

Book review forum

Dialogues in Human Geography

1–4

© The Author(s) 2021

Article reuse guidelines:

sagepub.com/journals-permissionsjournals.sagepub.com/home/dhg

Martina Tazzioli, *The Making of Migration: The Biopolitics of Mobility at Europe's Borders*. London: Sage, 2019; 184 pp. 9781526464040, £25.99

'Migration thinking': Embracing mobility all the way down

Reviewed by: Maribel Casas-Cortes, *University of Zaragoza, Spain*

DOI: 10.1177/2043820621989592

As a border and migration scholar myself, I am always on the lookout for the very needed studies that do not objectify nor take migration for granted. This is precisely one of Tazzioli's main quests, going against the 'reification' of migration as a sociological category (p. 2) and beyond its 'containment' (p. 147); thus reversing its supposed destiny to become both a victim and a target of the humanitarian-security complex. Indeed, while engaging the rigorous argument running throughout *The Making of Migration*, I could not avoid but thinking of *Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World*, where Arturo Escobar—my doctoral advisor back at UNC-Chapel Hill—, engages in a similar Foucaultian enterprise of shaking unquestionable yet policy-driven notions, able to mobilize institutions, NGOs, grassroots actions and public opinion. As such, I foresee Tazzioli's book being praised for its nuanced and sophisticated intellectual contributions. Furthermore, I expect it to become a landmark intervention within and beyond academia, inspiring critiques and alternatives to dominant and problematic power-knowledges. Echoing another trait of *Encountering*

Development (Escobar, 2012), Tazzioli's book reaches broadly, unbound from disciplinary canons.

Drawing from geographers, anthropologists, philosophers, sociologists, and political scientists, this book is not just for migration and border studies, but speaks to scholarship of the social sciences and humanities at large. This is due to the very argument of the book which posits migration not only as a complex and challenging object of study, but as the very analytical lens to study broader processes of power articulation and the formation of political subjectivities. In fact, taking mobility as a point of view is one of the main tenants of the research tradition known as Autonomy of Migration inspired by Boutang's historical appraisal of mobility as the engine of socio-economic transformation (Moulier Boutang, 1998) and represented by works such as *Border as Method* (Mezzadra and Neilson, 2013); *Keywords on Migration and Borders* (Casas-Cortes et al., 2015); *The Borders of Europe* (De Genova, 2017). Throughout the manuscript, drawing on authors linked to Autonomy of Migration theses and taking migrants' statements and practices seriously, Tazzioli shows how her work is deeply embedded in this theoretical and political trend. Furthermore, her approach is grounded in feminist, critical race, post-marxist and post/de-colonial theories, whose authors also pepper the pages of Tazzioli's book. Bringing intersectional analysis and the refusal to objectify the supposed 'object' of study, migration is posited as the very point of departure for conducting a deep questioning of categories, which are usually articulated as binarisms both inaccurate and hurtful. Indeed, Tazzioli explicitly intends to conduct a theoretical undoing of unquestionable pairings, what she calls 'operations of disjoining, which consist of decoupling a taken for granted nexus'

(p. 102), such as ‘mobility vs. control’ (p. 127), ‘citizen vs. migrant’ (p. 144) and others. This dismantling of assumed articulations within the realm of migration governmentality speaks to the *Decolonial* notion of ‘border thinking’ (Mignolo and Tlostanova, 2006). Building on Anzaldúa’s praise of the *mestiza* as a unique site of enunciation able to embrace simultaneous multiplicity, the border becomes the place from which to think differently and insightfully with a non-dualistic framework. Building on such a borderland gaze, Tazzioli pushes the very tradition of Autonomy of Migration further, with an invitation to enact a kind of ‘migration thinking’, by making mobility the core of a transformed epistemology and ontology to address the present. In addition to being taken as a point of view, in *The Making of Migration*, mobility is distinctively argued to be the object and technology of restrictive migration policies, as well as the catalyst to reshape the very meaning, practices and subjectivities of what constitutes the political.

Tazzioli advances this provocative argument based on multi-sited ethnographic research through different ‘internal frontier-spaces’ within the EU, collecting empirical material at the French-Italian and Swiss-Italian borders, in Calais, in Paris, in Sicily and on the Greek Islands. Without intending a comparative study, she digs into the resonances between different transit places within those geographies, such as migrant camps, asylum centers, informal migrant transit points and official EU migration hotspots. In this way, this study is able to identify patterns of control and excesses to it, becoming an exemplary case of an ‘ethnographic border regime analysis’ (Hess, 2012). Through meaningful details drawn from interviews and the attentive presence of the author among the different actors involved in these border zones within the EU, the book thoroughly shows how contention and spatial enclosure is simply one more technology of control used toward what is considered ‘unruly mobility’ embodied by those who have not been granted visas or asylum. In fact, the author provocatively argues how the mobility of those that have been ‘racialized’ and ‘labeled’ as migrants and refugees is targeted and managed by migration policy through keeping them on the move constantly and exhaustingly: ‘shifting the focus from the government of mobility to

government through mobility’ (p. 120). As such, forced mobility becomes a strategy of deterrence, wresting material resources and spatial terrain from migrants through police strategies of dispersal, including the use of eviction, harassment and the dismantling of temporary settlements. Building on historical analyses, Tazzioli develops a colonial genealogy of dispersal ‘to highlight the partial historical continuity’ (p. 115) with ‘tactics for disciplining colonial populations—in the colonies as well as in the metropolis’ (p. 111). This process of constant and potential displacement provokes conditions of vulnerability with bio-political effects on migrants’ possibilities of livelihood. Tazzioli’s engagement with the material and temporal consequences of such ‘produced and protracted vulnerability’ (pp. 52, 58, 64) resonates well with other induced precarities in resistance (Butler et al., 2016), connecting many *vulnerabilized* sectors with the condition of migrant-hood (Feldman, 2015). In fact, much of my work deals with those ‘transversal alliances’ (p. 138) Tazzioli’s posits as potential ways of going beyond thinking of migration as an isolated issue. So called migrants and non-migrants come together into heterogeneous and temporary alliances given shared conditions of precarization, struggling together for common infrastructures to cope with unbearable uncertainty, re-claiming access to housing, to medical care, to education, to move and to stay, etc. (pp. 142, 146, 157). I personally appreciate this amplification and problematizing of migration as a potential condition and struggle *of and for* anyone under any induced vulnerability. As such, mobility is contended not only as a mode of governing. Also, mobility becomes a way of politicizing the ‘mob’, refreshing the meaning of politics building upon the experiences of those who are struggling to make livable lives whether on the move *or* in situ. This book brings attention to the political-ness of migration, often discredited and even criminalized as non-political. Therefore, through the angle of mobility, this book ultimately wrestles with the broader and bothersome question of who counts as a political subject and who does not? Building on a refined reading of Foucault and bringing Fanon’s work on the French colonization process in Algeria, Tazzioli contributes to key debates on agency vs. victimhood, unpacking

processes of objectification and subjectification. In this way, *The Making of Migration* develops a missing yet crucial area of political theory, mainly by exploring how do political practices and subjectivities look like among protractedly vulnerable and constantly volatile collective formations? ‘Frantz Fanon equip us with analytical tools for politicizing the migrant’s body’ (p. 49). Understanding how the colonizer vs. colonized relationship is shaped historically becomes insightful to understand the formation of hierarchies and simultaneous processes of object/subject making among refugees and asylum-seekers today. For instance, building on Fanon’s theory of the pathologization of the colonized, Tazzioli explains the obsession with biometric data as coming from the notion of the asylum seeker as pathologically incapable of telling the truth, and thus the need to directly read the body itself, looking for an ‘epidermic truth’ by neurotic fingerprinting for instance (p. 76). Furthermore, I celebrate the use of Fanon as a very pertinent move within the geo-politics of knowledge in the field of EU migration governmentality.

For all those reasons, the book might be taken as a theoretically well-grounded and empirically proven provocation for radically shifting research approaches toward migration, and challenging political stances, including critical ones. In terms of analytical shifts, Tazzioli makes a series of critiques and propositions that she takes on in her own study, mainly pushing research in the following ways: a) beyond the state gaze and actively against methodological nationalism; b) beyond presentism and engaging in a genealogy of both technologies of control and unusual political formations with the example of ‘motley pirate crews’ (p. 142); c) beyond methodological individualism and reversing liberal notions of resistance and political action; d) beyond exclusively spatial approaches to migration control and complementing those with biopolitical analyses of the material and subjective effects upon those affected by current border regimes.

A promising mobility lexicon

Mobility has become an official keyword within EU neoliberal discourse, being equated with a flat understating of freedom of movement for a few, and

unproblematic circulation of goods, all within the perimeters of the EU (p. 127). In Tazzioli’s work mobility is ‘re-appropriated’ in three ways: 1) as the analytical point of departure (focusing on transit points of all kinds); 2) as the center-piece of her research findings (mobility as technology of control, through a variety of mechanisms of colonial origin; and 3) as a renovated source and site of politics (volatile heterogeneous formations able to re-inscribe Europe, and thus, the author argues, the need for a historical archive of collective migrant struggles). Such a thorough embracing of mobility is translated into a rich lexicon that is introduced and further developed through the different chapters, advancing original terminology, to name a few: ‘migrant multiplicities’ and ‘migrant singularities’ (chapter 1); ‘disjointed knowledges’ and ‘politics of disregard’ (chapter 2); ‘data-objectification’ and ‘para-citizens’ (chapter 3); ‘choked mobility’ and ‘scanty multiplicity’ (chapter 4); ‘spatial disobediences’ and ‘mobile communing’ (chapter 5). Indeed, the book offers a prolific production of concepts, laying the groundwork for innovative future research agendas that fully embrace mobility, all the way down.

Author’s note

This piece is written under a research fellowship known as ‘*Ramon y Cajal*’ awarded to the author by the European Social Fund and the National Spanish Research Agency (# RYC2018-024990-I).

References

- Butler J, Gambetti Z and Sabsay L (eds) (2016) *Vulnerability in Resistance*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Casas-Cortes M, Cobarrubias S, De Genova N, et al. (2015) New keywords: Migration and borders. *Cultural Studies* 29(1): 55–87.
- De Genova N (ed) (2017) *The Borders of ‘Europe’: Autonomy of Migration, Tactics of Bordering*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Escobar A (2012) *Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Feldman G (2015) *We Are All Migrants: Political Action and the Ubiquitous Condition of Migrant-Hood*. Stanford, CA: Stanford Briefs.

- Hess S (2012) De-naturalizing transit migration: theory and methods on an ethnographic regime analysis. *Population, Space and Place* 18: 428–440.
- Mezzadra S and Neilson B (2013) *Border as Method, or, the Multiplication of Labor*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Mignolo WD and Tlostanova MV (2006) Theorizing from the borders: shifting to geo- and body-politics of knowledge. *European Journal of Social Theory* 9(2): 205–221.
- Moulier Boutang Y (1998) *De l'esclavage au salariat: économie historique du salariat bridé*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France.