and through borders (*ibid.*: 279). Instead of viewing borders only as sites of violence – while admitting that they indeed appear as such – we explore the governmentality of what we suggest are “plastic borders”, stressing their changeability.

We start by providing an overview of the relevant literature on autonomy of migration, foregrounding autonomy as migrant praxis. Next, we approach the analysis of borders through the juxtaposition of control and its subversion by migrant itineraries, analysing how borders are about violence but also how they appear as sites of escaping control. Following the AoM approach, we pursue the idea of “bodily borders”, arguing that borders shape subjects and their bodies, and are themselves shaped by the embodied experiences of border-crossers.

The central question this article explores is what kind of governmentality rationalizes contemporary bordering? To explore this, we use Foucault’s accounts on governmentality and argue that nowadays migrations are governed through “plastic borders” that are shaped as direct responses to the tactics of migrants. Rather than having a coherent policy, the EU and its nation-states respond to migration by adopting mechanisms as a direct response to migrant mobilities. Thus, migrants push institutional changes rather than the other way around.

Emphasizing bodily experiences in theorizing borders allows us to argue that institutions respond to contemporary mobilities through a specific regime governed by the “plasticity of borders”. In the absence of coherent migration policy, what becomes its primary driver is plasticity – the bending and stretching of borders in attempts to control migration has developed into the central strategy of migration management. We show this by reference to examples of border externalization as a “plastic modality of bordering”. The examples include an analysis of the EU Global Approach to Migration and Mobility and the governmentality of the Balkan migration route.

## DEFINING AUTONOMY OF MIGRATION: MIGRATION CAME BEFORE CONTROL

The autonomy of migration approach generally refers to a shift in migration studies from researching the structural causes of migration and migration management and control to looking at migration practices and seeking instances of independence from institutionalized constraints. Moulrier Boutang (see Moulrier Boutang, Garson 1984), writing on mobility in the 1980s and 1990s, was among the first authors to express criticism of the widespread approaches to migration and mobility research that relate migration too one-dimensionally to legal and state frameworks and the economic determinism of the labour market. Only by reversing the focus from the relationship between mobility and state apparatuses to mobility strategies per se, it was argued, are we able to recognize the dynamics of migration and the diversity of mobility. Consequently, autonomist theories of migration go beyond administrative regulation, and start by looking at the “subjective diversity of migrant mobilities” (Casas Cortes et al. 2015: 896). Relating migration to autonomy and independence allows the researcher to view these phenomena as a multiplicity of practices and behaviours, tactics and interventions. Thus, the AoM approach has provided a framework for promoting perspectives that foreground the subjectivity of migrant mobilities and recognize migration as movement. Consequently, AoM looks at how processes of “subjectification” become multiplied through mobility itself, and through the related political mobilization and organization. In this context, AoM wants to go beyond the recognition of agency, referring to subjectification as the political deeds of people, regardless of their legal status, within “complexes of practices that always exceed the ability of migration policies and state authorities to fix and control them” (ibid.: 896–897).

Since Moulrier Boutang’s work, AoM approaches have taken different paths, leaning directly or indirectly into debates on autonomy, *operaismo*, Marxism, post-colonial, queer and anti-racism studies (Casas Cortes et al. 2015). AoM recognizes the autonomy of migration regardless of control – instead of treating borders as fixities, AoM focuses on migrants’ capacity to change borders and render them porous. To name a few notable examples, in *Escape Routes*, Papadopoulous et al. (2008) thematize mobility and migration as productive power beyond the logic of rights and representation, to explore the autonomist idea of resistance as the central dynamic, permeating all politicality of existence. The authors approach escape not in the reactive sense of “escape from”, but rather as a practice that generates new modes of being in the world. In *Border as Method*, Mezzadra and Nielsen (2013) use AoM to develop epistemologies and methodologies for looking at borders as multi-scalar processes in current capitalist figurations, while de Genova and Peutz (2016) in *The Borders of “Europe”*, by providing a de-centred look at control, show how borders and migration management fall short because of their neglect of the diversity and subjectivity of migration.

As argued by Casas Cortes et al. (2015: 898), by considering migrant movements and actions as powers with which institutions interact, AoM inverts, theoretically and strategically, the traditional approach to migration management as the control and violent curbing of migration, expressed for example in theories regarding Fortress Europe. These theories do not address the tricks used by migrants to slip through borders, and the Fortress Europe approach assumes that migrants are doomed to fail (Bojadžijev, Karakayalı 2010). Autonomist perspectives on migration thus put the emphasis on activities that develop beyond the regimes of subordination, approaching mobility in terms of rupture, escape or flight (Mezzadra 2001; Papadopoulos, Stephenson, Tsianos 2008).

Re-signifying migration away from functionalist analysis, conceptualizing it as creative powers or changing “turbulences” (Papastergiadis 2000), AoM shows how mobility is re-making spaces and territories, leading to changes in the governmentality of migration. Only by placing the power and politicality of migration at the centre of the analysis are we able to see the true nature of bordering. This has moved beyond the general aim of preventing mobility. Inspired by AoM, we argue that the governmentality of bordering has been developed in its “plasticity” – it has been stretched and bent, in respect of migrant tactics, with the purpose of framing new strategies of control. Adopting AoM enables us to analyse migration policies while acknowledging that they are shaped as responses to the migrants’ own mobility tactics, which we capture through the notion of plasticity. We do not think that new bordering falls short because it neglects migrant tactics (Genova, Peutz 2016); on the contrary, it works (by preventing mobility and increasing surveillance) because it adapts, plastically, to migrant mobility.

From the AoM perspective, in the analysis of contemporary borders it is necessary to overcome the push-pull models of interpreting migration as driven by labour market demands, or victimization and humanitarian approaches that too often depict migrants as powerless victims in grips of the omnipotent western sovereign, and recognize migration as powers that push shifts in institutional responses. In our approach to the analysis of borders we acknowledge that migration management seeks to control, limit and prevent migration, and that practicing “violent borders” (Jones 2016) negatively affects both migrants and societies at large. Along with AoM, however, we also try to approach the border as a space and practice of contestation. De-centring the logic of the border and control enables us to view migration and border policies not only as violent, thoughtless and mechanistic tools of surveillance but also as tools that are reframed again and again by the power of migration and migrant tactics. As noted by De Genova (2017: 6; 2010), first there is mobility as a basic human condition and then there is bordering. Mobility precedes borders. Borders do not define mobility, but rather the other way around: new forms of constantly reimagined mobility define strategies of bordering. “The movement of people around the world, and hence across border zones, came first. The multifarious attempts to manage or control autonomous mobility have always come as a response” (De Genova 2017: 6).

## “BODILY BORDERS” BETWEEN VIOLENCE AND ESCAPE

In his essays *What is a Border?* and *Borderland Europe*, Balibar emphasizes the polysemy and heterogeneity of borders (Balibar 2012, 2015).<sup>1</sup> Borders multiply, change, and are set anew (for example the Balkan route in 2015–2016). If the EU is formed as a “borderless space” for capital and (certain) people, it can also be closed to people, one example being the reintroduction of borders for people from Eastern Europe migrating to Western Europe, or the reintroduction of border controls between EU member states, e.g. at the border between Slovenia and Austria as a reaction to the so called “refugee crisis” in 2015–2016.

The mutability of borders however does not change the fact that borders have appeared historically as institutional means of exclusion. Physical borders, i.e. national demarcations, have remained until the present mechanisms for the reproduction of the exclusion and sorting of people. Nevertheless, we can say that unidimensional definitions of borders (borders only as violence) do not tackle their contradictory nature. Belonging to groups of people means facing borders *eo ipso*, including in the sense of connectivity – for example, every day we are faced with what Fichte has called our inner borders. Belonging to “imagined communities” (Anderson 1983) is always constructed around heterogeneous parameters including being born in a defined country, conforming to cultural, religious, sexual norms etc. Our placement in an environment that includes reflection in relation to fellow humans, which we can understand as a legitimate form of finding one’s place in this world, is interpretation of the world through borders. Borders can be relevant in what Said (1979: 54) calls “imaginative geography”, the mental organization of space-shaping identities. Walls and borders can thus appear as “potent organizers of human psychic landscapes” (Brown 2010: 86).

Mezzadra and Nielson (2013) argue that borders need to be analysed together with the multiplication of labour in contemporary (post)capitalist societies that are formed under the dictate of the capital, at the crossroads of “mutations of capital and sovereignty” (ibid.: 12). To be able to understand these transformations, language that only associates borders with walls and exclusion does not suffice – the authors suggest a more complex, dynamic language that would embrace the dialectics of hardening and softening of borders (ibid.: 279). As emphasized in the AoM approach, borders can not only be understood following the difference between violence and non-violence – the best proof are the works of Franz Fanon (1963) who pointed to the “productivity of violence”, or to the role of violence in emancipation – borders are also formed as spaces of (migrant) (non)violent struggle.

Therefore, migrants are not only victims of violent borders (Mezzadra 2011; Papadopoulos, Tsianos 2013), but are also subjects who rupture the status quo and

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1 The next three paragraphs are revised versions of those that first appeared in the foreword that I wrote to the Slovenian translation of the book *Violent Borders* by Reece Jones (Pajnik 2017).

question the established world order. "Exiles cross borders, break barriers of thought and experience" (Said 1984/2000: 185). Borders manifest the violence of institutions, but they are also counterfactual, embodying possibilities for alternatives; they are spaces and methods that shape alternatives to the institutional blocking of individual subjectivities and preventing the free movement of people.

Management of migration is violent in restricting movement, deporting people and incarcerating them in camps, while the camps and borders are spaces simultaneously demarcated by despair and hope; they are marked by the prevention of both mobility and escape. The contradiction of the dialectics of detention (banning mobility) and escape (re-instituting mobility) is shown in numerous practices of border politicization. For example, Jones writes about young people hoping that scanning by an X-ray machine would not reveal them hiding in a bus's undercarriage, squeezed into the wheel wells or the engine compartment trying to cross the Strait of Gibraltar from Tangier, Morocco to Algeciras, Spain. Then there are migrants who try to cross the "deadly border" in the Spanish towns of Melilla and Ceuta, resembling a fortified garrison with a high wall and fences; or the thousands of migrants who flee by boat from the Libyan shores, to name only a few examples of border politicization (Jones 2016: 2–3, 12–13). Since control by means of violent borders aims at annihilating politics, we thus also need to emphasize the "life of borders", their politicization by migrant movements (ibid.: 178).

Borders are symbols of the criminalization of migration (crimmigration), and a possibility, a praxis, "a mobile commons" (Papadopoulos, Tsianos 2013) that is manifested differently through various tactics. "Mobile commons" as defined by Papadopoulos and Tsianos (2013: 188) comprises knowledge of mobility – migrants exchange knowledge about border crossings and routes, and escape surveillance – cf. the analysis by Lipovec Čebren and Zorn (2016) who discuss the autonomous practices of migrants related to avoidance of deportation in the buffer zones in Slovenia and Serbia. Migrants and asylum seekers have resorted to avoiding fingerprinting by deliberately cutting or burning their fingerprints in order to prevent their enrolment in EURODAC. Also, migrants practice connectivity: they use media and word-of-mouth strategies, embodying the notion of the "connected migrant". They practice informal economies, and engage in communities of justice, such as developing alliances with NGOs. All these can be viewed as transnationalist tactics, as acts for sustaining life (Papadopoulos, Tsianos 2013) at and beyond the border.

Along these lines, in introducing the notion of "appropriation" (rather than resistance) to theorize migrants' capacity to subvert border control, Schell (2017) analyses how the "manipulation of documents", clandestine border crossing, and "visa shopping" (a strategy where visa applicants lodge simultaneous applications in several EU member states) are used to break down the institutionalized distrust and increase the slim chances of obtaining a visa. Analysing how migrants appropriate mobility to Europe via the Schengen Visa regime, adopting the AoM approach, Schell (2017) stresses "uncontrollability" as a key moment of autonomy.

## Embodied Borders

As the AoM approach has also been a target of criticism, its application in the analysis of borders requires us to address the danger of over-romanticizing migration. For example, in defining the border as method, Mezzadra and Nielson (2013: 17) dispute allegations claiming that the association of border with method is no more than the (romantic) “performativity of method”; it is about politics, the kinds of social worlds and subjectivities that can intervene in the production of borders. Most of the criticism has argued that there is too much emphasis on self-determination in AoM and that the efficiency of border control has not really been acknowledged. Furthermore, AoM needs to deal with the criticism that it glorifies migrants as heroes of clandestine border crossing, diminishing the effects of border control. Schell (2013) has argued against this, which he thinks is a misreading of autonomy, emphasizing that the approach centres around migrants’ appropriation, through which the limits of bordering have been transgressed, e.g. the previously mentioned refusal to comply with visa requirements. De Genova et al. (2018: 245) have recently analysed the “autonomy of asylum” as an example of the spatial disobedience of refugees who are refused recognition as refugees according to legal standards. Following the AoM approach, the “autonomy of asylum” lies in claiming the right to receive protection and insisting on the right to choose where to receive protection, expressed by people beyond the ascribed legal statuses and beyond the restrictions instituted by the Dublin Regulation.

Perhaps the most visible specificity of AoM that responds best to criticism is the insistence that autonomy needs to be studied in embodied encounters, moments of uncontrollability, in the conflict between migration and means to suppress it (Schell 2013). Migration always features particular bodies in which people appropriate mobility and are also targeted for surveillance, and AoM specifically highlights the dialogical and contested nature of mobility and bodily border encounters. Furthermore, AoM is not about autonomy that is abstract or absolute but one “that is necessarily limited, compromised, contradictory, and tactical” (De Genova et al. 2018: 243).

The lived experiences of migrants are very diverse and dependent on various individual circumstances, and borders indeed imply differential treatment of migrants in terms of class, gender, ethnicity, and age. Zavrtnik Zimic and Cukut-Krilić (2018), employing intersectional analysis, emphasized that border management in the example of the Balkan route has specifically affected women and children, perpetuating their vulnerability. We have shown in our own work (Pajnik, Bajt 2012) how women migrants actively practice transnationalism, by way of managing their own private trajectories, from family to work, escaping the ascribed role of victims, while recently, Milharčić Hladnik (2016) has emphasized the need to study migrant women’s resistance and their avoidance of control when they use migration for their own benefit. AoM allows us to acknowledge the fact that mobility is embodied. Borders are relational to the body – borders can play out violence upon the body, and

they can reconfigure the body, through entrapment, imprisonment, and even death. Furthermore, borders are shaped by the subjectivities of border crossers, they are defined by migrants' bodies, their crossings, separations, protests, eating and singing, building neighbourhoods etc. – bodies both “shore up and tear down borders” (Smith et al. 2016: 259).

## CONTROLLING MIGRATION WITH PLASTIC BORDERS

We argue that “bodily borders” inspire a specific kind of governmentality, rationalizing contemporary bordering by inducing plastic borders. In the analysis of the governmentality of contemporary migration management we rely on Foucault (1978/2007, 1978/2003, 1979/1991), who uses governmentality in several ways, of which we are most interested in using the concept to point to the exercise of power in the early modern period in Western European societies, since the launch of the population as a new object. Foucauldian governmentality broadens our understanding of power not only in terms of the hierarchical top-down power of the state but also the power to include forms of social control and knowledge that guide the behaviour of the populations. Governmentality, according to Foucault, is related to bringing biological life into the modalities of state power (as control); it marks the division of sovereign power into two modalities, i.e. disciplinary power, based on the surveillance of the individual body, and biopower, which regulates the population through its optimization (Foucault 1978/2007). Hence, governmentality signals the promotion of the population against the enemies, which include various categories of people who are deemed to pose a threat to the population – such as migrants. Adopting a Foucauldian approach, Zaviršek (2017: 54–55) concludes that if imprisonment in madhouses in the past served the construction of the idea of what constitutes the normal (and the abnormal), today refugee camps serve similar goals, perpetuating the structure of exclusion by reproducing the abnormal other.

What Foucault defines as state racism also applies to the understanding of the population in racial terms, introducing a break between life that counts and “abnormal life” which threatens the population as a whole (the “normal” population) (Foucault 1978/2007). Migrants are classified among the latter; “abnormal irregulars” are deemed to be enemies that threaten the wellbeing of the “normal population”. The more unknown and uncontrollable the mobile populations to be governed, the more “plastic” and adaptable to specific situations technologies and practices of bordering must be. Passports, visas, invitation letters, health certificates, bordering by fingerprinting, and x-raying are employed as governmentality strategies in contemporary migration management.

Our thesis on the governmentality of plastic borders is also inspired by Malabou's (2004) analysis in *The Future of Hegel*, where she approaches plasticity as the modality that demonstrates the Hegelian “to see (what) is coming”: To see (what) is

coming is plastic. Plasticity that “works on and within the body” (ibid.: 18), enabling the transformation from one form to another; by allowing us to move from one individuality to another, plasticity enables the embodiment of newer and improved forms of subjectivity. The governmentality of plastic borders can thus be viewed as a strategy of migration management that is shaped as a response to this changing subjectivity, active at and beyond the borders. Plasticity encapsulates borders that are both fluid but also resistant, and so are mobile subjectivities. We argue that governing through plastic borders develops temporal responses to migrant mobility as a best fit to follow this mobility, in the attempt to control it.

Speaking from the perspective of AoM, we do not make the case that plasticity accounts for migrants’ subjectivities “in order to strive for inclusion into the host society” or to adapt to the interests and needs of the EU and national migration policy (Konsta, Lazaridis 2010: 370, 380). Being inspired by AoM, what is at stake for us are not plastic individuals who adapt to border control but the other way around – borders are best governed as plastic borders in order to respond to migrant movement. Migrants’ tactics, from escape to “sabotage”, are the “fears” that are then governed by plastic borders. From this perspective, as emphasized by Bojadžijev and Karakayali (2010), many of the social conflicts initiated by migrants “are not about becoming citizens, but about insisting that they are citizens already”. And plastic bordering has become a predominant strategy in trying to control and eventually eradicate migrant citizenship.

### **Externalization as a Plastic Modality of Contemporary Borders**

One notable example of governmentality by way of plastic borders, we argue, is the European Commission’s Global Approach to Migration and Mobility (GAMM), which since its adoption in 2011 has constituted the main policy framework in the field of border security and migration management (for previous analyses see Vaughan Williams 2014; Casas Cortes et al. 2015). To begin with, the approach was launched as a direct response to migrant mobility: it was adopted as a consequence of a perceived threat of “irregular migration” following political unrest in North Africa since 2011. At the time, the EU was communicating a “threat” of thousands of “irregulars” illegally obtaining access to the EU, exposing Mediterranean countries that apparently needed help in returning migrants to their countries of origin (GAMM 2011: 2).

Practices of control of the mobility of “irregulars” are projected by GAMM outside of the EU. The common strategy governing borders has become border externalization, i.e. the containment of illegalized migration at the EU borders, a practice well described as “the off-shoring and out-sourcing of EU borders” (Vaughan Williams 2014: 2). In line with the securitization approach, irregular migrants are framed as a threat by GAMM, that – strategically – combines securitization with a more humanitarian face (humanitarianism aligning with the moral principle of preserving

life), claiming that, in addition to securing the borders, EU policies should also recognize that migrants are people, thus putting into effect the “twinned emphasis on border security and saving lives” (Vaughan Williams 2015: 3). Framing bordering as humanitarian intervention serves to disguise the actual practices that Vaughan Williams has bluntly termed the “animalization of migrants” (ibid.). The author argues that European border management has reproduced animalized subjectivities that are chained in dehumanized spaces, the “zoopolitical spaces of Europe” that attempt to make “irregular” populations governable (ibid.: 5).

Foucauldian biopolitics is revealed in the very pairing of the strengthening of smart bordering and surveillance with a humanitarian focus, recognizing that “in essence, migration governance is not about ‘flows’, ‘stocks’ and ‘routes’, it is about people” (GAMM 2011: 6). New knowledge of technological and biometric bordering is used by GAMM (i.e. plasticity), and a humanitarian face is applied to it – with the purpose to discipline migrants and control their mobility.

Extra-territorial projections of borders are pursued by GAMM’s main objective, i.e. border externalization, through the strengthening of the EU’s external migration policy based on so-called mobility partnerships with non-EU countries (GAMM 2011: 2). Via bilateral agreements, for example with Libya or Morocco, we see that the outsourcing of practices of bordering brings the transfer of EU governance to the states in North Africa. An analysis of GAMM shows that the EU, from the position of the rule-maker, colonizes the East and the South, as the rule-taker, by adopting agreements to stop mobility before it reaches their Western borders. It needs to be stressed that governmentality by way of border externalization, applied through international “agreements and partnerships”, actually relies on the acknowledgement of the power of migrants’ itineraries (Casas Cortes 2015 et al.: 905). GAMM was driven by a need for bordering that responds to migrant movement which brought plasticity in the shape of bordering development that focuses on tracing migrant itineraries, “scripting these itineraries as ‘routes’, and intercepting the migrants wherever they originate or travel” (ibid.). Partnership agreements, as mechanisms of plastic borders, as manifestations of the “spatial and institutional stretching of border policy” (ibid.) have been adopted in the wish to trace the details of the complex routes along which migrants move. Such tracing can, indeed, most efficiently be done through route management, which requires international cooperation, i.e. the broadened geographical scope of bordering. GAMM shows that the EU has recognized the limits of the Fortress Europe approach, and has pushed the governmentality strategies in the direction of the construction of bordering as an immediate, temporally and spatially plastic response to migrant movement.

Bigo has analysed governmentality via smart surveillance after 11 September 2001 as “a new way of producing irregular people”, not only through obstruction, but through programmes designed to speed mobility and free passage. The European border surveillance system (EUROSUR), Visa Information System (VIS), biometric deployment of passports, the EU Maritime Policy, and the design of Frontex

have all been framed as forms of “freedom” and protection of “our population”. The governing of mobility through freedom, or policing in the name of freedom, Bigo argues, is about securing channels for specific people (money and information), which coincides with obstructing mobility for “others” (Bigo 2011: 40). With reference to Foucault (2007), freedom here is correlated with security apparatuses. It serves the “security dispositif” that is concerned with mechanisms to enhance the exercise of power, the governing of populations, controlling, sorting the good from the bad; it is concerned with anticipating and minimising potentially harmful behaviours (of the “irregulars”), increasingly not only in the EU but also in migrants’ countries of origin.

### **Chasing Migrant Crossings: the Example of the Balkan Route**

GAMM has set the framework for responses to the autonomy of migration, pursuing control and mobility prevention. The events in Calais, France in 2015, when migrants charged the Eurotunnel barriers in an effort to board vehicles heading to Britain, causing traffic delays, is one such example that led to the deployment of riot police by French authorities and the construction of a new razor-wire fence by the British. The violent attacks in Paris and the sexual assaults in Köln in 2016 reinstated Eurocentrism and the racialization of Muslims and Arabs, represented as culturally different and incompatible with “European values” (De Genova 2017: 10–11). Reintroducing temporary border controls across several European states since 2015, building fences in Hungary, Slovenia, Bulgaria etc., and adopting new laws on foreigners that curb migration are some of the measures that show how bordering and migration management have been dedicated to the processing of specific mobilities (ibid.: 9–11, 14–15).

We have argued above that practices of governmentality of plastic borders as a driver of contemporary migration management are not formed as a coherent policy plan or a political vision. Rather, these practices develop sporadically, as temporary reactions to tactics of autonomous migration. One recent example is the so-called Balkan migration route, re-opened since 2015 (the route has a long history of crossings) by migrants’ new mobility strategies. The Balkan route has shown, on the one hand, how autonomous migration can result in the transformation of policies, and, on the other, how plastic bordering fits the purpose of the Leviathan’s attempt to curb migration. Furthermore, the Balkan route has revitalized stereotypical constructs of “the Balkans” as European periphery (Zaviršek 2017: 51).

Persistent migration spurred by the march of migrants encamped at Budapest’s Keleti railway station towards Austria and Germany resulted in an opening of a “formalized humanitarian corridor”, officially recognized after Germany temporarily suspended the Dublin Regulation for Syrian refugees in September 2015. The corridor brought a temporarily recognized state of emergency, leading the countries along the route, after Hungary’s closure of its borders with Serbia and Croatia, i.e. Greece,

Macedonia, Serbia, Croatia, Slovenia, Austria and Germany, to facilitate movement through the provision of transportation and basic humanitarian aid (Ladić, Vučko 2016: 17; Beznec et al. 2016).

The corridor, which was analysed from the perspective of AoM as a “victory of the migrant liberation movement” (Lunaček, Meh 2016: 41) brought the unprecedented possibility of a border crossing that has not been illegalized. Still, migrants were compelled to resist border policing, e.g. migrants’ movements acting in concert with transnational activist movements at the border between Slovenia and Croatia in Rigonce/Harmice and Obrežje/Bregana (Kurnik 2015: 234–235), as well as other actions along the corridor. Even if the corridor allowed migration, “its aim was not to produce sustainable solutions and alternative long-term migration policies, but rather to ensure a swift transport of people which would transfer the responsibility for them to the next state as quick as possible” (Beznec et al. 2016: 61–62).

While the borders along the corridor were plastic enough, the movement was nevertheless closely surveilled revealing the Foucauldian “security dispositif” in the forms of army and police control. The dialectic of plasticity, i.e. the simultaneous softening and hardening of the borders was apparently at stake: the crossing was accompanied by constant surveillance, documentation, numbering, classification of people, including fingerprinting (Lunaček, Meh 2016: 33). The management of the corridor reveals governmentality of plastic borders that are in line with GAMM in their coupling of security and humanitarian measures. This confirms Bigo’s (2011) analysis of the strengthening of securitization in the name of protection and “freedom”; humanitarianism, just like securitization, are both strategies pushing the plasticity of bordering that are hard and violent even when soft and porous. Officially aimed at protecting free, open, lawful societies from exploitation, through such strategies, borders are actually built of “suspended law, producing a collective ethos that is defensive, nationalistic and militarized” (Brown 2010: 52).

The further development of the corridor shows the opportunism of governmentality through plastic borders. The exceptional transit soon united the states along the corridor in their voracious attempt to re-establish border control and eventually close the corridor (Beznec et al. 2016: 62). After the relative porousness of the borders in autumn of 2015, a hardening phase began in January 2016, when mobility was obstructed overnight. Based on NGO reports, Kogovšek Šalomon (2017: 260) analyses the “reinstitution of the crimmigrant approach” that first brought unfavourable treatment of non-SIA (Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan) nationals and later also of SIA nationals without appropriate papers, who were at some point prevented from continuing their journey.

Similarly, the author analyses how the EU-Turkey agreement, since March 2016, has reinstated crimmigrant rules governing migration management, when “deterrence and expulsion as the main goals of crimmigration policies prevailed once again” (ibid.). Crimmigration was introduced in all of the countries along the route in a domino effect, bringing the militarisation of border control, restriction of entry,

confinement of migrants in detention centres and restriction of access to asylum procedures. As one example, in January 2017 Slovenia introduced amendments to the Aliens Act which allow the state to close the border to asylum seekers, thus limiting access to international protection (Kogovšek Šalamon, Zagorc 2017), and similar changes were adopted in neighbouring Austria and Hungary. The VIS system and biometric passports have shrunk the possibilities for “visa appropriation”, as the system now recognizes (using fingerprints) if a person has already applied for asylum or has been rejected.

Governing by plastic borders as a direct response to migrant movement along the Balkan route led to both the opening and the closing of the corridor. While the corridor has remained closed, the route, historically marked by autonomous mobility, cannot be. What it can be and probably will be, however, is a site of application of new governmentality strategies in response to migrant mobility.

## CONCLUSIONS

Theorizing borders at the crossroads of violence and escape, we have shown in this article that borders are sites where people are active, and that suppression at the borders does not halt migrant activities. Applying the autonomy of migration approach to border analysis, we have shown how AoM presents itself best, as put by De Genova (2010), “as a manifestation of the elemental exercise or the ontological condition of human life, the human freedom of movement”.

Focusing on migrant subjectivities, borders were revealed as “bodily borders” – we have argued that bodies are the subjects on which control is applied and also that bodies remain the basic topos to escape and counteract control. These bodies, as it was shown, fit neither the picture of the victim nor the picture of violent individuals given by the media. Rather, borders are about migrants’ struggles, they are about specific practices through which migrants address the controllability of borders, trying to negotiate them through their own bodies. Border struggles always involve specific subjective positions, opening spaces and logics of citizenship (Mezzadra, Nielson 2013: 13–14).

Furthermore, we have shown how the governmentality of migration through “plastic borders” responds to migrant mobility in order to control it – “acknowledging the power of migrants’ itineraries”, institutional policies of mistrust are shaped as responses to migration movements and migrants’ acts of citizenship (Casas Cortes et al. 2015: 905). The distinctiveness of our contribution to the AoM approach and border studies lies in pursuing the thesis of the governmentality of current migration management through the introduction of plastic borders by the EU and its “walled states”, signalling “waning sovereignty and walled democracy” (Brown 2010).

The plasticity of borders as a process of governmentalization is inspired by migrants’ embodied mobilities – which, we have argued, are what is driving plastic

borders. The plasticity of bordering was analysed in line with the EU objective to manage migrants' escape strategies, which is evident in the EU's main policy framework, i.e. the Global Approach to Migration and Mobility (GAMM), in place since 2011. GAMM has enthroned border externalization as the main modality of plasticity, which was pursued in the hope of tracing migrant itineraries. The management of the Balkan route through the method of the corridor, exposing plasticity in the simultaneous hardening and softening of borders, i.e. introducing the crimmigration approach together with the softer humanitarian temporary allowance of passage, followed the governmentality approach as set out in GAMM. Such governmentality is a far cry from the possibility of understanding and approaching the movement of people as a basic human condition. Instead of understanding migrants' politicality at the borders and safeguarding it as expressions of active citizenship, plastic borders work to suppress human mobility.

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## POVZETEK

### AVTONOMIJA MIGRACIJ IN VLADNOST PLASTIČNIH MEJA

Mojca PAJNIK

Avtorica v članku analizira avtonomijo migracij, ki v preučevanju migracij in mobilnosti avtonomijo poudarja kot migrantski *praxis*. To ji omogoča misliti meje kot mehanizem nadzora, strateškega upravljanja in tudi nasilja ter hkrati kot migracijske strategije bega, ruptur, upora, politična dejanja, in to ne glede na pripisani migracijski status in ne glede na strategije nadzora. Avtorica meje analizira kot »utelešene meje«; te oblikuje telesnost ljudi, ki migrirajo ter redefiniirajo prostor in politike nje-govega upravljanja. Z uporabo Foucaultovega koncepta 'vladnosti' (*gouvernemental-ité*) in koncepta 'plastičnosti' (*plasticity*), kot ga analizira Malabou, poudari tezo, da upravljanje migracij danes uporablja mehanizem »plastičnih meja«, ki so oblikovane kot neposredni odziv na mobilnost migrantov. Plastičnost upravljanja migracij z namenom nadzora prinaša nenehno začasnost politik kot odgovore na aktualne prakse mobilnosti. Uporabi primer eksternalizacije meje, kot ga Evropska unija opredeljuje v dokumentu Globalni pristop k migracijam in mobilnosti, in ga izvede na primeru upravljanja balkanske migracijske poti, da bi pokazala, kako plastičnost, upogibanje in raztezanje meja z namenom nadzora nad migracijami deluje v praksi.

Bilateralni sporazumi in sistemi nadzora (EUROSUR, Frontex idr.) kot primeri eksternalizacije meja, ki jih legitimizirajo kot mehanizme zaščite domačega prebi-valstva, se izvajajo za slednje in za obvladovanje migracijskih poti ter so neposredni odgovor na mobilnost. Podobno humanitarni koridor na balkanski begunski poti ni bil primarno vzpostavljen kot mehanizem zaščite ljudi, pač pa je pospešil transport, da bi ljudje za azil zaprosili v državah zunaj balkanske poti. Plastičnost humanitarizma in sočasne sekuritizacije meja je v upravljanju balkanske migracij-ske poti delovala v funkciji ustvarjanja in posledično obvladovanja strahu, ki da ga predstavljajo migranti.