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Grains of dust in the Aegean archipelago: Unruly migrants and everyday resistance in EU hotspots

Luděk Stavinoha
University of East Anglia, UK

Abstract

This article centres the everyday resistance practices by illegalised migrants contained in EU hotspots in Greece. Set against the regime of violent abandonment governing these carceral spaces, the article draws on ethnographic research in the Aegean archipelago to explore how resistance is enacted, experienced, and suppressed. The analysis foregrounds three distinct tactics of resistance – *insubordination*, *insurrection*, *occupation* – whereby migrants, individually and collectively, seek to disrupt carceral mechanisms. By shifting the analytical focus to migrants' often barely visible dissenting practices, the article sheds new light on how modalities of bio/necropolitical power and resistance intersect in the everyday workings of the EU hotspots. It reveals how migrants transform these spaces into stages of (infra)political struggle against forced confinement, even if they are unable to fundamentally weaken the hotspot regime as such. The article concludes that attending to migrants' everyday resistance practices, however fragile, fragmented, and fleeting, is critical. These practices not only unmask the racialised violence that resides at the core of the hotspot regime but its inability to fully contain migrants' desire for autonomous movement.

Keywords

Camps, EU hotspots, migration, refugees, resistance

As the infrastructural centrepiece for disciplining "unruly mobility" at Europe's frontiers (Tazzioli, 2018), EU hotspots have attracted much scrutiny in critical border and migration scholarship since they were first installed on Greek islands in the Aegean Sea in 2015. Scholars have examined how security and humanitarian logics of spatial and temporal control intersect within the EU hotspots (Pallister-Wilkins, 2020a; Papada et al., 2020;

Corresponding author:
Luděk Stavinoha, School of Global Development, University of East Anglia, UK.
Email: l.stavinoha@uea.ac.uk

Tazzioli and Garelli, 2020). Others have cast light on the necropolitical conditions of abandonment inside the camps and their debilitating effects upon the thousands of people incarcerated within them (Iliadou, 2023; Pallister-Wilkins, 2022) – spaces that crystalise Europe's increasingly hostile politics of mobility control (Davies and Isakjee, 2019). Made up of camps and detention facilities on the islands of Lesvos, Samos, Chios, Leros and Kos, the Aegean archipelago, however, constitutes not only a spectacle of cruelty and one of the main sites of governmental experimentation in the deployment of carceral technologies. The archipelago is also an important site of "border struggles" (Mezzadra, 2020); sites where illegalised migrants, animated by an irrepressible desire for autonomous mobility, recurrently disrupt the smooth functioning of the hotspots through various disobedient practices (Spathopoulou and Carastathis, 2020; Tsavdaroglou et al., 2024). Indeed, as Vradis et al. (2020: 985) note, *despite* and *against* the multiple modalities of violence and control deployed to govern migrants, "resistance is still practiced every day opposing the hotspot logics" – be it in the form of publicly visible acts of collective claims-making to less perceptible acts of insubordination, subversion, and sabotage that lie at the centre of this article.

Drawing on long-term ethnographic research on the Greek islands between 2016 and 2022, this article proposes to shift the analytical focus towards the everyday "arts of resistance" (Scott, 1990) through which individuals contest their incarceration in the hotspots. It asks: How do people assert their capacity for political agency within the spatial confines of the hotspots? How is everyday resistance enacted, experienced, or suppressed, and how are these acts of contestation circumscribed by the modalities of violence and control through which hotspots are governed? Moving beyond the realm of publicly visible migrant solidarity movements and protests (Tyler and Marciniak, 2013), the main focus of this article is thus on "everyday resistance" (Vinthagen and Johansson, 2013) that takes place *inside* the hotspots. Approaching resistance practices in such securitised spaces necessarily entails delving into the domain of *infrapolitics* – the domain of "disguised, low-profile, undeclared resistance" (Scott, 1990: 198) that subordinated groups adopt under conditions of coercion, atomisation, and bare survival. "The logic of infrapolitics," writes Scott (1990: 200), "is to leave few traces in the wake of its passage" such that it "eliminates much of the documentary evidence that might convince social scientists and historians that real politics was taking place". In response to this erasure, this article foregrounds and interrogates moments when unruly camp subjects disrupt the hotspots' "mechanisms of power" (Vradis et al., 2020) through subtle, small-scale acts of resistance, transforming the archipelago into sites of struggle against forced confinement.

The risk associated with foregrounding such resistance "tactics" (De Certeau, 1988) is that we lose sight of the overpowering strategies of domination and forms of violence, both direct and structural, that pervade everyday life in the camps. I thus approach resistance and power as fundamentally "entangled, even co-constitutive forces" (Stierl, 2019: 27), and migrant agency as relational to a violent regime of mobility control of which the EU hotspots are an indelible component (Aru, 2021). More specifically, to avoid mythicising everyday resistance practices, it situates migrants' (infra)political agency (and its limits) in relation to the entangled biopolitical and necropolitical modes of governance through which migrants' lives are not only continuously disrupted and their agency severely debilitated, but that often overwhelm and subsume their daily subversions and interruptions.

In advancing a granular account of everyday resistance *within* and *against* the hotspot, this article makes two central contributions to ongoing debates in critical border and migration studies. First, it sheds new light on how those ensnared within the hotspot, individually and collectively, contest its brutalising logics by identifying three common tactics of

resistance – *insubordination*, *insurrection*, and *occupation*. Building on prior research on resistance in camps and immigration detention facilities (e.g. Boochani, 2018; Campesi, 2015; Puggioni, 2014; Tsavdaroglou et al., 2024), the analysis shows how migrants confront the "slow violence" (Mayblin et al., 2020) of the hotspot regime at the level of the everyday. By attending to these practices, we can, I argue, begin to better discern how (some) individuals are able to navigate and, temporarily, subvert carceral mechanisms designed to produce docile and deportable migrant subjects, while interrogating how collective mobilisation and the formation of transversal solidarities are continuously fractured by spatial and temporal mechanisms of control.

Second, ethnographic attentiveness to everyday struggles inside the hotspots offers an important vantage point for interrogating how the regime of violent abandonment in the Aegean archipelago simultaneously *creates* and *limits* the conditions of possibility of resistance. Taking migrant agency as an analytical standpoint (Tazzioli and De Genova, 2023), the analysis reveals how the hotspots function as "spaces of unfreedom" (Brankamp, 2022), yet where migrants' disobedient practices may point us towards "abolitionist vistas" (Mezzadra, 2020). Ultimately, I suggest that while they cannot fundamentally challenge, let alone dismantle, the hotspots as carceral technologies, attending to migrants' daily freedom-seeking practices, however fleeting, fragmented and ambivalent they may be, is critical. They not only unmask the racialised violence that resides at the core of the hotspot regime but its inability to fully contain migrants' desire for autonomous movement.

The article is organised as follows. In the first half, I synthesize existing research concerned with the EU hotspot regime, the entangled bio- and necropolitical modes of migration governance in the Aegean, and studies on political agency in refugee camps and detention facilities. Drawing on recent scholarship in the field of resistance studies, I then set out my conceptual framework for interrogating the intersections between everyday resistance and power in the hotspots, before discussing the associated methodological and ethical challenges. The rest of the paper offers an account of specific tactics of resistance, as well as their limits, drawing on testimonies of people contained in the Aegean archipelago. The paper concludes with reflections on the findings' implications for critical border and migration scholarship.

Hotspots: Regimes of violent abandonment

First established in Italy and Greece in late 2015, the European Commission's "hotspot approach" was meant to instil order at the EU's external borders amidst the "chaos" of unruly mobility following the long summer of migration (Papada et al., 2020). Presented as a "a novel governance mechanism" for managing migration (Vradis et al., 2020), the hotspot approach foresaw close cooperation between national and EU asylum and bordering agencies, including the European Asylum Support Office (EASO), Frontex and Europol, in identification, asylum, and deportation procedures. In the technocratic imaginary of its architects, the hotspots were conceived of as spaces for the swift processing of asylum claims and "the streamlining, absolute knowledge and control of populations on-the-move" (Kalir and Rozakou, 2016; Stavinoha, 2024). In practice, however, the hotspots became characterised by bureaucratic informality and irregularity following the March 2016 EU–Turkey agreement, which saw the Aegean archipelago turn into a site of prolonged confinement.[1]

Approached as a mode of governing unruly mobility, scholars have shown how the hotspot regime not only subjects migrants to pervasive bureaucratic "mechanisms of partitioning, identification and preventive illegalisation" (Tazzioli and Garelli, 2020), but how its

spatial and temporal logics of control channel and constrain migrants' mobilities beyond the material confines of the camps (Vradis et al., 2020). As Tazzioli (2018: 2764) argues, the hotspot regime "contributes to enforce forms of containment through mobility that consists in controlling migration by obstructing, decelerating and troubling migrants' geographies – more than in fully blocking them". Hotspots impose a panoply of spatial restrictions and ever-shifting legal and administrative measures upon migrant populations, who are partitioned according to nationality, vulnerability, and legal status, and subject to divergent and ever-shifting bureaucratic procedures and mobility regimes. In Greece, most migrants have been subject to an admissibility procedure that is designed to effectively prevent access to asylum by first determining whether Turkey constitutes a 'safe' third-country. While some asylum-seekers are, more or less swiftly, granted permission to travel to the Greek mainland, the vast majority has been subject to 'geographical restrictions': barred from leaving the islands, they have been trapped in a tortuous legal limbo for months, sometimes years, as they await the outcome of their asylum claims. By generating migrant populations with unequal mobility and settlements rights, hotspots are thus integral to the EU's racialised bordering regime (Pallister-Wilkins, 2022).

While hotspots are thus more than just physical infrastructures of spatial confinement, in the Greek context, thousands of people have been incarcerated inside the dilapidated and often desperately overcrowded camps of Moria (Lesvos), Vathy (Samos), or Vial (Chios) for prolonged periods of time. To fully grasp how (infra)political agency manifests within these spaces, it is therefore essential to approach the hotspots "from below" (Rygiel, 2011), enabling a deeper understanding of how migrants' lives are suspended amidst the ambivalent entanglements of humanitarian and securitising logics. Upon entering the hotspots, existing research has detailed how migrants are subjected to various biopolitical practices aimed at managing, monitoring, sustaining, and extracting data from camp populations. A plethora of humanitarian actors – UNHCR, 'vulnerability' experts, humanitarian NGOs, grassroots volunteers – operate within the camps to provide care (food, clothes, medical aid), and assist in the sorting and management of migrant bodies according to criteria of deservingness (Pallister-Wilkins, 2020a). In doing so, they have become uneasily entangled in the control and violent containment of migrant populations on the islands, particularly in the aftermath of the EU–Turkey agreement (Papada et al., 2020). For example, conceptualising the Moria hotspot on Lesvos as a "biopolitical borderzone", Topak (2020: 1873) shows how, under conditions of legal exclusion, prolonged confinement, and material precarity, waiting functions as a biopolitical "technique of power" that is "aimed at creating docile, submissive and depressed bodies and souls".

Other scholars have turned to the notion of *necropolitics* to theorise the way hotspot populations are not just governed but rendered disposable. Indeed, to conceive of the hotspots as spaces governed by *liberal-humanitarian* rationalities "in both idea and practice" (Pallister-Wilkins, 2020a) seems not to adequately account for how everyday life has been chiefly characterised by conditions of *violent abandonment*. Defined by Achille Mbembe (in Keady-Tabbal and Mann, 2023: 81) as the "systematic withdrawal of care and the renunciation of obligations towards a designated population", necropolitical violence manifests in the denial of the most basic biopolitical ingredients traditionally associated with quintessentially humanitarian spaces like refugee camps: the provision of water, nutrition, medical care, sanitation, shelter, and physical safety (Agier, 2011). In a comprehensive review of the "necroharms" inflicted upon migrants in the Moria hotspot on Lesvos, Illadiou (2023) shows how "abandonment and disposability" function "as a modus operandi of migration governance". Similarly, for de Vries and Guild (2018), the hotspots are sites where the violence of the border inscribes itself onto migrants' bodies through physical and

psychological debilitation, accumulating over time and space to produce a "politics of exhaustion". At its peak, Moria housed some 20,000 migrants, despite an official capacity of around 3,000. Consequently, thousands of people have had to endure conditions of extreme precarity, insecurity, and slum-like squalor in sprawling makeshift tent camps (Illadiou, 2023; Tsavdaroglou et al., 2024). In infrastructural terms, the Aegean camps embody, as Pallister-Wilkins (2020b: 78) presciently writes in her essay on shelter provision in Moria, a "politically crafted materiality of neglect and suffering" that is not the result of mere state negligence or incompetence but, rather, integral to the EU's deterrence policy.

Approached through a necropolitical lens, the hotspots thus form an integral component of Europe's racialised border regime, where "disposable 'Others' are not actively killed, but are instead kept injured, dehumanized and excluded, often through the deliberate and harmful inactivity of the state" (Davies and Isakjee, 2019: 214). At the level of the everyday, the hotspots subject their populations to various modalities of "slow violence", a concept that has been mobilised to probe how structural violence, dispersed across time and space, becomes intimately embodied in the lives of illegalised migrants at the level of the seemingly banal: the way people eat, dress, sleep, socialise (Mayblin et al., 2020). Slow violence sharpens our ability to appreciate how hostile asylum policies translate not only into intense physical and mental harms but produce subjects "so docile in the face of perpetual wounding, that any possibilities for resistance" are "quietened" (Mayblin et al., 2020: 120), if, importantly, not entirely erased.

Ultimately, as Davies et al. (2017) suggest, in the brute and often brutal realities of everyday struggles for survival in camps, bio/necropolitics need not be conceived of as "binary oppositional forces". Rather, they constitute distinct yet entangled modes of governance that seek to "render docile and compliant those subjects caught within its web … through the slow, gradual, almost imperceptible infliction violence" (Saunders and Al-Om, 2022: 531). For a study of everyday resistance in the hotspots, the key point to emphasise is how *both* modes of domination – the biopolitical management of camp populations and their necropolitical disawoval – intersect to strip "individuals of autonomy and selfhood" (Boochani, 2018: 528). In other words, hotspots are carceral technologies for confining undesirable migrant populations, removing them as *political subjects* from the public sphere (Osso and van Houtum, 2024; Stavinoha, 2019), while significantly constraining, if not entirely denying, their political agency inside the facilities.

Resisting encampment

For scholars working within the Autonomy of Migration paradigm (Mezzadra, 2020; Stierl, 2019; Tazzioli and De Genova, 2023), it is precisely migrants' stubborn refusal submit to states' bordering tactics, including their enclosure in camps and detention centres, that is accorded analytical primacy. From hunger strikes, riots, protests, powerful acts of defiance such as self-immolation or lip-sewing, to the realm of infrapolitical insubordination and individual acts of subterranean flight, numerous studies have explored the continuum of resistance practices through which migrants contest diverse carceral mechanisms (Boochani, 2018; Campesi, 2015; Lendaro, 2019; Puggioni, 2014). This body of work has contributed to a "post-Agambian" shift in the field of camp studies, away from readings of camps as totalising systems of control to complex socio-political spaces that always contain "fields of possibility for political action" (Martin et al., 2020: 11).

The question of migrants' resistance has most recently been taken up by scholars working within an abolitionist paradigm, rooted in the radical vision "to unmake encampment and, ultimately, end all forms of carceral humanitarianism" (Brankamp, 2022: 122).

While a thorough discussion of border abolitionism and its intellectual genealogy is far beyond the scope here (Bradley and de Noronha, 2022; Mezzadra, 2020), its emphasis on understanding how through everyday practices "illegalized border crossers objectively defy state powers, disregard the law, and subvert borders . . . for the sake of advancing their life projects" is critical (Tazzioli and De Genova, 2023: 8). Indeed, it is precisely due to the necropolitical horrors unfolding in the Aegean archipelago that it is essential to chart the practices through which migrants "counter, undo, disrupt, contradict, make visible, and chip away at camp logics" (Brankamp, 2022: 120). For in so far as the hotspots, like all camps, are bordering devices for containing and filtering (un)deserving and (un)desirable populations, then, as Vradis et al. (2020: 987) argue, interrogating migrants' "embodied practices of resistance" is integral to reimagining "what a subversion of the border might look like."

For Spathopoulou and Carastathis (2020: 9), the Aegean hotspots are sites where migrant resistance "punctures the seamlessness of the bordered reality in which and against which it takes place". Through various "spatial disobediences", such as refusing to be fingerprinted, migrants try to navigate datafied bordering systems and actively carve opportunities for autonomous, if always precarious, mobility (Tazzioli, 2018). Other studies have examined how digital technologies allow migrants to contest their enclosure in the hotspots by documenting abuses on their mobile phones and circulating testimonies via digital platforms (Stavinoha, 2019), while forging transgressive encounters and spaces of solidarity with the manifold grassroots citizen-led initiatives that operate across the Aegean (Mitchell and Sparke, 2020; Stavinoha and Ramakrishnan, 2020). Yet, while migrants' capacity for enacting political agency is readily acknowledged in existing literature on EU hotspots, there is scant research that attends to the everyday "tactics" through which migrants contest governmental "strategies" of control *within* these spaces (De Certeau, 1988). In the rest of this article, I thus want to follow Agier (2011: 65) who, in his anthropology of the camp, directs our attention to

> acts of refusal, confrontation or revolt [that] denote the moment . . . when disorder makes its appearance in the face of the order of the camps . . . and brings the refugees out of their anonymity as 'victims', supposedly without a voice or subjectivity.

It is in such moments of confrontation that a new political subject emerges: the *unruly subject* who is capable of transforming, albeit in fleeting and precarious ways, the "humanitarian stage" into "an unforeseen political one" (Agier, 2011: 157).

To approach these moments of refusal and disorder, I draw on work in the field of resistance studies which has advanced the concept of *everyday resistance* to understand how subaltern subjects challenge relations of power and domination through seemingly mundane practices and forms of struggle (Chandra, 2015; Lilja, 2022; Vinthagen and Johansson, 2013). Scott's (1990) foundational work on everyday resistance emphasised its essentially hidden or disguised nature. Constrained by forces of repression from engaging in overt forms of confrontation or rebellion, subjugated groups adopt low-profile tactics such as evasion, foot-dragging, sarcasm, passivity, or sabotage. However, more recent attempts to theorise everyday resistance suggest that this perspective obscures the multiplicity of forms of resistance and the complexity of their entanglements with power. Lilja (2022: 209) argues that "individual, small-scaled practices are not necessarily hidden", while disguised and subterranean modes of resistance can take on collective forms as well. Lilja and Vinthagen therefore propose the concept of "dispersed resistance" to account for resistance practices "which might be 'everyday' and subtle, or loud and extraordinary" but that do not

necessarily coalesce into sustained forms of collective action (2018: 212). Moving beyond the binary distinction between individual and hidden practices on one hand and organised, overt protest on the other is particularly important for examining resistance in the hotspots. As shown below, while many acts of small-scale resistance are spatially confined to the hotspots and do not reach wider publics, this does not mean that they are intentionally disguised from camp authorities.

What binds the multiplicity of everyday resistance practices together is that they entail some sort of challenge to existing power relations that are typically perceived as unjust. Everyday resistance is, in brief, an "oppositional act" (Vinthagen and Johansson, 2013). It follows that power and resistance are fundamentally *relational*; they are "interdependent and constitute/affect each other and, as a result, become entangled" (Vinthagen and Johansson, 2013: 26). Migrant agency, understood as "migrants' decision-making, strategies, counter-conducts and actions" occurs, as Aru notes, "under conditions of constraint" (2021: 1622). Such a relational approach is essential to avoid romanticising the hotspots as a breeding ground for rebellion. Instead, everyday resistance must be conceptualised as both a response to and as circumscribed by the existing regime of violent abandonment in the Aegean archipelago. At the same time, following Foucault, an analytical focus on resistance serves as "a chemical catalyst so as to bring to light power relations, locate their position, and find out their point of application" (in Stierl, 2019: 16). Examining how migrants challenge the constraints imposed on them through, for instance, non-compliance with camp regulations can thus illuminate the performativities of power inside the hotspots, and how transversal solidarity between different groups inside the camps becomes fractured.

By expanding our understanding of political agency, the concept of everyday resistance serves as a productive entry for probing how migrants navigate, disrupt, or undermine carceral logics inside EU hotspots – spaces that, by definition, do not permit full-blown acts of rebellion. Indeed, an important observation that emerges from work on migrant resistance is the need to move beyond traditional conceptions of political action – visible, collective forms of mobilisation and claims-making that directly and deliberately target the bordering apparatus (Hughes, 2022). Resistance does not only take the form of acts of refusal or negation; nor does it always subscribe to a *politics of visibility* (Tyler and Marciniak, 2013). As Kallio et al. (2021: 4007) note, "only a fraction of migrants gain access to such agency" that risks eliciting punishment or deportation. Equally, though, we must not let abstention from *manifest* resistance obscure mundane forms of infrapolitical agency that are, paradoxically, "seldom identified as political" (Kallio et al., 2021: 4007). In the context of a manufactured hostile environment intended to make everyday life intolerable, practices that enable migrants "to survive and to navigate the system cease to be 'only' survival strategies and can become a form of everyday resistance to slow violence and to the forms of power that lie behind it" (Saunders and Al-Om, 2022: 538). In other words, the slow violence of necropolitical abandonment meets the often barely perceptible practices of "slow resistance" (Saunders and Al-Om, 2022: 538). For example, although the Moria hotspot may have been "an institution of schooling in the bodily pedagogy of submission", Hamilakis (2022: 218) shows that it was unable to fully erase all traces of autonomy, with camp inhabitants organising their own systems of food provision, mirroring the hidden resistive practices of detainees in prisons (Ugelvik, 2011). Similarly, Tsavdaroglou et al. (2024) describe how people in Moria navigated the brutalities of the hotspot through "remarkable efforts of self-organization, solidarity and mutual help" – be it by sharing food, clothes, phones, information, collectively constructing improvised shelters, or providing emotional care. Through such mundane practices, migrants not only seek to attenuate the hotspots' necropolitical brutalities but create openings for imagining more hopeful and

dignified alternatives to the politics of encampment (Brankamp, 2022). Crucially, in contrast to heavily state-regulated carceral spaces like immigration detention facilities (Boochani, 2018; Campesi, 2015; Puggioni, 2014), everyday life in the hotspots was not characterised by pervasive surveillance and disciplinary control, even if Greek riot police and private security guards were always on stand-by. It is, paradoxically, precisely due to conditions of abandonment and overcrowding that people were able to forge precarious spaces of "liveability" and "sociability" (Tazzioli, 2024) that are key for cultivating and, as detailed in the next section, researching everyday resistance.

Methodological notes

Unlike the slave rebellions, peasant revolts, and popular uprisings that are the subject of Scott's (1990) classic treatise on subaltern resistance, there is only scant documentary evidence of the acts of subversion and sabotage that permeated everyday life in EU hotspots. I have tried to piece together some of these fragments through ethnographic research conducted to Chios, Samos, Lesvos, and Kos between April 2016 and July 2022. During 13 visits, most lasting two weeks up to two months, I spent about 12 months researching spaces and practices of migrant resistance in the archipelago, with additional data collection taking place in Athens and Thessaloniki. In between periods of fieldwork, I closely monitored *AreYouSyrious* and social media platforms run by grassroots solidarity initiatives in Greece – indispensable sources for following developments in different locations and rich repositories of volunteer and refugee testimonies of everyday border struggles (Ramakrishnan and Stavinoha, 2024).

My methodological approach is heavily indebted to scholars who seek to grasp how violence, resistance, and solidarity in camps are embodied in everyday practices, relations, and lived experiences (Boochani, 2018; Rygiel, 2011; Tyerman, 2021). Throughout my research, I resisted the lure of gaining fleeting state-sanctioned "access" to the hotspots (Rozakou, 2019). Aside from troubling ethical questions (Minca, 2022), the resulting production of knowledge, Rozakou (2019: 79) cautions, tends to reproduce "the border spectacle . . . while claiming to scrutinise it", with camps like Moria serving as "a never-ending inspiration for dystopic accounts of . . . destitution, abandonment and violence". Although I did not conduct research *inside* the fenced perimeters of the hotspots, I was nonetheless able to gain insights into the subterranean spaces where "vengeful dreams are created and nurtured" (Scott, 1990: 200) through conversations in the makeshift dwellings surrounding the hotspots, nearby cafes, parks, volunteer-run solidarity spaces, follow-up exchanges via WhatsApp and other digital platforms, as well as by spending considerable time "hanging out" with volunteers and refugees (Minca, 2022). During the early phase of my research, I also adopted a "volunteer-researcher" role (Jordan and Moser, 2020). I joined one of the main volunteer groups on Chios, providing support to newly arrived migrants at the shores and in Souda – a small refugee camp located in the island's main town where, unlike the official EU hotspots, volunteers had relatively unrestricted access.

By investing time into developing relations of trust, mutual understanding and familiarity through repeat visits and sustained immersion into refugee–volunteer solidarity networks and spaces, I was able to gain a degree of proximity, in both an embodied and affective sense, to everyday life in and around the hotspots. In contrast to research in informal and often ephemeral transit camps (Minca, 2022), many of the people I met were trapped on the islands for months, sometimes years and we were thus able to meet on multiple occasions. Along with countless informal conversations, I conducted semi-structured interviews with 63 asylum-seekers and 55 volunteers across the four islands.

Although the analysis below only features material from the former, the latter were key in informing my understanding of the changing landscape of migrant solidarity and carceral mechanisms. Though hardly a representative sample of constantly shifting camp populations, I spoke to refugees of various nationalities and histories of displacement. Some were travelling alone, others with their families; only a few self-identified as political activists. A majority were male, educated, and many had a command of English, an obvious methodological limitation but also a reflection of the differential distribution of political agency in camps.

Ethnographic research in Greece takes place in a context of endemic criminalisation of solidarity initiatives and escalating state violence against racialised migrants. Therefore, conducting interviews outside the camps was an important means of reducing risks to participants, many of whom were, at the time, undergoing asylum procedures and living in highly precarious conditions. In several cases, I interviewed people only after they had been granted permission to leave, or they had escaped, the archipelago. All efforts were made to remove identifying information, including by changing participants' names. While an ethnography of subaltern resistance always carries the risks of inadvertently enhancing the state's capacity for repression, it is unlikely that the findings reported here could realistically be appropriated by camp authorities, especially given that the kinds of resistance practices I describe are common and, thus, already known to security forces deployed to police the hotspots.

Researching camps raises not only methodological and ethical issues but questions of epistemic violence and erasure, too. Refugees, remarks Boochani (2018: 364), "are undervalued or misread in terms of the testimonies they provide . . . [T]hey are not involved in the construction and application of the concepts, critical debates and themes" that structure our understanding of the camp as a technology of power. Suspended between the figure of the victim and villain, refugees are rarely placed in a position to reflect on their predicament, to ascribe culpability for the cruelties they endure, or to articulate claims of (in)justice beyond calls for pity and compassion (Agier, 2011; Paynter, 2024). Without resorting to a naïve conception of a singular refugee voice or experience, Boochani's (2018) decolonial writings compel us to take seriously the testimonies of people warehoused in the Aegean archipelago; a commitment to excavating the "hidden transcripts" that contain a shared "critique of power spoken behind the back of the dominant" (Scott, 1990: xii), and that nurture everyday struggles for autonomy and freedom of movement.

In the analysis below, the aim is not to offer a comprehensive account of the multifarious ways that migrants resist their enclosure in the hotspots. Instead, I focus on three specific tactics to interrogate the creative, yet always fragile, contingent, and precarious ways through which unruly migrants transform the hotspots into sites of struggle.

Insubordination

The most common tactics of everyday resistance inside the hotspots are those that leave few, if any, traces: the barely perceptibly bodily gestures of disdain, the curse words, the silences, the refusals to comply with orders, the "trickery" (de Certeau, 1988) and the mockery directed against the arbitrary rules governing these spaces. Take the case of Hamza, for instance. A refugee from Aleppo, Syria, Hamza steadfastly refused to "live like an animal" and take part in what he perceived to be the dehumanising ritual of food hand-outs during the many months he lived in Souda camp. At times, while watching the daily spectacle of hundreds of people queueing for the volunteer-run distributions of food parcels from the sidelines, he would bleat like a sheep, mocking fellow refugees as docile animals and

volunteers as their sheepherders. Improvised and spontaneous, Hamza's act of insubordination is the archetypal form of infrapolitics – "a diagonal politics, a careful and evasive politics that avoided dangerous risks" (Scott, 2012).

Although they are devoid of explicit political claims, acts like these mark individuals' *refusal* to play a part in their humanitarian subjection, whereby camp residents are made dependent on food provision by state authorities or humanitarian actors. They constitute moments when individuals break with the "assigned identity" of the compliant camp subject (Agier, 2011). The collective manifestation of Hamza's playful transgression is the mass boycott of food parcels – often inedible, sometimes mouldy and crawling with maggots – delivered by military-procured catering companies, as evidenced by the recurrent sight of piles of aluminium boxes discarded around the hotspots. Amidst bans on cooking by camp authorities, such minor, mundane acts of insubordination, coupled with migrants' creative efforts to create their own subterranean systems of food provision (Hamilakis, 2022), form part of everyday struggles to reclaim spaces of autonomy. By boycotting the distributions, Hamza, and many others like him, were thus not only reasserting their personal dignity but subverting the most elementary humanitarian practice – a camp distribution – that reproduces biopolitical relations of power between those who give and those who receive. In other words, it is through such mundane acts that some migrants are able to temporarily transgress the basic dictum by which all camps are governed: "They must know how to receive while keeping their place" (Agier, 2011: 198).

Yet precisely because they constitute an affront to the micro-physics of power relations governing the hotspots, even seemingly mundane acts of insubordination often entail physical confrontation with camp authorities: cursing, shoving, shouting, fists banging, and the sudden eruption of rage borne out days and months of accumulated indignities. This becomes perhaps most apparent when camp subjects challenge the ordeal of prolonged waiting through what Lilja (2022) calls "breaking resistance": small-scaled, mostly individual, forms of non-cooperation or disobedience whereby migrants defy the rules, orders, and norms by which the camps are governed. Approached as a technology of power, waiting seeks to produce "docile" camp subjects by exacerbating conditions of physical and mental exhaustion (Topak, 2020). In its most tragic form, this "governing by choking" (Tazzioli, 2024) materialises in desperate acts of defiance, as when a pregnant woman set herself on fire on Lesvos in February 2021 after being refused a transfer to Germany that she had pleaded for months.[2] But beyond such spectacular moments of resistance, there are more ordinary ways that individuals disrupt the "temporal work" of carceral mechanisms that continually "steal migrants' lifetime" (Tazzioli, 2024: 1132). Inside the VIAL hotspot on Chios, for example, the "Info Point" became a common flashpoint for embodied confrontations between camp subjects and authorities. The Info Point is where people would often queue for hours, even days, to request updates about their asylum cases, renew their identity cards, or plead for better shelter or a doctor's appointment. Spatially concentrated in the form of a queue, it is here where the "intimately embodied" (Tyerman, 2021) slow violence of the camp crystallises in its most apparent form. Sara, a young woman from Morocco, recounted a confrontation with an Info Point employee, who had threatened to summon the police when she dared raise her voice at being told, once again, that she must wait for information about her asylum case. "You are educated in human rights, yes?", Sara retorted. "So the first thing you should do is treat me like a human. That is my right! You want to call the police? Fine, let's go to the police together." Though Sara had no illusions about the possibility of seeking justice as an illegalised migrant, she was able to – albeit temporarily – subvert established norms of (il)legal conduct that underpin the hotspot

regime by asserting her rights vis-à-vis an authority of the state, which, paradoxically, had confined her to a condition of illegality and deportability.

To fully appreciate such instances of insubordination as *resistance practices*, it is important to recall that they are enacted under conditions where violent reprisal, arbitrary punishment, or incarceration constitute an imminent risk. In other words, how everyday resistance manifests depends on the form of power and violence to which it responds (Saunders and Al-Om, 2022). Following De Certeau (1988: 37), tactics of "poaching" take place "on a terrain imposed on it"; they are, therefore, necessarily fragmented, composed of "isolated actions . . . without any base where it could stockpile its winnings", if any materialise at all. Evidently, then, these are not tactics aiming to affect radical change or abolition of the hotspot regime as such, nor are they capable of undoing the carceral mechanisms by which the hotspots are governed. As quintessential forms of "dispersed resistance" they do not coalesce into sustained forms of collective resistance nor are they "coupled with communicative networks" (Lilja and Vinthagen, 2018: 215), leaving few, if any, traces in mediated public spheres. At times quiet and subtle, at other times loud and confrontational, they contain a politics nonetheless, as they *disrupt the appearance of order in the camp* (Agier, 2011). In this sense, Sara's act of defiance reveals the mundane ways whereby individuals, even if only momentarily, are able to appropriate the stage of the camp to assert themselves as rights-bearing, unruly political subjects. This "public turning of the tables", Scott (1990: 215) maintains, is all the more powerful precisely because it takes place before an audience composed of others who are similarly disenfranchised. Under conditions of violent abandonment where full-blown displays of collective resistance are heavily penalised, it is through everyday interruptions and subversions that migrants chip away at the legitimacy of a bordering apparatus that is structurally unable to guarantee the rights they are due.

Yet, the architecture of impunity woven around the hotspot regime means that there is no addressee to whom rights-claims can be addressed and no formal deliberative mechanisms through which grievances can be meaningfully articulated from *within*. "We have no voice here. Because this is not a camp but a prison," a Palestinian refugee described the condition of speechlessness inside the hotspot on Kos. It is not that camp subjects are rendered mute, however. Indeed, the critique of impunity is a common thread that runs through individuals' testimonies and it speaks to how the hotspots are experienced as a "liminal space", governed by a shifting nexus of EU agencies, Greek authorities, and humanitarian actors, where "responsibility, accountability and liability are dispersed and, finally, untraceable" (Rozakou, 2019: 80). The subversive character of such speech becomes apparent when set against the ways that refugees are conventionally rendered as "the wretched and miserable" (Boochani, 2018: 91) in the public sphere. Their testimonies refracted through a humanitarian lens, the refugee appears as "the wordless victim . . . armed only with a voice expressing a monotonous moan . . . of naked suffering" (Jacques Ranciere in Agier, 2011: 196). It is precisely against this logic of depoliticization that Idrees, leader of the Pakistani community on Lesvos, recalled the many frustrating encounters with camp authorities inside Moria: "We are not dogs barking in front of you! Listen to the people! We are 61 nationalities in this camp who are facing this shitty situation – what are you going to do about it?" These, at times hidden, and other times publicly declared, transcripts constitute a form of discursive resistance against a carceral regime that seeks to stifle the ability of individuals to utter politically meaningful speech; a regime where "you have the right to be psychologically damaged but expressing your opinion is a crime", as Mahmoud, another Palestinian refugee on Kos, put it.

Insurrection

Given the systemic evasion of accountability and the ways that refugees' political speech, and the claims for justice encoded within it, is routinely misrecognised or suppressed, everyday resistance often materialises in the form of "raw declarations", when individuals are no longer able to repress the "impulse to rage, insult, anger, and the violence that such feelings prompt" (Scott, 1990: 37). Manifesting in the form of riots, fires set to shelters, destruction of containers housing the offices of asylum agencies, the suffocating web of accumulated indignities is such that all hotspots are perennially on the verge of insurrection. Indeed, all Aegean hotspots have witnessed multiple moments when migrants spontaneously *appropriate the stage* and temporarily transform the camp into *sites of insurrection*. Collective declarations of rage are often triggered by especially violent or tragic events. In September 2019, for example, the residents of Moria staged a spontaneous revolt upon discovering the charred remains of an Afghan woman after a blaze erupted inside her container. In April 2020, just hours after the death of an Iraqi woman in VIAL, large-scale protests broke out, with fires set to parts of the camp, destroying the facilities of EASO, a canteen, tents, and containers.

Zahra, an Afghan woman in her early 20s, had witnessed several deadly fires and subsequent protests during the seven months she lived with her younger brother in Moria. She explained how such insurrections materialise:

> I remember once a fire happened and afterwards the people got crazy, of course, because they saw people dying inside the fire . . . And always, you know, the first group to leave the camp is the police because they know they cannot control the people. There are more than 20,000 people . . . They are stressed, they're nervous, they're angry, and they just need [snaps her fingers], and boom.

These raw outbursts of rage offer important insights into the interplay between the slow violence of prolonged confinement and everyday resistance in the hotspots. Because the "politics of exhaustion" (de Vries and Guild, 2018) stifles the possibility for long-term collective mobilisation; because there are few social spaces where durable solidarities can form; and because camp populations are atomized, resistance often assumes the form of "unstructured acts of vengeance" (Scott, 1990: 217). Leaderless and improvised, such acts are rarely accompanied by carefully articulated political demands or manifestos. They are a quintessentially "incipient" form of abolitionist politics (Tazzioli and De Genova, 2023), in the sense that they manifest an *impulsive refusal of carcerality* by targeting the material infrastructures of containment. As Zahra explained:

> There was not really a leader to say: 'OK, we go tomorrow or next week, be ready, call the journalists.' When I was living there, not even once do I remember someone telling me: next week, we will have a protest. No, it was like: 'tomorrow people want to close the way for the food truck' or 'today the people are going, do you want to join them?' It was always like that . . . not something really planned.

Given their largely spontaneous nature, state authorities tend to dismiss these eruptions as apolitical acts of vandalism and to respond to them accordingly: with teargas, beatings, and indiscriminate, racially driven raids and mass arrests. Yet, it would be a categorical error not to recognise these as fundamentally political acts of resistance against an illegitimate carceral regime – manifesting in collective chants of "freedom!" and improvised

banners reading "Moria kills". Indeed, they are rooted in a shared lived critique of the regime of violent abandonment that people are forced to endure – be it the "hell" of Moria, in Zahra's case, or the "sadism" of the hotspot on Kos, as Shahid poignantly described the wanton cruelty of camp authorities during his months-long survival in a makeshift tent. In this sense, as Khosravi (2022) writes: "The action of burning down Moria in September 2020 was in the same line of burning cars, banks, or governmental buildings by poor people in other countries and continents". Indeed, I argue that these declarations of indignation are simultaneously a reaction to and serve to expose the slow violence of the hotspot regime; they embody the eruption of suppressed longing for freedom that simmers just beneath the surface in the Aegean archipelago.

Occupation

The precise articulation of everyday resistance is shaped by a confluence of factors: individual biography, collective identity, histories of displacement as well as people's lived experiences of violent abandonment inside the camp. Different refugee communities have distinctive modalities of contestation, derived from diverse socio-cultural repertoires of protest. *In Syria we die once, here we die everyday* was a phrase frequently uttered by Syrian refugees to capture the gradual yet continuous infliction of slow violence. The Congolese community in VIAL sang anti-colonial liberation songs, with abolitionist lyrics adapted to their present condition of refugeehood, during one of the many sit-ins staged inside the camp. As John-Mark, a refugee from Liberia, recounted:

> African people are singing slavery songs, songs of freedom, liberation songs: "we are not slaves", "we are not prisoners", "we need our freedom" . . . Sometimes when you see the protests, it's terrible because you can remember: it's like we are just like slaves . . . the slave trade . . . it's just like what's happening here.

Indeed, the most common form of collective protest inside the hotspots is the sit-in: groups of people gathering to occupy the space in front of ISOBOX containers housing the offices of the Greek Asylum Service (GAS) and EASO. Since the 2016 EU–Turkey deal, dozens of such protests have taken place across the archipelago. The sit-in constitutes a tactic of resistance deployed by groups of migrants to temporarily shut down the asylum apparatus. Its immediate aim is to communicate a singular demand to camp authorities: to speed up lengthy asylum procedures, grant asylum-seekers international protection and, most importantly, allow them to continue their interrupted journeys. "We didn't want to protest", Fatima, who arrived at Chios with her husband and two children, recalled one such sit-in in the VIAL hotspot in 2019. However, after several months during which no Afghan asylum-seekers were interviewed due to the prioritization of other nationalities, the Afghan community mobilized to protest when the asylum claims of several families were abruptly rejected. Several dozen men, women, and children gathered in front of the asylum offices, holding cardboard placards reading "Freedom" and "We need justice", and photos of the carnage caused by suicide bombings in Kabul, in rejection of the official claim that Afghanistan is a "safe place".

As all resistance practices in the hotspots, the sit-ins emerge from months of frustration and suppressed indignation against an asylum regime that is designed to illegalise and deport as many people as possible, while confining them to a state of prolonged uncertainty (Topak, 2020). People are brought together spontaneously by word-of-mouth, tent-to-tent, via WhatsApp chat groups. Guided by a *politics of limited visibility*, the aim of these protests

is not to penetrate the public sphere; no attempts are generally made to mobilise support from volunteers or activists through digital media networks (Stavinoha, 2019). They are spatially confined to the camp and temporally short-lived. Their aim is "just to attract the attention of the authorities inside", Farhad, a prominent figure amongst the Yemeni refugee community on Chios, explained.

Ultimately, few people I spoke to harboured illusions that protests like these can fundamentally challenge the hotspot regime's production of unequal mobility. Some, like Hamid, felt that resistance confined to the camp is futile:

> I don't think demonstrations will make any change for this camp because, you know, they have eyes. They see what situation refugees are living in. They know everything that's going on but they don't care . . . If you make some demonstration in VIAL, the employees are happy. They tell you: 'There is a demonstration today? OK, I'll go home. No work today.' It's a holiday for them.

Indeed, in many cases, camp authorities responded to the sit-ins by evacuating the EASO and GAS offices, issuing promises to speed up asylum procedures in attempts to defuse the immediate situation, yet often leaving these unfulfilled. Nonetheless, while they may succeed in gaining only limited concessions (e.g. transfers of individuals of particular nationalities to the mainland), these periodic occupations constitute acts of collective insubordination through which migrants recurrently assert their presence as rights-bearing subjects vis-à-vis a depersonalised bureaucratic apparatus that has suspended their lives in a tortuous legal limbo. Though they may fail to affect shifts in power arrangements that underpin the state's categorisation of (il)legal and (un)deserving migrants, it is important not to underestimate the transformative effects (quasi-)public declarations of indignation may carry for the individuals concerned by restoring their "sense of self-respect and personhood" (Boochani, 2018; Scott, 1990: 210). As one Gambian asylum-seeker said after four months in the "Jungle" of the Samos hotspot, moments of protest are a means to assert "our right to reclaim our anger". This suggests that their radical potential resides not in the promise of overturning the hotspot regime as such but, rather, in disrupting established norms that define who has the authority to speak as a political subject both inside and outside the camp's spatial boundaries.

Fears and fractures

The tactic of the sit-in also brings to light the *limits of collective mobilisation* inside the hotspots. There are three closely related factors which undermine the formation of transversal solidarities between camp inhabitants. First, solidarity is fractured along national, religious, linguistic, gendered and racialised lines; forces that intersect to divide camp populations and silence some groups. Women are often marginalised during protests, while refugees from sub-Saharan Africa spoke of their experience of racialised discrimination and hostility not just from camp authorities but fellow camp residents. "They tried to do a protest unanimously asking everybody to come on board. But it doesn't work," John-Mark said when asked about attempts to bridge divides between different communities in VIAL. "What I've seen is country-by-country during the four months I've spent here: I've seen Somalians, the Arab people, the Congolese doing protests." Each sit-in is thus often confined to a distinct community, as different nationalities are effectively forced to compete against each other vis-à-vis the asylum apparatus. Indeed, though hostilities between different national, religious, or ethnic groups that play out in the camps may have deep

historical roots, they are exacerbated by techniques of governmental control that are integral to the everyday implementation of the hotspot regime (Papada et al., 2020). Bureaucratic "segmentation" of asylum cases, whereby some nationalities are prioritised over others on grounds of efficiency, has been found to contribute to "inter-ethnic tensions and riots . . . reflecting the frustration of certain nationalities waiting for months without being given access to the asylum procedure" (ECRE, 2016: 47).

Second, it follows that the fractured, differential mobility that the hotspots' filtering logic sets in motion undermines the possibilities for any kind of slow, sustained, laboursome movement-building. The hotspots are spaces of fleeting encounters; the population of each camp is in permanent flux. Few have the desire to invest themselves in a struggle to transform the place they want to leave as quickly as possible. At the same time, community leaders who transgress the bounds of quiescent collaboration with camp authorities, activist-refugees, and other 'trouble-makers' are often swiftly relocated. Unlike the large city-camps in the Global South (Agier, 2011), the social ties that form between refugees and with solidarity networks on the outside are continually fractured by their desire to move, be it through authorised transfers to the Greek mainland, resettlement to other European countries, or unauthorised acts of fugitivity. Consequently, there is no linear relationship between practices of micro-resistance and collective struggle (Lilja, 2022).

Finally, resistance is thus tightly circumscribed by the threat of unleashing the full brutality of the hotspot regime. Resistance is calculated, cautious, as acts of contestation that reach beyond the spatial confines of the camps are typically brutally contained by riot police (Legal Centre Lesvos, 2019). Power and resistance may be entangled, but that does not mean they are equivalent forces; migrants' agency in the hotspots is severely constrained by their condition of legal and material precarity on one hand and the state's ability to exercise arbitrary and excessive punitive measures to discipline non-citizens. Indeed, as all carceral institutions, the hotspot imposes docility through the ever-present threat of violence and, in the case of asylum-seekers, deportation. As John-Mark explained:

> Sometimes people fear to protest because they think if you protest, they [the authorities] will see you. Most Africans fear to talk to people, even people like you . . . I've heard some people organising but it doesn't work because lots of people fear that it will affect them in their asylum process.

This also explains why there are few records-written testimonies, photos, or videos-circulating across digital platforms of the acts of resistance that punctuate everyday life within the camps. "So many times I've had my hand on my pocket, wanting to take my phone out and take a photo or a video, to document something. But at the last minute I always decided not to," Ramadan, a young man from Gaza in VIAL, said. Ramadan's statement speaks to the way resistance practices are circumscribed by the specific spatial and technological design of individual facilities, generating differential conditions of "obstructed agency" (Tazzioli, 2024). On Kos, for example, detainees in the heavily policed pre-removal detention section of the hotspot have the cameras on their mobile phones smashed by security personnel. This stands in contrast to quasi-open camps like Souda on Chios or the Vathy hotspot on Samos, which blended with surrounding urban settings, allowing for spaces and relations of solidarity between camp subjects and citizen-activists to form (Stavinoha and Ramakrishnan, 2020). As Lendaro (2019) shows in her study of Italian hotspots, migrants' subtle refusals and acts of insubordination *can* and *do*, at times, transform into collective mobilisations staged in public spaces. This has also been the case in the Greek hotspots, which were *not* entirely closed facilities throughout most of their existence,

allowing for spontaneous eruptions of collective rage to, at times, spiral into protests, riots, and marches outside the perimeters of camps, only to then be swiftly contained by the state's repressive apparatus (Tsavdaroglou et al., 2024).

Moreover, these *always-already* precarious and policed infrastructures of solidarity are being aggressively dismantled by the Greek state. Under thinly veiled racist discourse, the Greek state instrumentalised the COVID-19 pandemic to further segregate camp populations, while deploying the full force of the penal-judicial apparatus to criminalise their exercise of political agency (Legal Centre Lesvos, 2019). Additionally, following the destruction of Moria in September 2020, migrants arriving to the islands are now being contained in the remotely located and heavily securitised Closed-Controlled Access Centres (CCACs) that are replacing the dilapidated hotspot camps. From drones to CCTV cameras equipped with motion analysis algorithms, migrants are subject to pervasive (albeit imperfect) surveillance technologies inside these new *de facto* detention facilities (Emmanouilidou and Fallon, 2021). Consequently, migrants' capacity to engage in acts of contestation have become increasingly constrained, though not entirely suppressed, as evidenced by periodic reports of eruptions of resistance (AreYouSyrious, 2022; Osso and van Houtum, 2024).

Conclusion

The Aegean hotspots, like all refugee camps, "are managerial solutions that disappear the displaced" (Brankamp, 2022: 107), a disappearance that entails not only physical segregation and incarceration. Rather, the technocratic imaginary that propels the hotspot to contain, filter, and deport those whom it ensnares, must, to maintain its veil of legitimacy, expunge from the official record traces of insubordination, insurrection, and migrants' everyday struggles against their enclosure. It is against this erasure that this paper has sought to capture the "grains of dust that jam the machinery" (Agier, 2011: 7) tasked with disciplining illegalised migrant populations in the archipelago. This is not to suggest that camps in the Aegean are a carnival of resistance. Neither is the aim to romanticise the struggles of people who have been illegalised, detained, and abused for the sole reason of having crossed sovereign borders without authorisation, nor to attenuate the necropolitical brutalities and biopolitical modes of control that pervade these spaces, and the irreparable physical and psychological injuries they leave in their wake (Iliadou, 2023). Rather, the attempt has been to foreground the everyday practices through which migrants contest the carceral mechanisms that silence, stifle, and choke their lives, as well as their limits, contradictions, and the conditions of debilitated agency under which they take place.

Because resistance that takes place inside the camps leaves few traces, the account presented here is inevitably partial and fragmentary. Indeed, as in other carceral contexts (Saunders and Al-Om, 2022), resistance in the hotspots is itself fragmented, fractured, and fleeting, consisting largely of spontaneous acts of insubordination and insurrection. Because resistance and power are, by definition, entangled (Lilja, 2022), the effects of the everyday acts of resistance that materialise within these spaces are necessarily ambivalent; they are tightly circumscribed, and oftentimes overwhelmed, by the brutalities of violent abandonment. They do not manifest in fully-fledged abolitionist claims, nor do they amount to a cohesive political project, as evidenced by the fact that no coordinated refugee-led mass protest spanning the entire archipelago has thus far taken place. Confined spatially to the perimeters of the hotspots and temporally short-lived, the tactics of resistance documented above evidently do not, in and of themselves, have the capacity to fundamentally weaken a bordering regime that disrupts migrants' journeys and manufactures conditions of

precarity, irregularity, and deportability, even if they may succeed in momentarily *disrupting* carceral logics and *appropriating* the camps as sites of struggle.

Ultimately, the policy architects of the hotspot regime do not require their fantasy of orderly migration management to be fully realised to fulfil the political objective of signalling to EU electorates that punitive action is being taken against unruly migrants. In brief, the hotspot regime does not have to function flawlessly, just well enough.[3] Yet, as Chandra reminds us, though subaltern resistance rarely fundamentally weakens existing social arrangements and power constellations, "the *failure of resistance* ought to be differentiated from the *failure to resist*" (2015: 565; original emphasis). Two implications follow for critical migration and border scholarship.

First, following Tazzioli (2024: 1136), if we move beyond viewing resistance solely "in terms of victory or failure", we can better appreciate how, taken together, migrants' disobedient practices that punctuate everyday life in the hotspots embody an "active intolerance" of "the intolerable functioning of the asylum system at large" (2024: 1136). Beyond their most immediate expression – whether insubordination vis-à-vis camp authorities, spontaneous insurrections, or collective protests against exclusionary asylum procedures – these resistance practices thus always contain an *excess*. They embody, I suggest, a lived critique of violent enclosure in the Aegean archipelago, animated by a desire for autonomous mobility. As such, these practices provide a critical lens for approaching the hotspots as a central component of the "confinement continuum" (Tazzioli, 2024), along which illegalised migrants are systematically policed, brutalised, and segregated. As demonstrated in this paper, this implies attending to resistance practices beyond the realm of collective mobilisations and organised migrant solidarity activism staged in the public arena. Resistance, as I have shown , can also be located in the mundane and more-or-less visible practices through which migrants assert their presence, claim their rights, and seize relative autonomy within these spaces of unfreedom. There is, in this sense, a close affinity between resistance practices that occur in the hotspots and other carceral institutions like immigration detention facilities or prisons, where resistance may be "ever-present but hidden" (Turner and Whyte, 2022; Ugelvik, 2011). Centring the diverse ways that people refuse to submit to different carceral mechanisms, while attending to the *fragilities* of resistance and solidarity, is, I suggest, essential for grounding scholarship committed to the politics of border abolitionism (Bradley and De Noronha, 2022; Tazzioli and De Genova, 2023).

Second, with violent pushbacks of migrants at sea a systematic practice by the Greek state – endorsed politically, financially, and logistically by the EU – the Aegean archipelago has become an intensified site of border violence in recent years (Keady-Tabbal and Mann, 2023). At the same time, the new EU-funded CCACs on the islands, hailed by political leaders across Europe as an infrastructural blueprint for managing unruly mobility, are geared towards invisibilising racialised migrant populations and pre-empting the archipelago from becoming, once again, a central stage for Europe's border struggles. Amidst this intensification of carcerality and state violence, preserving the traces of migrants' everyday struggles against their enclosure becomes, analytically and politically, all the more urgent.

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ORCID iD

Luděk Stavinoha https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2031-0498

Notes

1. Under the agreement, Turkey committed to tightening border controls to prevent 'irregular' migration to the Greek islands, with those arriving to be swiftly returned. In exchange, Turkey received €6 billion for refugee assistance and a promise of visa-free travel for Turkish nationals to Europe. While crossings to Greece declined significantly, few migrants have been deported to Turkey since the deal. Instead, thousands of people have been contained on the islands, undergoing lengthy asylum procedures.
2. The woman, severely injured, was subsequently charged with arson and destruction of public property by Greek authorities (Smith, 2021).
3. I am indebted to the anonymous reviewers for pushing me to think through these critiques.

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Luděk Stavinoha is Associate Professor in Media and Global Development at the University of East Anglia. His research focuses on the politics of border control and migrant solidarity in Europe.