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Accumulation by immobilization: Migration, mobility and money in Libya

Marthe Achtnich

Abstract

Forms of accumulation in Europe's wider borderlands proceed through the creation of confined subjects. Migrants' experiences in Libya's context of fragmented state authority reveal how vulnerable mobilities become a source of value through violent and forced immobilization. This dynamic is termed 'accumulation by immobilization', where accumulation involves different situations of confinement and detention imposed by criminal and state actors, the extraction of value through indentured labour as well as the drawing of rent through the payment of money to move on. Going beyond expulsion and the exploitation of free labour under capitalist production, accumulation by immobilization points to a carceral capitalism in the borderlands that profits from the enclosure and disposability of migrants' lives.

Keywords: migration; mobility; borders; accumulation; value; Libya.

Forced immobilities

My taxi driver rushed through the dusty and rundown outskirts of Tripoli, Libya's capital. It was 2014 and I was on my way to meet Idiris, a Somali

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man.¹ Finding the house he shared with many other migrants wasn't easy. After several attempts I finally managed to locate the door in a small side street. The taxi stopped directly opposite, the door opened and suddenly I was standing in a small courtyard in front of a smiling Idiris. 'Welcome', he said. There had been a police raid in the area earlier and he was still a little on edge. The house was a cluster of small and windowless rooms, separated from the dusty street by a heavy door – an important security measure. Pencil drawings, prayers, calls for 'freedom' and phone numbers covered the dirty walls, testimonies of those who had moved through this house over the years. Up to 200 migrants lived there at any one point in time, each paying around 50 Libyan dinars per month to the Libyan house owner.² They were all waiting to move on by boat to Europe, but immobility was what had shaped their migration experience thus far.

'You just need to understand the rules and you are fine', was how Idiris explained his life in Libya: 'It is a business and it is all about money'. Idiris had left Somalia a few years earlier and moved with human smugglers through Sudan, the Sahara desert and Libya. Moments of immobility shaped his fragmented journey. Like many other migrants living at the house, Idiris was not only detained by smugglers and other criminal actors in informal sites of confinement, but also by state authorities in government-run detention centres. In Libya's context of fragmented state authority and law, paying money was often the only way out of these situations of immobility. 'How to break the door, how to escape', was all migrants at the house could think of, whether when detained or during everyday life. 'Even now. I am free. If I get caught, how do I escape? The only thing I can think of is freedom. [...] how to leave that prison', Idiris explained. He had come to Libya to take a boat to Europe, but had been trying to move on from the house in Tripoli for several years. Idiris spent this waiting period sourcing money for onward movement, whether through casual labour or support by friends and family abroad. The money was not only needed to pay a smuggler for a place on a boat, but also to get out of situations of confinement. Over the course of his time at the house, Idiris had been ready to take a boat three times. Once he even made it out to sea before being detained by Libyan authorities. Forced to pay US\$400 for release from detention, Idiris moved back to the house. As a group, they paid another smuggler who simply disappeared with the money they had given him. Idiris thus needed more money to pay for a fourth attempt at crossing the sea.

* * *

The serial fragmentation of Idiris' unauthorized journey, brought about through immobility enforced by different criminal and state actors as well as the payment of money to move on, reflects the situation of many migrants in Libya. In this paper, I look more closely at these immobilities, which occur in a disconnected stop and go rhythm, to ask how we can rethink the migrant body as part of a transnational system of economic production in the

wider borderlands. I am concerned with understanding how serial forced immobilities lead to the generation and extraction of value from migrants' bodies and mobilities in the context of a fragmented state and 'illicit economy' in Libya (Micallef, 2017, p. 2; Shaw & Mangan, 2014, p. 9). Ethnographic attention to migrants' unauthorized journeys reveals how confinement becomes the basis for forms of extortion, rent, indentured and unpaid labour, giving rise to a wider carceral economy that profits from the direct enclosure of vulnerable, mobile bodies. I argue that not only is value produced under capitalism through speed-up and mobility, but also through forms of immobilization that create confined, restricted and unfree subjects, poignantly witnessed in the carceral landscapes and wider borderlands just outside of Europe.

I call this process 'accumulation by immobilization' – a shift from regimes of accumulation centred on dispossessing and displacing people (cf. Harvey, 2003; Sassen, 2014) to those predating upon journeys, and where mobilities themselves become a source of value. Whilst accumulation by dispossession focuses on the ongoing conditions of forcibly expelling populations from land, or an enclosure of the commons through privatization, land-grabs and asset restructuring, giving rise to rightless and free wage labour (Glassman, 2006; Harvey, 2003; see also Li, 2010), what emerges in contexts such as Libya is a situation where 'vulnerable human mobility' itself becomes a 'source of revenue' (Andersson, 2018, p. 424). This differs from well-known accounts of surplus extraction through wage labour, property regimes and financial speculation. What matters is not solely displacement at origin (Andersson, 2018; Sassen, 2014), but that which happens after, 'in the process of migration itself, that is, the in-between phase of mobility and enforced immobility' (Andersson, 2017, p. 90; Collyer, 2007; Hage, 2009). As Andersson (2018) suggests with reference to the Mexico-US and Euro-African borderlands, "extraction through expulsion" is only part of the story', for value 'is not just extracted' by displacement 'but also *generated in the borderlands*' through vulnerable mobilities (p. 417; emphasis added). Akin to other processes of value generation, where what is fluid needs to be 'fixed' before value can be extracted – for example ground parcelled into land or labour fixed into a commodity – mobility needs to be 'fixed' for value to be extracted. It is this intersection between immobility and movement – witnessed in the journeys of migrants like Idiris who are repeatedly incarcerated and pay to move on – that is crucial to understanding the rentier and value generating system constituting a carceral landscape and illicit economy in Europe's wider borderlands. It is a form of accumulation that hinges on necropolitics (cf. Mbembe, 2019) and proceeds through the direct enclosure of mobile lives.

In Libya, such extractive economies are shaped by smugglers in the Sahara desert, other criminal actors or state authorities in detention centres, and revolve around rendering migrants immobile. Like Idiris, many migrants source money, learn the rules of the 'business' to be able to navigate it more efficiently and remain mobile, and use economic terms to articulate their own feelings of commodification. They perceive themselves as 'moneymakers',

'goods' or 'livestock', caught in a spiral of forced immobility and the payment of money for release, only to risk being detained again. An ethnographic exploration of this value-generating system profiting from mobility reveals how the latter is variegated. Rather than describing a simple binary of being mobile and being rendered immobile, my analysis draws attention to how the two are folded into one another: whilst migrants are confined, incarcerated and detained, they are also mobile, escaping detention centres, negotiating rental arrangements, trying to get on a boat to Europe.

Scholarship on mobility has long argued how movement is both productive of, and produced by, social relations involving the generation and distribution of power. Mobility is not uniform but varies in its 'motive force, speed, rhythm, route, experience, and friction' (Cresswell, 2010, p.17; Salazar & Smart, 2011). These different dimensions of mobility are taken up by a number of scholars advocating for a closer scrutiny of migrants' journeys (BenEzer & Zetter, 2014; Khosravi, 2010; Lucht, 2012). They move beyond linear depictions of movement as departure and arrival (Collyer, 2007; Schapendonk, 2012), where mobility is relegated to an in-between 'liminal' or 'active transit' state (Vogt, 2013, p. 766). Mobility scholars call for multisited ethnography (Marcus, 1995) that transcends place-boundedness and challenges the local as 'a bounded, self-contained, ahistorical unit' (Appadurai, 1996; Feldman, 2012, p. 183; Hannerz, 1996). How mobility and immobility shape subjects ties into the 'regimes of mobility' framework proposed by Glick Schiller and Salazar (2013), who highlight the continuous dynamic between sedentariness and movement in situations where power is distributed unequally (see also Glick Schiller, 2018).

Nevertheless, underlying this is still a 'conceptual framework centered on locally fixed origins and destinations and the connections between them' (Vogt, 2018, p. 6). Moving beyond such fixed frames, it is important to look at what happens along migrants' journeys where the fragmented stop and go rhythms experienced by people are reflective of wider economic processes (Achnich, 2021b). Immobility is crucial for rendering the political economies underpinning mobility intelligible: 'Even the seemingly frictionless world of global capital' is riven with 'fixity, and friction', which it needs in 'order to reproduce itself' (Cresswell, 2010, p. 29). As recent work on migration and its political economic underpinnings, including the commodification of migrants (Vogt, 2013), industry of control (Andersson, 2014), migration apparatus (Feldman, 2012) or migrant 'bioeconomy' (Andersson, 2018, p. 414) shows, there are many other economic aspects to enabling, thwarting and regulating mobile life. These range from incorporating migrants into the formal workforce, to informal and clandestine economies where various actors profit from migrants' bodies and labour, and which operate in the grey zone between life and law or directly elude legality and formal organization. What is at stake here is not only exploitation of irregular migrants through the production of cheap and deportable labour by host states (De Genova, 2002; Mezzadra & Neilson, 2013), symptomatic of capital's dynamic of accumulation

(Harvey, 2003), but the predatory extraction and generation of value, financial or otherwise, from mobile ‘life itself’ (Rose, 2007, p. 3; also see Andersson, 2018, p. 417). This focus extends and broadens understandings of the bioeconomy, which has typically been about biotechnology and pharmaceutical sectors where life is decomposed into discrete objects that can be ‘isolated, delimited, stored, accumulated, mobilized, and exchanged’ (Cooper, 2008; Rose, 2007, p. 7; Sunder Rajan, 2006). At the same time, forms of accumulation in Europe’s borderlands draw attention to a necropolitical economy that profits from the disposability of human life (Mbembe, 2019).

* * *

Migrants’ journeys through the Sahara desert and Libya are geographically and organizationally segmented. Diverging from contexts like the Mexico-US route where migrants depend on individual smugglers to navigate landscapes (Vogt, 2016), routes through Libya are characterized by localized hierarchies and a division of labour by a variety of actors (Campana, 2018). Moreover, in contrast to regions with strong state and legal authority, where bordering operates via typologized categories of illegal or legal, refugee or economic migrant, migrants’ mobilities in Libya are shaped by extra-legal bordering practices implemented by criminal and state actors – including human smugglers, other criminal groups, militias, police, immigration officials, border guards and Libyan citizens – primarily aimed at extorting money (Achtnich, 2021a; Campana, 2018; Micallef, 2017). Such practices have developed in a context where state institutions, the economy and the rule of law have mostly collapsed, with militias competing for control over territory and political power since the 2011 uprisings (Micallef, 2017). While smuggling was ‘a relay-race conducted by loosely connected groups’ prior to the 2011 uprisings, it then became a ‘new financial backchannel’ (Micallef, 2017, p. 7). Smuggling routes in Libya continued to evolve in the years post-2011. They shifted in line with a fluctuating regional and local political landscape and included the entry of ‘armed gangs and militias’ who often receive a percentage of the business conducted on territory they control, a form of drawing rent paid to them as protection money by the smugglers (Micallef, 2017, p. 8).

Muammar Gaddafi, who governed Libya from 1969 to 2011, put in place migration policies to further his domestic and foreign-policy interests, including framing the ‘migrant other’ within a discourse of security and fear (Paoletti, 2010, p. 103). Since the 2000s, and with increasing boat migration from Libya to Europe, bilateral agreements between Libya and the EU have furthered the implementation of restrictive migration policies towards sub-Saharan Africans (Brachet, 2018). This includes funding of immigration detention centres, training and sea patrols to monitor borders, voluntary return programmes and cooperation with embassies, as well as increased surveillance in the Sahara (Bialasiewicz, 2012; Brachet, 2015; Paoletti, 2010). The newly-created Department for Combating Illegal Migration within the Ministry of Interior took control of immigration detention centres in 2012 (Danish Refugee Council, 2013), but

overlaps between state and criminal groups in running the centres remain, with militias also involved (Micallef, 2017). Normative distinctions between the state actor enforcing the law, the migrant as victim and the smuggler as predator are thus not tenable, calling for a more nuanced attention to the spatial and temporal dimensions of the production and marketization of (im)mobility (Sanchez, 2015; Vogt, 2013). In this context of fragmented state authority many migrants I met understood their vulnerability to be less because of their papers – some had passports, residence permits or other legal documents – but more because of their darker skin colour and easy identification as foreigners (Achtnich, 2021a). The precarious lives of migrants like Idiris were marked by fear. State actors rarely performed the role of assigning legal status and protection, but perpetuated spaces of exploitation and immobility by intercepting migrants. Despite ongoing shifts in migrant routes and a changing political landscape, migrants' stories of abuse in Libya have remained similar to those before the 2011 uprisings (Micallef, 2017).

I trace migrants' mobilities across informal sites of confinement, government-run detention centres and private houses in Libya to uncover voices that are too easily collapsed in a singular narrative of the 'illegal' migrant on a linear journey to Europe by macro-level accounts of migration governance. Going beyond these simplified views of migrants as exploited victims of the evil smuggler and notions of a migration 'crisis' that take migrants to be a threat to the nation state, I turn to wider political economic practices at stake: notably the overlaps between movement and different, often violent, forms of immobilization that underpin an illicit and carceral economy in Europe's borderlands.

This focus on migrants' journeys mainly emerges from multisited ethnographic fieldwork I conducted with migrants for around six months in 2013 and 2014 in Libya and in Malta, together with follow-up research. The people I engaged with came from a range of eastern and western sub-Saharan countries, from where they had left for different reasons. They moved with human smugglers through Sudan or Niger and the Sahara to Libya, and either stayed or moved onwards to Italy or Malta by boat. Migrants' journeys are of course much more fragmented than this simplified description I provide here, shaped by many difficulties and stops along the way. In this paper, I focus on situations of immobility that migrants encounter just before and in Libya. I trace migrants' journeys through participant observation, interviews and group discussions in private houses, community spaces, detention and reception centres in Libya and Malta. I was granted access to immigration detention centres in the north-west of Libya by the Ministry of Interior. Migrants' narratives provide information on areas I could not access, such as the south of Libya or the sea. I refer to the people I engaged with as 'migrants', regardless of the geographical, spatial, temporal or legal situation they find themselves in. Many, but not all, were undocumented. I thus use the term 'migrant' to describe people, their mobilities and experiences without resorting to the politicized, bureaucratic and legal categories of refugee, economic migrants, asylum seeker, for such

categories vary across time and space and empty out migrants' lived experiences along their journeys (see also Mainwaring, 2019).

As a researcher I inhabited a position of privilege by being far more mobile and less vulnerable because of my citizenship. Finding the right way to study and write about migrants' journeys is therefore difficult. De León & Wells (2015, p. 13) suggest that 'we as ethnographers need to be more critical regarding the contexts where participant observation is deployed and more reflective about how we write about the act of witnessing other people's trauma'. A focus on migrants' forced immobilities, then, must strive to be reflexive, attentive to both migrants' experiences and what we might learn from them about economic arrangements profiting from vulnerable mobile lives. The subsequent sections attend to migrants' experiences of different forced immobilities in Libya, and to related forms of value generation, extraction and realization: value extorted by criminal groups in the desert through confinement, transactions including money transferred for release from detention centres, and migrants as consumers of clandestine journeys when they attempt to move on by boat. Together, they provide an ethnographic basis for conceptualizing forms of accumulation in Europe's borderlands.

Chained

'There's a chain of them, there's a chain of them, working from beginning to the end [...], you change hands from one smuggler to the next, to the next, to the next, to the next', was how a man from Somalia described moving through the Sahara desert. Whilst scholars suggest that many human smugglers on this route work as loosely connected individual entities (Campana, 2018; Massari, 2015), migrants' own perceptions of the desert crossing refer to a 'chain' linking them together. A binding and coercive metaphor, long caught up with histories of slavery and bonded labour, the 'chain' establishes links that come into being through the knotting of the lives of migrants and smugglers when travelling on overcrowded vehicles from Sudan or Niger along desolate spaces of the Sahara desert to Libyan towns. Being chained tethers migrants to smugglers, creating conditions of dependency, as a man from Cameroon explained: 'You embarked on an unsafe trip which has no legal backing [...] you are endangering yourself' and 'have no say'. 'Those people who are carrying you, they are like your God, they decide for you. They decide where is going to be your destination', he said.

Migrants were dependent on smugglers during the desert crossing. Not only was this a coercive and uneven relation shaped by violence, including physical abuse, sexual harassment or the mixing of water with petrol to make it undrinkable, but it also materialized through the threat of being rendered immobile. Abandonment, particularly on the way from Sudan, was not unheard of. Having left the vehicles and passengers behind after a breakdown, drivers sometimes, but not always, returned with new supplies or a repaired vehicle.

This dependence – being bound to those enabling clandestine journeys with ‘no legal backing’ – reveals how immobilization and mobility work in conjunction. Whilst smugglers can be ‘predatory’ and ‘violent’, and are depicted as ‘quintessential villains’ exploiting migrants’ desperation and inflicting considerable suffering, they are also ‘agents of mobility’ (Sanchez, 2015, pp. 20–22). Smugglers thus played a dual role: they promoted movement of migrants and actively transported them on overcrowded vehicles, but also interrupted movement through abandonment.

Forced immobility along the desert route was not only about relations with individual smugglers who moved people through difficult terrain, but was also enmeshed with more organized systems of rent and linked to the payment of money. The long-established route through Niger was shaped by a system of ‘illegal taxation’, where state authorities were involved in informal activities (Brachet, 2018, p. 20; Raineri, 2018). A substantial part of the state officials’ income, money extorted in this manner was making its way back into the local economies (Brachet, 2018). This long-standing system of money extortion along the road was well understood by everyone. As a man from Cameroon recalled: ‘So [migrants] know exactly what is going on. So once the vehicle come to stop, they do what you normally do. You settle, you pay in your dues. They will allow you to pass’. An EU-backed change in migration legislation in 2015 criminalized migration in Niger, but, with corruption ongoing, ‘smugglers still bribe policemen to let them leave the town or pass through their checkpoints’ (Brachet, 2018, p. 27).

The ‘chains’ along which migrants moved across the desert were encapsulated by an entire network of actors, including smugglers and other criminal groups. They were at the heart of a system of accumulation that worked through forced immobility, witnessed in sites of informal confinement surrounding Libya’s southern borders. Migrants were stopped in their movement and held captive unless they paid. People who took the route through Sudan particularly mentioned these spaces of confinement (see also Campana, 2018), in which payments of larger sums of money were commonplace in order to move on. Money was paid using informal trust-based money transferring systems. Migrants’ friends and relatives arranged this by phone and through brokers in Sudan. Mobility was commodified: people with cash or family links that allowed them to pay were able to move on, while those lacking the means had to stay put, often for weeks, and working as cleaners or interpreters to earn their way out (see also Amnesty International, 2015). The main actor responsible for transactions in these spaces of confinement in the desert is the ‘debt collector’ (Ali, 2016, p. 24) or ‘local’ smuggling head (Campana, 2018). Many migrants referred to this figure as *Magafe*, a Somali word translated by migrants as ‘the one who never misses’. ‘If you’re going through this journey you must go through him’, a man from Somalia said. ‘You cannot say to him you are bad [...] because you are the one who comes to his area, [...] he has the power. [...] You have to pay compensation for your head. Otherwise you will remain there’, another man explained.

Being transferred along this chain of actors not only rendered confinement into an always-possible outcome, but made migrants feel commodified and dehumanized. Abuubakar, a man from Somalia I met in Malta, recalled how he was constantly ‘changing’ hands. At the border between Sudan and Libya, their smugglers changed and he had to pay the different actors US\$600 and US\$300: ‘They arranged everything. The smugglers speak to each other, and we were handed over to the Libyan smuggler like livestock. We were their livestock [...] ready to be sold’. Whilst at certain moments they were stock to be traded, at other junctures they were ‘moneymakers’, as another man from Somalia described:

So when you come in the desert, you don’t have any choice. You have to pay just only. There is no choice. [...] there is no choice [...] you have to pay, that’s all. [...] And I say: “Everyone says 500, 500, do you think we are moneymaker?” Yes, you are moneymaker, you have to be. And we be. And I pay.

Being transferred along a chain is indicative of the industry surrounding human smuggling, ‘premised on the treatment of human beings as human cargo, commodities to be transported, exchanged and in some cases, discarded’ (Vogt, 2016, p. 369). But, as migrants’ experiences reveal, the journey is also ‘a new phase in commodification’ transforming migrants ‘into particular types of commodities that may both gain and lose value within local conditions’ (Vogt, 2013, p. 765). In such conditions, forced immobility could also be productive of other relations. Those migrants facing the same predicaments and engaging in similar negotiations formed bonds of solidarity. Support networks were established among the group. Many migrants interacted with their smugglers and asked for the price to be lowered by threatening to report them to their friends back home to ruin their business.

Closer to Libya’s towns, state authorities entered the scene as additional actors along the chain. Movement from places like Kufra, Sabha, Al Gatrún, Benghazi or Ajdabiya to the capital Tripoli – where migrant communities were bigger, work was often easier to find, and from where most of the boats to Europe departed – took place in trucks, buses, cars or taxis, often with fake documents. Moments of immobility and the subsequent payment of money to move on further punctuated mobility, creating a stop and go rhythm that was characteristic of journeys within this carceral landscape and illicit economy. Criminal and state actors, whose identities were often blurred, held migrants in private houses, in government-run detention centres or at checkpoints. For many migrants, this was the third or fourth time they had to pay since having entered the desert. Those who carried cash on their bodies had instant access to better treatment and mobility, indicative of how important economic transactions were for ensuring safety and security. In addition to confinement, migrants, particularly those from West Africa, were also held in conditions of indentured or bonded labour (Micallef, 2017). In the perception of many migrants, there was not much difference

between sites of informal confinement controlled by various criminal groups and government-run detention centres.

Detained

‘Freedom or die trying’, was written on the dirty wall of a room in one of the government-run immigration detention centres I visited. ‘Nothing, apart from eating, sleeping and thinking’, a group of young West African men described their daily life. They sat on the floor, playing a game similar to chess but made out of the lids of old bottles. One man pointed to a pencil drawing of a plane they had sketched on the wall: ‘We want freedom. [...] We are being treated like animals, like mutton [...] and no human being deserves to be treated like that’.

Established by the Libyan government for migrants in breach of immigration regulations, detention centres had the veneer of legally ‘justifiable’ imprisonment. However, migrants’ own perceptions differed. Often, they perceived their arrest to be based on their darker skin colour and visibility as foreigners rather than the legality of documents. Migrants were detained after the desert crossing, when travelling in taxis, when living at houses like the one where I met Idiris, during daily activities such as walking to work or going shopping, when trying to leave by boat, as well as when brought to detention by abusive employers (see also Amnesty International, 2013, 2015). For many, the suddenness of detention, including the removal of mobile phones, meant that they were unable to let their friends and family know what had happened to them. They simply disappeared. There were many stories, like the one of the man from Nigeria I met in detention, who was employed as a plasterer with legal documents and was intercepted one morning on his way to work, supposedly for having the intention to take a boat, an accusation he denied. Or the case of the woman from Nigeria, who was intercepted in Tripoli on her way to the supermarket, exclaiming that she didn’t ‘do anything wrong’, that they were ‘normal people’ simply earning a living.

Some of the detention centres were in new buildings, particularly if funded by the EU, while others were set up in re-used former prisons or factories (Human Rights Watch, 2014). Conditions inside detention centres varied, but access to sunlight and fresh air was rare and most detainees I met were locked up behind bars in overcrowded rooms. Sanitation facilities were often limited and the food monotonous. Detainees frequently suffered from skin rashes, scabies, tuberculosis, tooth infections or diarrhoea (Amnesty International, 2013). The stories of mistreatment and labour exploitation I was told were also highlighted by numerous humanitarian agencies (Amnesty International, 2015; Danish Refugee Council, 2013; Human Rights Watch, 2014). While the involvement of smugglers in detention centres had been happening since before 2011, ‘the control now leveraged by militias over these facilities has expanded this activity to a scale not seen before’ (Micallef, 2017, p. 38).

With no access to legal recourse or the outside world, migrants experienced their time in detention as shaped by uncertainty about release, sudden deportation or transfer between centres. Forced movement between detention centres made migrants feel like goods. An Eritrean man I met had moved between five such centres. Kicking the air with his foot, he said he was a 'football' being kicked around. Money was made by moving him back and forth, he was convinced. 'It's a business' and 'it's all about money' were exclamations I heard often: 'They make money with us'. Limited access to legal recourse heightened migrants' feelings of objectification and their dependence on detention staff. As for Idiris, a common way of leaving detention was to buy one's way out through the payment of money directly to detention centre guards (see also Amnesty International, 2015; Human Rights Watch, 2014). The guards acted as gatekeepers to the outside world, arranging phone calls with families to organize payment through informal money transferring systems, often via a broker in Sudan. 'Freedom' had to be bought.

Detention staff played a double role: aiding escape but also using violence to punish migrants when attempts at escaping went wrong. Abuubakar described how he managed to negotiate with the guards, not only to purchase goods from outside with money sent by their families, but also to escape. After their initial attempt at escaping, Abuubakar and his fellow detainees were punished hard and physically beaten. They learnt that the only way to get out was to pay US\$1,200. The officer in charge remarked: 'Listen, in this world, there is nothing which is free. If you want to go out, you have to pay for your freedom'. Abuubakar was told that he could pay US\$800: 'I tell him "No, I can't pay 800"'. He managed to negotiate the price to US\$700, a sum he could afford with the help of his family who sold some land in Somalia. Shortly afterwards, realizing he could not leave his travel companions behind, Abuubakar went back to the officer in charge and managed to negotiate their release too. Paying one's way out of detention was no guarantee of freedom, however, as the next arrest was just waiting to happen. Feelings of imprisonment and fear of repeated arrest stretched beyond the walls of detention centres, resulting in the desire to leave Libya altogether. Many migrants decided to take a boat to Europe after their release.

Indentured labour was another avenue through which value was extracted from migrant bodies (see also Malakooti, 2019). At times, Libyan citizens and detention staff picked up migrants from detention to work as domestic help, detainees explained (see also Human Rights Watch, 2019). They were often asked to work for free – arrangements referred to as 'slavery' by many migrants. Not only does this reveal how dispossession is not solely about the creation of 'free wage labour' as Harvey's (2003) analysis would suggest. Rather, dispossession results in a necropolitical economy profiting from the debasement of life. Furthermore, it reveals how static and administrative categories, including terms such as 'trafficked' and 'smuggled', are far more complicated in practice (Martins Junior & O'Connell Davidson, 2021). Indenture, however, also represented an opportunity to exert agency, a chance to escape

from detention. The men 'would come to the prison every morning to ask for labourers and we would go and people would find a chance and escape', a man from Somalia recalled. He remembered that they used to say to each other that the Libyans 'are so stupid, [...] do they think that we are animals?' How could they take them to work and go away, expecting them to still be there when they came back, he wondered.

Escape from detention could also happen by simply running away, often when guards were distracted. At times, different methods of escaping were combined. People who were unable to pay their way out were deeply frustrated. Immobility and incarceration thus generated pathologies. The feelings of uncertainty about release led to what detainees and detention staff called 'becoming crazy'. Or, as one centre director explained, detainees often developed mental health problems after three or four months because they were uncertain of their future and 'thinking too much'. 'You have to have hope. If you lose hope, this is the end, you will go crazy', was how an Eritrean man described the predicament that had been thrust upon him. Migrants' embodiment of these experiences adversely affected their mental and physical health, and the effects stretched beyond the confines of detention to the wider landscape in Tripoli.

Immobility in detention is enforced by actors whose identities straddle divides between state and criminal authority, blurring distinctions between the legal and illegal in what are a set of economic practices profiting from human mobility. Forcibly rendering migrants immobile becomes crucial for both the realization and extraction of value. The former includes rent in the form of monetary payments made by migrants, rendering them into actors who help realize value, whilst unpaid indentured labour is a stark example of extraction. Carnal and carceral, both the realization and extraction of value are closely linked to the generation of restricted and unfree subjects, inflicted through violent measures of immobilization. The rentier forms of such economic arrangements are further highlighted in narratives of those waiting to move on by boat to Europe.

Waiting

'I learnt in prison. Next time, if I get in jail again, I [will] know how to handle the situation. I can save myself. Money, the escaping part, policemen', Idiris explained while sitting in the hot midday sun in the courtyard of the rundown house in Tripoli. It was almost lunchtime during one of my visits to the house. Many of the residents were resting on old mattresses spread across the small rooms. Others were cooking food on small gas burners or were just sitting on the floor in the intense sun, staring into space. Like Idiris, most of them had been detained at least once during their time in Libya. Idiris' repeated attempts at leaving by boat happened within the wider value-generating system that proceeded through serial forced

immobilities, a system that many other migrants at this house had to navigate. They stayed at the house from a few days or weeks to years, returning after unsuccessful attempts at crossing the sea. Paying for a place on a boat commodified movement, albeit in a clandestine manner, rendering migrants into consumers of what were difficult and dangerous journeys.

During the time of my fieldwork around US\$1,000 were needed to be released from detention, and between US\$300 and US\$2,000 for a place on a boat. Prices varied depending on the size of the boat, availability of life vests, as well as negotiations with the broker. Movement, detention and the payment of money were interlinked and shaped migrants' lives, as one man explained:

I paid [...] 800 dollars. I lost it. And I paid again 500. I lost it again. I paid [...] 900. I lost it again. [...] Sometimes you pay to release your head. Releasing your head, it will cost you money. Releasing your head. [...] Every day you lose, you get, you lose, you get, you lose, you fed up, then you get up. That is the way it works. When you're fed up, you get up again.

It was important to maintain hope and strength when navigating this system of serial immobility, although it stretched the meagre financial resources of individuals and their families and friends to the extreme. Ikraan, a woman from Somalia, was engaged in her third attempt at leaving when I met her. One year earlier she had received US\$800 from her mother in Somalia, which allowed her to take a boat with other migrants from a beach near Tripoli. Shortly after leaving, they were intercepted by Libyan coastguards and taken to detention. Having managed to escape, Ikraan returned to the house, and then attempted to embark on a boat again two months later with another US\$800 from her mother. After the boat's engine broke down, they drifted aimlessly for 10 days until a fishing boat rescued them. On her way back to the house, Ikraan was stopped at a checkpoint and detained again, having to pay her way out. Finally back at the house, Ikraan hoped her uncle would send her money because her mother had become tired of paying. 'Heartbroken', she was determined not to lose hope: 'I try my best. You can win. [...] I'm afraid, but I try. I want to. I keep trying until I go'. Ikraan needed to earn money in Europe to support her family in Somalia, while at the same time being reliant on her family's money to move there. Idiris, who had been engaged in unsuccessful attempts at onward movement from the house for several years, was convinced that their fate hovered between 'money' and 'God':

Here, everything is money. God, it's all up to God. Money. God. [...] The problem is money. [...] A friend of mine once told me that it gets darker before dawn [...] It's a problem, it's all about money [...] You have to be patient.

While Idiris had not been very lucky, the friend whom he had travelled with was able to move on quickly. It would take many more months for Idiris to

finally make the journey to Europe. Knowing the rules, being patient and having hope, as Idiris and Ikraan put it, was important to navigate the situation of immobility, both at the house and within the wider Libyan landscape.

The lives of migrants were marked by waiting: for onward movement and for what they hoped would be a better life. This form of voluntary, or at least not entirely coerced, immobility also rendered migrants vulnerable to other forms of violent accumulation. The house garnered visibility as a space where people were saving up money to take a boat and therefore became an easy target for robbery by criminal groups. In a context where the licit and the illicit were blurred, the house was also susceptible to police raids. These attacks, coupled with the threat of detention, often resulted in fast and sudden onward movement, as shown in the story of a Somali couple I met in Malta. Shortly after their arrival at the house, they were detained, as had happened numerous times before. They managed to escape and decided to not leave the house anymore for fear of being detained again. Following an attack by a criminal group at the house shortly afterwards, the couple decided to take a boat: 'Just to leave Libya only, and go anywhere. Lampedusa, Malta, Sicilia, anywhere we have lucky [...] If we die in sea it's better than to go back in Libya'. Had the Libyan authorities caught them at sea, they would have jumped in the water to drown in order to avoid detention. As they had to leave quickly, they were reliant on financial help from their migrant broker and friends in order to move onwards. Community support structures that emerged through bonds between migrants at the house supported onward movement.

The vulnerability waiting generated manifested itself in troubled sleep and ill health. Many migrants at the house slept in their shoes and clothes, ready 'to run' at any time. Life in Libya was 'running', and they could only 'reconnect with their emotions' when in Europe. One day, when I arrived at the house in the afternoon, people were just getting up. Tired and scared, they recounted how a group of young Libyan men with guns had come at 3am and fired through the door. They were lucky to have escaped, hiding on the roof. Sleeping only in the early mornings, when it was relatively safe, many people were constantly tired and too stressed to eat. Creating a safer environment for migrants at the house was a strategy employed by the landlord to ensure that he had a good reputation and thus had tenants. Sometimes, he would help residents by locating their night-time attackers and reporting them to the police. At other times, his role fluctuated between protecting and exploiting migrants through extorted rent payments, sexual harassment or evictions when they were ill.

Some people started looking for a new house in Tripoli as soon as possible, often with the help of friends who had already moved on to Europe. While they felt a little safer in smaller and less crowded houses, problems with landlords often continued. Sitting on the floor of the new room he had just moved to, a man from Eritrea showed me a pair of shiny new shoes he had bought. Strangely out of place in this derelict house, the man kept his brightly coloured shoes wrapped in a plastic bag for safekeeping on the boat. They were meant for his 'new life', for his 'freedom' in Europe. His friends next to him on the floor

explained that they, too, would be ‘normal’ people again when they arrived in Italy. Whilst the anxieties that were embodied by migrants often led to emotional stasis, they also manifested in hope, as the example of the shoes shows – a sign of movement and better futures. The continued fear in everyday life, repeated incarceration, and constant exploitation by networks profiting from rent led many migrants to make the decision to cross the sea, as a Somali man in Malta told me:

And the sea is not frightening. [...] Because you are so used to problems and you are so used to moving from prison to prison and to moving from place to place that when you finally arrive at the sea, you say, “okay, this is my escape. I either make it through or make it across or I sink, and it’s going to be much better than the life that I am living in this place”.

At spaces like the house in Tripoli, where vulnerable migrants engaged in waiting, value was realized by rendering migrants into consumers of clandestine, but commodified, journeys. People were exposed to further rounds of accumulation, revealing how the stop and go rhythm of movement mapped on to multiple rounds of payments for a place on a boat, rent and ransom. It was the underlying fear of being detained and having to pay money yet again that shaped migrants’ decisions on onward movement.

Accumulation by immobilization

The experiences of Idiris, Abuubakar and other migrants provide a powerful depiction of forced immobilization and the regimes of accumulation that profit from migrants’ unauthorized journeys and the disposability of life. In contexts of a fragmented state and law at the edges of EU borderwork, vulnerable mobilities themselves become a source of value. Migrants entangled in such economic practices often show an acute analysis of their modes of operation, learning the rules and using economic metaphors to describe their own identities. Feeling like a good, ‘livestock’ or ‘moneymaker’ was a visceral explanation of being denied entry into the category of ‘the human’ (cf. Mbembe, 2019), and reveals how people move through the desert in the hands of smugglers, learn how to negotiate with brokers and arrange money transfers to buy ‘freedom’ from detention. Learning the ‘rules’ of the ‘business’ of government-run detention was not only central to being able to leave, but was also closely entangled with life at private houses where people were engaged in repeated attempts at moving on by boat while evading detention.

Moving away from a linear and ‘crisis’-oriented understanding of migrants’ journeys across the Mediterranean, I have shown that sub-Saharan migrants’ mobilities are highly uneven, constituted by a mobility-immobility dynamic. Immobility has long been a focus of scholarship on mobility (Cresswell, 2010; Lubkemann, 2008; Salazar & Smart, 2011), but the political economic

dimensions of immobilization and how immobilization operates to generate specific kinds of value in carceral borderlands have been neglected. In the desert, migrants were chained to smugglers, objectified and dehumanized into commodities (Sharp, 2000). In government-run detention centres, value realization occurred through payment of money for release, whilst extraction happened through unpaid labour. Waiting for onward movement by boat at the private house in Tripoli subjected migrants to a further round of accumulation: as the consumers of clandestine, commodified mobilities, which were offered by a subterranean market that emerges as Europe's borders undergo intensified securitization. Here, value is generated through the vitality of the living, mobile body, whilst it is extracted in the form of unpaid and indentured labour, and realized through rent. The debasement of life and the making of precarious bodies is the other, necropolitical aspect of generating value.

In Libya's fragmented state context, actors forging this illicit and carceral mobility economy are heterogeneous. There is a blurring of lines between state and non-state actors, including smugglers and criminal gangs, particularly in detention, but also in the spaces of everyday life. Accumulation here is closely related to the kinds of movement that emerge as a result of immobilization: a stop and go rhythm entailing struggles, evasion and the payment of money to move on. Mobility and immobility are not so much binary opposites where one state occludes the other, but a set of movements that fold into and shift between one another. Mobility is not antithetical to confinement. Rather, and counter-intuitively, it becomes commensurate with the very process of confinement.

In this context, confinement is the basis of accumulation and it is for this reason I deploy the term 'accumulation by immobilization'. This is not simply an adaptation of more well-known formulations of primitive accumulation, which result in the rise of a free and rightless population whose living labour is exploited in capitalist production (Glassman, 2006), and neither is it a reformulation of accumulation by dispossession that focuses on the methods and means by which spaces are violently prised open for future capital investment (Harvey, 2003), witnessed for instance in urban gentrification and the enclosure of the commons. Rather, accumulation by immobilization refers to the relentless generation and extraction of value from vulnerable mobile life through incarceration and the creation of unfree subjects. It entails rendering migrants into commodities, although being a commodity is but one 'moment' in the journeys of migrants where value is extracted at different sites and in multiple forms. Accumulation by immobilization refers to the exploitation of indentured and unpaid labour, for specific durations, in a carceral landscape through which migrants have to move. It is also a rentier form where a range of actors demand payments from dispossessed, mobile bodies. Accumulation by immobilization proceeds by violent and extra-legal means, and can also be extra-economic, playing out in a sphere outside the realm of formal, expanded reproduction (Glassman, 2006). The dynamic of accumulation by immobilization is serial, recurrent and folded into journeys, subjecting migrants to multiple events of incarceration and extraction.

This has consequences for how we specify and analyse forms of capitalism that emerge in the technologized, carceral borders of Europe (Andersson, 2018), or in other border zones more broadly (Green, 2011; Vogt, 2013). Accumulation by immobilization unsettles the familiar story of capitalist expansion and reproduction through mobility, fluidity and flow, to front-stage forms of carceral or penal capitalism that proceed through confinements and restrictions, extracting value from the direct enclosure of human life. In the Libyan context, there are a number of intersecting forces at work. The externalization of the EU's borders to Libya, including through the funding of detention centres, contributes to the rise of a highly uneven, violent and carceral landscape. Detention centres require bodies to populate them and, in Libya, they operate in ways that blur divisions between the legal and the illegal, the state and non-state. However, the generation, extraction and realization of value from vulnerable mobile life is not necessarily what one observes in the Mexico-US border zone (Green, 2011; Martínez, 2016; Slack, 2016; Vogt, 2013), or even in the immediate borders of Europe (Andersson, 2018), where drones, surveillance technologies and a carceral asylum system return bodies and data as use-values for capital. Rent or money extorted in Libya or Niger make their way back, in various forms, to local economies (Brachet, 2018), but are not necessarily reinvested for capitalist expansion.

In other words, there are various economic practices and formations at stake, sharing elements of a penal capitalism and influenced by state-centred biopolitics of regulating mobile life, but not reducible to either in their entirety. A range of licit and illicit practices in the borderlands is revealed and points to a much more variegated set of processes, some of which are capitalist and some of which emerge through 'the outside' that state-centred biopolitics and necropolitics create. Other scholars have referred to these as 'bioeconomies of containment', viewed to resemble the 'global kidnapping industry' because 'both "warehouse" people for the extraction of different forms of value (political, policing, financial)' (Andersson, 2018, p. 434). These insights are helpful as they point to an intersection of different forces and diverse ways through which vitality and mobile life itself becomes a source of economic value. The bioeconomy here is not so much about parsing life into discrete and isolated objects (Rose, 2007), than it is about extracting from life through its immobilization and, at times, its devaluation. Equally, 'values are derived not just from the usefulness of bodies as laborers or objects to transport' but also 'from the various social relations that imbue their lives' (Vogt, 2013, p. 774).

An ethnographic account of different forms of immobility also recuperates questions of migrant agency in what might otherwise seem an overbearing, carceral landscape. Migrants' own accounts of their journeys and lives move beyond a simple focus on the smuggling industry, as prevalent in much literature on irregular migration (Campana, 2018; Sanchez, 2015), as well as political and media discourse and migration policy that perpetuate normative constructions of the smuggler as predatory and exploitative and the migrant as victim (Sanchez, 2015, 2017; Vogt, 2016). Not all processes of value extraction from

irregular migrants are solely violent, predatory and sensationalistic (Sanchez, 2015; Vogt 2013, 2016), but include a multitude of relationships where smugglers are exploitative and also agents of mobility. Detention can invoke forms of intimacy (Conlon & Hiemstra, 2017) and mobility itself is an 'intimate lived social process' where human smuggling can be a type of intimate labour and care on journeys (Vogt, 2013, 2016, p. 368).

The confinement of bodies and the extraction of value from mobile life is thus an ongoing condition, symptomatic of present global capitalism and the outside that it creates. This ethnographic endeavour has focused on the latter: how a migrant bioeconomy (Andersson, 2018) emerges in contexts of fragmented state authority like Libya. Here, the precarious migrant body becomes part of a transnational system of economic production in the wider borderlands, subjected to multiple rounds of value extraction. Whilst accumulation by immobilization can be read as a dynamic specific to the context, it offers up wider insights for understanding predatory practices that aggravate precariousness, deploy violence, and forcibly enclose the mobilities of some of the most vulnerable people in the world. It brings new understandings of migration governance and an economization of life shaping migrants' journeys to the fore.

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Notes

1 All names have been changed.

2 The conversion rate at that time was roughly US\$1 = 1.2 LYD (<https://www.xe.com>).

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