

# The Politics of Exhaustion and the Externalization of British Border Control. An Articulation of a Strategy Designed to Deter, Control and Exclude

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## ABSTRACT

In response to contemporary forms of human mobility, there has been a continued hardening of borders seeking to deter, control and exclude certain groups of people from entering nation states in Europe, North America and Australasia. Within this context, a disconcerting evolution of new and increasingly sophisticated forms of border control measures have emerged, which often play out within bilateral arrangements of “externalised” or “offshore” border controls. Drawing on extensive first-hand field research among displaced people in Calais, Paris and Brussels in 2016–2019, this paper argues that the externalization of the British border to France is contingent upon a harmful strategy, which can be understood as the “politics of exhaustion.” This is a raft of (micro) practices and methods strategically aimed to deter, control and exclude certain groups of people on the move who have been profiled as “undesirable,” with a detrimental (un)intended impact on human lives.

## INTRODUCTION

The past decades of accelerated globalization and global mobility have witnessed a concomitant growth in border control methods (Bosworth et al, 2018: 35). Predominantly white, prosperous liberal democratic countries located across Europe, North America and Australasia have resorted to increasingly drastic measures to make their borders impenetrable to certain “undesired” groups, while making the same borders “hyperpermeable to desired groups and individuals as well as certain goods and services” (Mountz and Hiemstra, 2012: 455; see also Sparke, 2006). Aimed to deter and exclude, states’ policies of “*non-entrée*” (Hathaway, 1992: 40–41) are often contingent upon a strong element of delegation of migration controls to a third country acting as containment state (Barbero and Donadio, 2019: 137). This well-studied and researched phenomenon has been termed as “extraterritorial migration control” (Dastayari and Hirsch, 2019: 435), “deterritorialized control” (see FitzGerald, 2019: 4) and “externalization” (Hyndman and Mountz, 2008: 249–269; Akkermann, 2018; Zaiotti, 2016; Loughnan, 2019b).

What typically springs to mind when discussing externalization of border controls are subordinate relationships between a country in the global North and a counterpart from the global South, with

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Italy and Australia as obvious examples. In the context of Australia, known for its long-standing refugee policy rooted in the idea of deterrence (Pickering and Lambert, 2002: 76), a “ring of steel” (Dastyari and Hirsch, 2019) is excluding and containing prospective asylum seekers and other individuals on the move through extraterritorial migration controls on Nauru and the infamous and now-closed Manus Island detention facilities. Australia is also dependent on Indonesia for extraterritorial migration control, through detection, detention and deportation. In the Mediterranean, the European Union (EU) and its member states have taken the approach of “letting die” (Garelli and Tazzioli, 2019; Tazzioli, 2019b) as a form of deterrence for future migrants and asylum seekers (OHCHR, 2014) combined with Italian-led cooperation with Libya, and Spanish-Moroccan bilateral agreements aimed at containing and preventing migration to Europe via northern Africa.

In recent years, it has become increasingly clear that similar relationships of externalization of border control and the use of containment states are also a phenomenon between European states themselves, constituting what Barbero and Donadio (2019) refer to as “internal externalization.” The United Kingdom, never an adherent of the Schengen Agreement and Convention, openly promotes the offshoring of its borders as a corner stone of its border “defence” (Ryan, 2010: 10), with France acting as its third-party containment state. In contrast to the relatively widespread, if intermittent, political and media activity directed at the migratory situation in northern France, a sustained academic interest has arguably been slower to take root, with some important exceptions.<sup>1</sup> In any event, little academic attention has been accorded to the specific nature of the technologies and “tactics of bordering” (De Genova, 2017b) inherent in the externalization of the British border and the impact thereof. This article builds and draws on literature that examines new technologies for border control and externalized border enforcement.<sup>2</sup> In doing so, it contributes to an emerging body of scholarship that looks at how states are resorting to increasingly sophisticated (micro) practices and policies to deter, exclude and control, by influencing the choices and intention of people on the move.

The argument put forth is twofold. Firstly, it is argued that the “internal externalisation” (Barbero and Donadio, 2019) of the UK border controls to France is dependent upon an inherently harmful set of (micro) practices and methods, best understood as a “politics of exhaustion,” a new technology of border control and mobility governance, which aims to deter, exclude and control through the mental and physical exhaustion of individuals.<sup>3</sup> Far more seldom acknowledged than the internal dimensions of British immigration control, the external dimensions found in the politics of exhaustion, constitute a detrimental approach to mobility governance and merit the same levels of scrutiny and critique as the domestic British “hostile environment.”<sup>4</sup>

Secondly, it is argued that a theorization of the politics of exhaustion as a strategic approach to migration control serves to underscore the extent to which the externalization in the UK-France setting in many ways mirrors the violent and harmful nature of the more accentuated and widely denounced examples of externalization in the context of Italy-Libya, Spain-Morocco, Australia-Indonesia and beyond. By theorizing the politics of exhaustion as a systematic, strategic approach to border control in northern France, composed of otherwise hard-to-discern forms of harm and violence due to their gradual and unremitting effects (Loughnan, 2019a), the article cuts across the “dichotomy of intended versus unintended harms” (Weber and Pickering, 2011: 94). It is argued that, irrespective of the intent behind some of the more seemingly benign forms of practices and methods, the bordering tactics are essentially malignant in their outcomes (see e.g. Roberts, 2008: 20).

## A NOTE ON METHODS

My theorization and articulation of the politics of exhaustion is based on extensive field research into, and exposure to, the situation in northern France. My field research included 50 formal and informal in-person interviews with displaced individuals. Most of the interviews took place in

Calais, Paris and Brussels with undocumented individuals trapped “on the other side” of the UK border, while 7 of the interviews took place in London with persons who had previously spent time in displacement northern France over the past few years. In addition, the research was complemented with 25 interviews with volunteers, academics, activists and NGO workers carrying extensive immersive experience of the situation among displaced people in the area. These interviews took place in person in London, Calais, Paris, Brussels and over Skype.

During my fieldwork, I was accompanied by interpreters to enable me to conduct interviews in Amharic, Arabic, Persian and Tigrinya. I was also able to conduct additional interviews in English and French. This allowed me to include, in these interviews, individuals from the main country groups present in the area (Afghan, Ethiopian, Eritrean, Iranian, Iraqi and Sudanese). My knowledge and analysis of the (micro) practices and methods undertaken in northern France were also informed by, and benefited from, my long-standing engagement with the complex situation in the region as part of my role as executive director of Refugee Rights Europe, a human rights organization born out of the hopelessness in Calais in January 2016. I have also been able to draw on some of the secondary sources published by Refugee Rights Europe and other civil society actors to illustrate some of the points made throughout the article.

The field work inevitably required me to engage in reflexivity around questions of representation, subalternity and privilege, being deeply conscious of the wider relational frameworks within which I was operating: racial, socio-economic, historical, post-colonial and so forth. I do not claim to be able to “represent” or speak “on behalf of” any of my interlocutors, but rather, their accounts have lent me unique insights and knowledge. This has enabled me to propose a new framework for thinking of the harmful technologies of border control in the context of Britain’s externalization to France, as outlined in this article.<sup>5</sup>

## AN ARTICULATION OF THE POLITICS OF EXHAUSTION

By way of background, the UK has set up extraterritorial arrangements on French territory to deny leave to enter, a move which the UK Government has described as “fundamentally altering the way the UK operates at its border” (UK Cabinet Office, 2007).<sup>6</sup> This has been done through its “juxtaposed border arrangements” with France, contained in the 1991 Sangatte Protocol, the 2003 Le Touquet Treaty, and later bilateral agreements. Rights groups have argued that this policy is in breach of the UK’s international legal obligations by “circumventing the right to asylum and as a result also the protection against *non-refoulement*” (Refugee Rights Europe, 2020; see also Amnesty International, 2017). The externalization of the UK border to France, executed through the juxtaposed arrangements, has seen the deployment of hundreds of UK Border Force guards to French territory, the opening of UK detention facilities (Short Term Holding Facilities) in Coquelles in northern France (Bosworth, 2020), and the application of UK criminal law powers beyond its territory. These arrangements mean that safe and legal routes to seek asylum in Britain are next to non-existent<sup>7</sup> and have led to “the emergence of a ‘border zone’ stretching from Calais and Grande-Synthe in northern France to the capitals of Brussels and Paris if not further afield” (Welander, 2020: 33). These agreements have assigned France with the role of “containment state,” and the situation has culminated in the emergence of a new, disconcerting form of border governance tool aimed at achieving deterrence, control and exclusion: the politics of exhaustion.

Field research findings suggest that there are five broad categories of practices and methods which co-constitute and produce the politics of exhaustion, all of which converge to enable the strategic implementation of the externalization of British border control and mobility management to France. These practices and methods, which are examined in this article through the voices and experiences of my field research interlocutors, are ritualized forms of (in)direct violence and abuse;

the withdrawal of care and the related manufacturing of vulnerability; acts of dispossession; the shrinking and defoliation of living spaces; forced (im)mobility; as well as uncertainty and undercurrents of threat.

### Ritualized forms of (in)direct violence and abuse

“They are trying to make us give up our goal. [...] They [would do] everything they are able to do - to make us give up,” comments a Sudanese interlocutor in his late thirties. “For example, beating people, taking their clothes off, putting the people in basements - naked, or taking shoes from people to make them walk for more than two hours without shoes in the winter. Threatening people they would deport them if they didn’t give their fingerprints there. Even though they were sure [we] didn’t want to stay in France.”<sup>8</sup> Through these words, one of my interlocutors, who had spent more than nine months in the Calais “Jungle” camp in 2015–2016<sup>9</sup>, summarized his views and experiences of various types of ritualized violence and abuse unfolding in northern France.

Overtly violent forms of physical police brutality are relatively well documented and known (Refugee Rights Europe, 2016, 2017, 2018b; Human Rights Watch, 2017) and also emerged consistently throughout my interviews. Nearly all of my interlocutors were able to share accounts of violence and abuse at the hands of state officials, such as national police, the general reserve (known as *Compagnies Républicaines de Sécurité*, CRS) and the national gendarmerie, sometimes operating “undercover” in civilian clothing in the area.<sup>10</sup>

A woman from East Africa recounted an incident which had stuck with her and in fact, made her vomit from anxiety at the time, further highlighting the gradual and slow effects of the abuse:

They were beating someone really badly and it was a woman, so then she [...] said ‘I’m a woman, I’m a woman!’. They stopped beating her when they knew it’s a woman. French police are good with women, unless [they] think you’re a man. [When] it’s dark and we are all wearing the same things they don’t know.<sup>11</sup>

Meanwhile, a Sudanese man in his late forties, whom I interviewed in December 2018, commented on the police practices as follows:

Police. Let me tell you the truth, [they are] very rude, but I am saying this with evidence. A young man, underage, they beat him badly and I took him to the hospital. That guy was very scared [of going] to hospital because he thought the police would come and take him. [...] This is one of many circumstances. A lady said she was beaten very bad inside a [police van], she was trying to smuggle her[self]. They closed the door and started beating her very badly.<sup>12</sup>

The same interlocutor continued:

They enjoy doing that [being violent] to the migrants, especially when nobody is watching; no NGOs, no French people. They must be supported by high levels and know they are not going to be punished. When you have free power, you can do stupid things. I didn’t hear about any police being punished or prosecuted for anything or given a bad treatment. There is really bad treatment for migrants in Calais. People are afraid of speaking about it; they are not in a power position to speak against the police.<sup>13</sup>

Meanwhile, the more subtle and banalized forms of police abuse are also inherent in the politics of exhaustion, in particular when such banalized violence is ritualized. Verbal abuse and randomized spraying of tear gas or pepper spray is a common feature. One of the women I interviewed explained:

Sometimes police would stand and talk to us normally, and suddenly take out the spray. Sometimes they would beat people randomly, it could be a boy or a girl.<sup>14</sup>

Another interlocutor interviewed in Calais also explained that the use of tear gas and pepper spray is sometimes randomized and ritualized and used in contexts where it does not appear warranted: “If you are in a lorry they can spray. But we don’t know why they are spraying here [by the food distribution]. We don’t want to stay here in France.”<sup>15</sup>

Throughout my research, I have heard countless accounts of verbal abuse perpetrated by police officers against displaced individuals. One Sudanese interlocutor explained: “They are so bad, so rude especially to the migrants. They are joking when they [use violence]”<sup>16</sup>. A 19-year-old Afghan youth interviewed by Refugee Rights Europe (2017: 21) also similarly reported: “At night time two people came in a car and fought me and shouted bad things at me. Suddenly they showed their ID cards and they were actually police.”

One Sudanese man, whom I interviewed in London, explained:

Inside the port of Calais, they caught me from one of the lorries and they [swore] at me and were saying bad words. I think and they just sometimes try to torture you, even by their words - they assault you by words.<sup>17</sup>

The most tangible form of ritualized forms of banalized violence is found in the regular evictions of living spaces which, ever since the demolition of the Calais “Jungle” camp have emerged as a routine practice conducted at regular intervals, often every 48 hours or so. The activist group Human Rights Observers reported that the number of evictions doubled in Calais in 2019, increasing from 452 for the duration of 2018, to 805 in the first 10 months of 2019 (Amnesty International, 2019: 2). During these raids, living spaces of vulnerable individuals in Calais and Dunkirk are evicted by heavily geared CRS officers, who use tear gas or pepper spray while confiscating tents, sleeping bags and other personal belongings. While some individuals are routinely detained during this ritual, others would be allowed to return to the same living space hours later, only to have to face the same process again some 48 hours later. An Iranian interlocutor explained to me in December 2018:

The French police treat us really badly - if we want to go [somewhere] they hit us ... whatever we do, they catch us, collect our tents, they tear our tents, when we want to go somewhere, they harass us. They have gathered us in one place and as soon as we want to just move away from where we are, they catch us.<sup>18</sup>

Another Iranian man, interviewed on the same occasion, further elaborated:

They tell us to pick up our tents and things and go stand over there. We have to stand in a row and not move. They walk around and take tents that no one had time to [rescue]. Then we can go back again and we put our [tents] back. It doesn’t make any sense.<sup>19</sup>

In connection with the evictions, seemingly randomized arrests and detention would also unfold. None of the individuals I have interviewed over the period 2016–2019 have appeared to have had any idea of what the criteria were for such arrest; the police appear to be following an entirely random practice. A Sudanese interlocutor discussed these rituals with me in Calais in August 2018:

Blue and white cars come and catch you. You spend 2–4 days in prison, then you might be sent to a big prison and then to a lawyer. They ask “Why are you here...” You will stay maybe 7 days sometimes 2–3 weeks in that prison. Then they release you, give you a paper to leave France and let you out.<sup>20</sup>

The forms of ritualized (in)direct violence experienced by displaced people in Calais are echoed among people on the move elsewhere in Europe. For instance, at Croatia’s border with Bosnia, individuals have reportedly had crosses spray-painted on their heads by state officials, also being

smearred with food and beaten before being pushed back to Bosnia (Amnesty International, 2020). In Italy, a report of a police officer forcing individuals to slap each other as “punishment” (InfoMigrants, 2020) has illustrated similarly humiliating forms of violence perpetrated against displaced people in Europe. In the context of northern France, however, this abuse is often experienced over a protracted period of time and converges with a broad set of additional practices, including the continued manufacturing of vulnerability through the withdrawal of care.

### Withdrawal of care and the manufacturing of vulnerability

“We’ve been at food distributions where the CRS [police] have turned up and forbidden the distribution from taking place,” explains a British church minister with long-standing engagement in the Calais area. “We had a box of ready meals and started walking towards the line of CRS wearing our official vests marking that we belong to an association,” he continues. “They started beating our hands until we dropped the box with food.”<sup>21</sup> What my informant describes here appears to be a relatively common occurrence in the area. Over time, aid and food distribution have been hampered intermittently, and in the striking absence of state care, this leaves individuals in the area in an incredibly vulnerable state of existence.

The withdrawal of state care, coupled with the hampering of third sector alternatives, is an inherent component of the politics of exhaustion, and one which contributes directly to the production of additional vulnerabilities among the displaced people in the area. The notion of “active neglect,” elaborated by Loughnan (2019a) in the context of Australian externalization provides a useful lens for understanding the withdrawal of care in northern France. “Active neglect” is defined by Loughnan (2019a) as the removal of government support services combined with the erosion of hope and wellbeing among refugees and asylum seekers through unfulfilled promises and refusals. In a similar vein, Davies et al (2017) write about the violent consequences of state (in)action (2017:1) in informal makeshift camps in Europe, including the camp in Calais in 2015, and argue that *inaction* can be used as a means of control. Thus, in line with Loughnan (2019a) and Davies et al (2017), the “active neglect” or “violent state inaction” in the context of northern France can be understood as a strategic practice, through which the state *intends* to produce suffering and/or control people. In December 2018, an Iranian interlocutor commented with disbelief on the improvised living space which he was inhabiting:

Women, children, sick... there are families with children here... That poor woman with a 3 or 4-year-old child, how can they tolerate this? We have people here who have a broken leg, who have a cold or don't feel well and can't walk...they will freeze from the cold. Illness, sickness...

During the existence of the so-called Calais “Jungle” camp in 2015–2016, which at its peak hosted nearly 10,000 individuals, the effects felt from the denial of adequate state care were countered, to a degree, by a remarkable phenomenon, by which camp residents and volunteers and activists came together to build communal spaces, ranging from restaurants and cafes to places of worship, schools and libraries, and barber shops. The camp residents had access to regular distribution of hot and cold food items, clothing, tents, sleeping bags and provision of phone charging facilities and Wi-Fi. The vacuum left by the state’s “active neglect” (Loughnan, 2019a) was thus filled by an immense influx of donations, financial aid and grassroots volunteerism (see e.g. Sandri, 2018). The semi-permanent shelters and community sphere provided a place to rest and recover. The successively growing grassroots aid structures provided a foundation for solidarity and support. The Calais “Jungle” camp served as an antidote to the absence of state services, countering the harmful effects of the latter, at least to a degree. Understood within the framework of the politics of exhaustion, it is unsurprising that the camp had to go, as it acted as a counter-weight to any

aims of exhausting mentally and physically the individuals in the area, while it was of course far from adequate in terms of living standards, safety and security.<sup>22</sup>

The manufacturing of vulnerability has become particularly tangible during the period of the COVID-19 pandemic also plaguing the camps and settlements in northern France during spring 2020. In this context, the struggles for displaced people in the border zone have only worsened. As many of the volunteer and aid groups on the ground have had to cease their operations due to the health crisis, and in the absence of adequate state-led alternatives, large numbers of displaced people have seen their support being reduced drastically (BBC, 2020). The displaced individuals in the area are exposed to a cold and humid climate, coupled with stress and exhaustion caused by the ongoing uncertainty and daily police raids aimed at evicting informal living spaces.<sup>23</sup>

### Dispossession

“Some [police] are taking stuff off the guys, they took 300 euros from a guy as well as his two mobile phones. He is still here. [...] I saw a lot of things done wrong by the police, [...] this is why I don’t want to stay here. [...]”<sup>24</sup> The issue of dispossession and confiscation of personal belongings is a topic that has emerged consistently throughout my years of field research. Acts of dispossession are not only affecting individuals in a material way; they also appear to reduce people’s sense of dignity and sense of self-worth, making daily life seem increasingly hopeless. Mental health experts operating in the area explained:

...disruption of sleep, destruction of tents and confiscation of basic necessities, even drinking water, is taking its toll on people’s mental as well as physical health in worrying ways, appearing to have tipped many people beyond their ability to draw upon their own coping mechanisms, into mental health conditions which can lead to long lasting damage. (see Lloyd et al., 2018)

In response to the continued acts of dispossession, which is an inherent part of the politics of exhaustion, aid groups on the ground are working ceaselessly to counteract the damage done, by providing tents, sleeping bags, mobile phones and other essentials to the individuals in the area, and in the process they are constantly being stretched to their limits. The charitable supplies are depleted and require constantly renewed donations to survive. One Afghan man in Calais told me in April 2019: “The police take the tents away all the time and the volunteers don’t even have time to replace the tents as fast as the police takes them” (Welander, 2019b) Among aid workers, most of whom were volunteers, the notion of exhaustion would come up in many interviews and conversations. One of the long-term volunteers described the general sense of exhaustion felt during her engagement in the area: “We were all burned out at the end of summer.”<sup>25</sup>

While tents and other personal belongings tend to be confiscated during raids aimed at evicting settlements, there are also countless stories of individuals being dispossessed of their shoes. A British church authority, who has been active in Calais since October 2015, recounts an incident which took place during the period of the Calais “Jungle” camp: “One morning we saw a group, about a hundred yards from the flyover where you came into the camp. They had been stopped by the CRS and stripped off their shoes and made to walk back into the camp.” The camp residents were reportedly on their way to the supermarket, but had to turn back to the camp when their foot wear was confiscated. My informant continued: “Of course you can’t go and shop in socks – and this was not in great weather – it must have been late winter or early spring. We saw countless men coming into the camp in their socks.”

A former Calais “Jungle” camp resident, reflecting on the same practice of shoe confiscation, suggested:

They take off the shoes to make them suffer and struggle. They mean to make the people suffer and struggle more. Maybe they [think it would make people] go away from the border and keep that border safe. [. . .] Is there anything in the law that allows the police to take the clothes off, people's dignity? Same [treatment] as for the animals. They want to make them feel like animals, not human beings.<sup>26</sup>

The different acts of dispossession experienced by individuals in the area appear to be serving as a form of degradation and abuse. Similar tacit state violence has been reported elsewhere in Europe, with a particularly striking example in Greece where prospective asylum seekers had their clothes stripped off before they were sent back across the border to Turkey (Brazelle, 2020). In Belgium, displaced people have reported having their mobile phones taken by police (RTBF, 2018; Refugee Rights Europe, 2018a) while at the Croatian border, prospective asylum seekers are reportedly being stripped and having their documents burned (Geddie et al, 2020). In northern France, however, the dispossession is often experienced repeatedly, and alongside other exhausting practices over a period of time, for as long as individuals remain in the area.

### **Shrinking and defoliation of living spaces**

In addition to the confiscation of personal effects, state actors continuously seek to shrink people's access to space. Fences, razor wire and spikes have been erected across Calais, targeting people's preferred resting spots, sending a clear signal that these spaces are no longer inhabitable (see e.g. Help Refugees, 2019). The use of spikes to make a space inhabitable has also been seen in the so-called "hostile architecture," an urban design strategy often used to make a space impossible for homeless individuals to use (see e.g. Kerrigan, 2018). This approach, coupled with the tactic of defoliation, is part of the politics of exhaustion in northern France and contributes to a further sense of hopelessness over time. The tactic of shrinking access to space was also used at the time of the Calais "Jungle" camp. In March 2016, a court ruling authorized the French state authorities to proceed and demolish the southern part of the camp, which was home to several hundred individuals, including many family units. This inevitably led to the containment of all camp residents within a much more confined space, which sparked heightened tensions and allowed for fires to spread more quickly and generally created an increasingly difficult and exhausting daily existence in the camp. The final demolition of the camp and its flattening to the ground in October 2016 (BBC News, 2016; The Guardian, 2016; Welander and Ansems De Vries, 2016b) sent a clear message that the space for people to stay in the area was now completely closed and sealed off.

Following the demolition of the camp, settlements and encampments would soon start to crop up across the area, only to be closed down again by the authorities weeks or months later, with the help of walls, razor wire and fencing. This cycle has continued to be reproduced ever since the demolition of the camp until the time of writing, in August 2020. In 2019, actions aimed at shrinking the living spaces started to also be accompanied by defoliation. The woodlands in which displaced people were setting up tents and shelters were largely cut down or trimmed, laying bare the settlements and providing even less of a pretence at privacy.

### **Forced (im)mobility**

"Some guys came [to Calais] from Italy and asked for asylum in France, and [the authorities] sent them back to Italy, and Italy gave them no assistance and asked them to leave Italy. After that, they [came] back to France. France won't give them papers, so now they try to go to the UK but they are stuck," explains an older man from Sudan as I interview him in December 2018. "[. . .] If the authorities say they don't know this - it is impossible to not know. They don't care."<sup>27</sup> My interlocutor had identified another aspect of the politics of exhaustion, namely that of forced

(im)mobility. On one hand, individuals are confined or detained when attempting to move forward, as authorities ensure their continued immobility, while on the other hand, forced *mobility* is also used to exhaust people by convoluting their journeys and delaying their recourse to a solution to their predicament. Such “forced, obstructed and circulatory mobility” (Ansems de Vries and Guild, 2018: 1) is a commonly used migration management tactic across Europe and is indeed clearly identifiable in the context of northern France.

Looking firstly at the forced immobility, this primarily takes the shape of detention in the northern France area; often in the form of short periods spent in detention, followed by the release of the individuals again, shortly thereafter, without anything constructive being accomplished through such detention. Several rights groups have raised concerns regarding the situation relating to individuals held in this same detention centre. During my field work in April 2019, I visited a Sudanese man held in detention in the *Centre Administratif De Réention* in Coquelles, Calais, who explained:

They want me to give my fingerprints and ask for asylum in France but I think they just want to have a fast process and send me back to Sudan. But I want to go to the UK where I have family members.

He furthermore explained: “I have not eaten for several days. I am exhausted and my morale is going down every day,” adding that individuals in detention had recently gone on hunger strike protesting their detention, with a number of detainees having attempted suicide just a few days prior to our conversation. Another man, from Afghanistan, spoke to me in one of the informal settlements, later that day, about his time in the same detention centre: I was in detention in Coquelles and they put me in a small cell. Everything was metal, the floor, ceiling, and a metal bed. They gave me two dirty blankets, and it was really cold. In one corner there was a toilet with a camera on top.

Regarding forced *mobility*, on the other hand, many respondents whom I interviewed during the period 2016–2019 spoke of being caught by the police, and then driven to remote locations where they would be released again, left to cover the way back on foot. Others explained that they had been removed to other European countries under the Dublin Regulation following their detention, and subsequently jumped on trains and other forms of transport to make their way back to the area (see also Ansems de Vries and Welander, 2016b). Tazzioli’s (2017, 2019a) concept of mobility as a technology of government in the contemporary European refugee/migrant context is highly relevant to this aspect of the politics of exhaustion. For Tazzioli, displaced people across Europe are facing containment through forced mobility; their geographies are “diverted and decelerated” (2017: 30) and as such, they are controlled and excluded. Tazzioli highlights how displaced individuals’ movements are “controlled, disrupted and diverted not (only) through detention and immobility but by generating effects of containment keeping migrants on the move and forcing them to engage in convoluted geography” (Tazzioli, 2019a: 1). This is directly relevant to the practices of forced mobility in northern France, where individuals are constantly uprooted, forced to move, dispersed and driven out of the area, only to make it back to the same locations a few days later. Combined with the other control tactics mobilized in the area, forced (im)mobility is an effective method which appears to contribute to both physical and psychological exhaustion among people on the move.

### **Uncertainty and undercurrents of threat**

“The police came [unexpectedly] today. They took everything, my tent, and clothes,” a Sudanese man in his early twenties explains to me on a morning in August 2018. “My friend had brought me that tent from Belgium. I was away to have breakfast [at La Vie Active] and brush my teeth

because I didn't think they would come today." He explains that most people had had a chance to pick up their belongings before the raid, but some, himself included, had been caught off guard as the eviction did not follow the usual pattern. "The police come all the time, but for two days they didn't come, so I thought it would be OK. And then everything was gone, my bag, everything. We cannot trust any person here." While the acts of dispossession and evictions of living spaces, discussed earlier, are two important tactics utilized by the authorities to produce exhaustion, there is another layer to these practices, namely the sheer uncertainty and undercurrents of threat which permeate people's daily existence in the area.

One of my informants, who has been carrying out academic and arts-related projects with displaced people in Calais since 2016, similarly spoke of undercurrents of violence, suggesting that violence permeates life among displaced people in Calais:

Even when there was no physical violence, there was the waiting for the violence to come. Always hiding, hiding stuff, themselves, their true identity. [...] It must be draining and exhausting, it's insidious violence. Uncertainty is a form of violence in this context. People seem really stressed in times where everything seems calm.<sup>28</sup>

Another constant underlying threat is the ever-present possibility of death. Reportedly, at least 197 deaths occurred on the border between 1999 and 2017 (Agier, 2019: 139). The numbers were likely much higher, as many deaths risk going unreported. In March 2019, a 19-year-old Ethiopian boy named Kiyar lost his life in a lorry in Calais, desperately having tried to reach the UK where he had extended family. Others have been reported dead in roadside accidents, by drowning in the port or being suffocated or crushed to death inside lorries. In the winter of 2019, a Nigerian man died of suffocation in his tent, having lit a fire inside the tent to keep warm at night. It is perhaps then unsurprising that many of my interlocutors appeared to feel the omnipresence of death, uncertainty and the undercurrents of threat in their day-to-day existence, contributing to further mental exhaustion and disillusionment.

### **Theorizing the politics of exhaustion**

While many of the methods and practices outlined in the previous sections of this article are echoed as migration control practices in migratory contexts across Europe, my field research suggests that these are all found to converge in the context of northern France, and sustained over time. They are therefore best understood collectively as constituting an entire strategic state approach aimed to deter, exclude and control mobility, rather than constituting isolated, reactive undertakings by state actors. When examined in isolation from one another, the practices can be rather hard-to-discern as violence, given the unseen nature and gradual consequences thereof (Davies et al, 2017: 16). However, when understood as part of a strategic approach to migration control, it becomes clear that the accumulation of these practices, as experienced by displaced individuals in the area, contribute towards the production not only of physical violence but also emotional and psychological harm, which can have powerful effects on a person's capacity to resist. Indeed, the accumulation of the practices experienced by displaced individuals in northern France, often repeatedly and for extended periods of time, is radically malignant in their outcomes, in that they contribute towards the production of meaninglessness and emptiness of existence (Johansen, 2013: 265). In a parallel context of refused asylum seekers in Norway, Johansen (2013) argues that where the state is finding it difficult to remove or deport individuals, authorities confine them to miserable conditions as part of a "funnel of expulsion," with the hope that they will eventually break and decide to leave Norway voluntarily. Similarly, in the context of the border zone in northern France, the politics of exhaustion appears to be designed to attack people's resilience and ability to persist and survive the most adverse of situations. This also calls to mind Weber and

Pickering's (2014) work on technologies of "intent management" in the context of Australian border controls, and what Rose (2000:324) refers to as "technologies for the conduct of conduct." Weber and Pickering argue that "new forms of border governance are emerging that seek to shape individual decision-making to promote "voluntary" compliance with migration management goals" (2014: 17). Along similar lines, Behrouz Boochani, a Kurdish scholar and writer who was held in detention in the Australian-run detention centre on Manus Island for years, noted that "the system in these prisons has been created so that incarcerated refugees experience an unbearable amount of pressure, reach the point of hopelessness, and finally decide to return to their country of origin" (Boochani, cited in Loughnan, 2019a). The same logic of "intent management" (Weber and Pickering, 2014) could be assumed to constitute an underlying purpose and intention of the politics of exhaustion.

Eventually, individuals in northern France may well give up and be drawn into the "funnel of expulsion" (Johansen, 2013). Others would fall into the depths of substance abuse and further deterioration of health. Some yet again, would never make it out of the cycle of detention and deportation, eventually finding themselves back to their homelands, oftentimes exposed to considerable risks upon their return. However, many others would continue their struggle, draw on their capacity for resilience in the face of the politics of exhaustion, and one day make it to the United Kingdom.

A woman I interviewed in London in the spring of 2019 spoke at length about the exhaustion brought on by the border practices during the following testimonial shared with me. Upon arriving in the UK, following several years in displacement, the exhaustion caught up with her:

I just slept and slept and [the detention centre staff] thought I was dead. I slept all day and night. They came and woke me up because they thought I was dead. I couldn't eat for three days so the doctor came to examine me [...] I was sleeping or daydreaming so the breakfast, lunch and dinner was just sitting there waiting for me. I was so exhausted.<sup>29</sup>

Evidently, my interlocutor had persisted, despite the emotional, psychological and physical effects of the politics of exhaustion, and is today living in the UK with official refugee status (Leave to Remain). Her story, among many others, is testament to the capacity for resilience that is evidence in spite of the harsh deterrence policies, and the gravity of the harm produced through the externalization of the British border.

### CONCLUDING REMARKS: DETER, CONTROL, AND EXCLUDE WITHOUT ACCOUNTABILITY

Through my direct engagement with people living and working in the UK-French border zone, I have argued that the "internal externalisation" (Barbero and Donadio, 2019) of UK border controls to French territory is dependent upon an inherently harmful set of (micro) practices and methods, best understood as a "politics of exhaustion", a new technology of border control and mobility governance, which aims to deter, exclude and control through the mental and physical exhaustion of individuals. My engagement with individuals with first-hand experience of the politics of exhaustion has allowed me to map out the concrete experiences and effects thereof, thus building on emerging bodies of academic work which look at new and increasingly sophisticated forms of bordering tactics aimed at influencing the choices and intention of people on the move, and contributing to literature which challenges the policies enacted at the UK's border with France.<sup>30</sup>

Contrary to the façade of legitimacy and legality of the UK-France cooperation on border control in northern France, the externalization of the British border to France arguably mirrors more than is usually acknowledged the inhumane production of harm in the context of the externalization within the subordinate relationships between states of the global North and their global South counterparts.

It is arguably not far removed from the deeply deplorable “letting die” approach in the Mediterranean and in Libya, the intense forms of violence at the Spanish-Moroccan borders in the enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla, or the widely criticized containment of vulnerable people in the Australian off-shore detention centres on Nauru and Manus Island.

The harshness of the politics of exhaustion raises questions about how it is enacted and justified by states claiming to uphold liberal values and norms of human rights. Here, the work of Weber and Pickering (2011) lends a useful lens in thinking of how the absence, or invisibility, of clearly defined and identifiable “human culprits” in the implementation of the politics of exhaustion may give an illusion of the absence of intention to cause harm (Weber and Pickering, 2011: 94). As such, resorting to the politics of exhaustion, where the source of harm inflicted is not immediately identifiable or diffusely shared between various different actors, may be more easily enacted and justified than more drastic and overtly unlawful measures, such as regular blanket returns and *re-foulement*, mass-detention, physical torture or direct killings. Loughnan (2019a) similarly discusses, in the context of Australia’s externalization, how “[t]he gradual yet unremitting effect of [certain] policies render them hard-to-discern as violence.” The same could be said about the politics of exhaustion as a preferred migration control approach for liberal democracies; it helps states to “sanitize” and “invisibilise” (Loughnan, 2019a) the harm and violence inherent in this form of externalized border control.

Political philosopher Hannah Arendt once asked “How can the refugee be made deportable again?” (Arendt, 1985: 284), and the question appears more pertinent than ever in the context of northern France today. The politics of exhaustion can be understood as co-producing *de facto* situations of deportability (De Genova, 2017a), and self-fulfilling prophecies of migrant deviancy and violence, used to justify the harm-inducing politics of exhaustion, deterrence and exclusion. Ruben Andersson (2014: 111–112) discusses in his extensive ethnographic work how individuals, when subjected to border control practices and methods, often turn to more suspect behaviours and begin to act in ways that confirm the redeployment of the same measures which produced the deviant behaviours in the first place. Indeed, the “illegality” assigned to the individuals in the UK-France border zone, and sometimes their own acts of amplified deviance, can be mobilized by the state to present “an obvious need to repel such deviance that in turn re-affirms the legitimacy of state responses” (Pickering and Lambert, 2002: 77). As such, the harmful technology of border control and mobility governance on the external side of the British border is allowed to continue to unfold, receiving less attention and scrutiny than the “hostile environment” yet constituting a most tragic condition due to its brutality and tormenting impact on human lives.

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## PEER REVIEW

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## NOTES

1. See in particular Millner, 2011; Rygiel, 2011; Davies and Isakjee, 2015; Reinisch, 2015; Ansems de Vries and Welander, 2016a, 2016b; Bosworth, 2016a, 2016b, 2020; King, 2016; Ansaloni, 2017; Davies et al, 2017; Sandri, 2018; Agier, 2019; Hicks and Mallet, 2019; King, 2019; Welander, 2020.
2. See for example Pickering and Lambert, 2002; Walters, 2004; Collyer, 2007; Spijckboer, 2007; Hyndman and Mountz, 2008; Mountz, 2011; Garelli and Tazzioli, 2016; Tazzioli, 2017, 2019a, 2019b; De Genova, 2017b; Davies et al, 2017; Hess and Kasperek, 2017; Barbero and Donadio, 2019; Dastyari and Hirsch, 2019; Loughnan, 2019b; Missbach and Phillips, 2020; Bosworth, 2020.
3. Having first written about and attempted an early theorisation of, the politics of exhaustion alongside Leonie Ansems de Vries in the context of the demolition of the Calais “Jungle” camp (Ansems de Vries and Welander, 2016a, 2016b), I am basing this article on field research and observations conducted in 2016–2019 as part of my PhD research, hosted at the University of Westminster. The concept “Politics of Exhaustion” has previously featured in the work of Dominic Pettman (2002). His work *After the Orgy: Toward a Politics of Exhaustion* identifies and examines the dynamic tensions of various apocalyptic discourses, in order to highlight the complex constellation of exhaustion, anticipation, panic and ecstasy in contemporary culture. This is entirely unrelated to my work and has in no ways inspired or informed my proposed conceptualisation of the politics of exhaustion in the context of human mobility.
4. The *internal* manifestations of the British border control through its “structurally embedded” border (Weber, 2013) have been dissected and well-captured within the notion of “hostile environment” (see e.g. Bowling and Westenra, 2018; Hiam et al, 2018; Goodfellow, 2019); a widely criticised set of policies and practices facing “undesired” entrants after arrival.
5. Due to the limited scope of this article, I will not be looking at the myriad of forms of agency and “everyday resistance” (Scott, 1989) found among the individuals in the border zone. I address these matters extensively as part of my broader PhD research.
6. These agreements were given effect in Britain through The Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002 (Juxtaposed Controls) Order 2003. See: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2003/2818/part/3/made>.
7. This article refers to safe and legal routes to reach the UK from other European countries (specifically, via France) in order to seek asylum, whilst not referring to resettlement schemes of prospective asylum seekers or individuals with refugee status from other parts of the world.
8. Interview in London in August 2018.
9. The so-called Calais “Jungle” camp was an informal settlement built gradually by displaced people and volunteers and activists in 2015–2016. At its peak, it hosted up to 10,000 individuals, including family units and unaccompanied minors. State services were largely absent, and the activists and displaced people set up their own food distribution systems, built shelters, restaurants, schools, houses of worship and so on. See Agier (2019) for an extensive account of this camp, its prelude and its aftermath.
10. The allegations against state officials described in this section have not been verified through official sources. The aim of this academic paper is to relay the voices and experienced of people in displacement, based on self-reporting.
11. Group interview in London in March 2019.
12. Interview in Calais in December 2018.
13. Interview in Calais in December 2018.
14. Group interview in London in March 2019.
15. Interview in Calais in August 2018.
16. Interview in Calais in December 2018.
17. Interview in London in November 2018.
18. Group interview in Calais in December 2018.
19. Group interview in Calais in December 2018.
20. Interview in Calais in August 2018.
21. Interview in London in March 2019.
22. It is not my intention to romanticise the Calais “Jungle” camp, which was a wholly inadequate place for individuals to reside. Largely a “lawless land,” it was a dangerous place in many respects. Women and children in particular were exposed to immense safety risks in the absence of any safeguarding structures, left largely unprotected from sexual and gender-based violence. At the same time, many of its former residents have spoken very highly of their time in the camp, as this godforsaken place also provided many with a space where solidarity and unexpected manifestations of dignity could take root.

23. As of mid-April 2020, the French authorities have taken a number of steps to address the COVID-19 situation in the area, including daily buses taking people to accommodation centres, some provision of water and soap, COVID-19 information sheets, and so on. However, organisations operating on the ground report that the measures are largely inadequate, and individuals continue to return to the informal settlements after having stayed in state accommodation for a couple of nights.
24. Interview in Calais in December 2018.
25. Skype interview in October 2019.
26. Interview in London in August 2018.
27. Interview in Calais in December 2018.
28. Interview in London in August 2018.
29. Group interview in London in March 2019.
30. See e.g. Bosworth, 2016a, 2016b, 2020; Ansems de Vries and Welander, 2016a, 2016b; Welander 2019a, 2020; Timberlake, 2020 for accounts which challenge the UK's border policies in northern France.

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