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# Integration into liminality: women's lives in an open centre for migrants at Europe's Southern Antechamber

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## ABSTRACT

This article examines the 'integration discourse' that characterises migrants' governance in the Centre for the Temporary Stay of Immigrants (CETI) in the Spanish enclave of Melilla. Beyond observing the incongruous character of the integration discourse, the article unpacks the ways in which this framing fulfils a specific function within the broader setup of migration control and the gendered modalities of migrant governance on a daily basis. The article argues that life in the CETI presents the fundamental characteristics of an existence inscribed within a total institution, implying the use of discipline as a technology of power and a structure of relations based on deference, in the specific guise of residents' condition as 'subjects to be integrated'. Furthermore, the article identifies three forms of dispossession – material, role and time-related – carried out against the background of a fictional integration, each bringing its share of gendered implications. This article draws on fieldwork conducted in Melilla over three months, with regular visits to the CETI that entailed participant observation inside the Centre as well as semi-structured interviews with migrant women on the one hand, and social, healthcare, and administrative workers on the other.

## ARTICLE HISTORY

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## KEYWORDS

Migration; borders; gender; integration

'It is absolutely forbidden to bring in, keep or prepare food in the room'.

The CETI presentation booklet

'Cleanliness is fundamental. Taking the food out of the rooms. For example the Subsaharians they like to have mayonnaise in the rooms'.

Notes from an interview with an *integradora*  
(integration worker).

## 1. Introduction

The rule quoted above and the comment made by an 'integration worker' are instances of a discourse, here referred to as the 'integration discourse', performed in the Centre for the Temporary Stay of Immigrants (CETI) located in the Spanish enclave of Melilla. This

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article examines modalities of migrants' governance in this Southern European<sup>1</sup> borderland, in particular in relation to women's daily experiences of life in the CETI. Melilla, along with the other Spanish city in North Africa, Ceuta, forms the only territorial border of the European Union with the African continent. This territory of around twelve square kilometres and 84,000 inhabitants is surrounded on one side by one of the most sophisticated border fences ever built and on the other by the Alboran Sea, a part of the Mediterranean Sea. Melilla is a peculiar place, shaped by its colonial past and produced both by the flows that traverse it and the barriers that cut it off from its surroundings. This Spanish outpost in North Africa has attracted researchers' attention in relation to the local forms of territorial porosity in this border region (Guia 2014; Karell 2014; Soto Bermant 2014). Local mobilities constitute a vital part of the border city's daily life, from domestic workers crossing the border every morning and evening (the 'transfronterizas'), to the Moroccan women carrying on their backs manufactured goods to be sold in Morocco, to the Spanish tourists escaping the enclave for a few days. A land of shifting and porous borders over centuries, Melilla became a full-fledged enclave following Spain's inclusion in the EEC and the city's reframing as a European gatekeeper (Soto Bermant 2017). Though formally included in the Schengen area, the city's mobility regime presents specificities. Moroccans from the neighbouring region of Nador are allowed to enter the city (without being authorised to stay overnight) and police check the documentation of all who set out to leave the enclave by boat or plane, thus maintaining a border within sovereign Spanish territory. Moroccan 'neighbours' who enter Melilla on the basis of the special Spanish-Moroccan agreement cannot travel farther, nor can migrants in Melilla reach mainland Spain without a Schengen visa or special police authorisation.

The politics of border securitisation constitute the other focus of migration-related research in the Spanish enclaves in North Africa (Andersson 2015; Ferrer-Gallardo 2008). Melilla is indeed situated on international migration trails for migrants going from Africa, and more recently the Middle East, to Europe. Most of these persons are accommodated in the CETI after their arrival in Melilla. At the beginning of the fieldwork conducted for this research, in September 2016, 928 persons were residing in the Centre, with women and children representing 34% of its population. If scholars concerned with migration across disciplines have dedicated increasing attention to gender since the mid-1980s (Donato et al. 2006; Lutz 2010), the Western Mediterranean route was mostly characterised by male-dominated migrations, with women's stories and experiences in this context only recently beginning to be explored (Grotti et al. 2018; Tyszler 2018).

In this article, I place the analytical focus on the manifestations of power in the relations between a range of actors among the administrators and managers of the Centre on the one hand and women residents on the other. I rely on Foucauldian understandings of discipline as a technology of power (Foucault 1975) to account for its manifest and latent workings within the encountered situations. The structures of these relations appear furthermore to resemble those identified by Goffman in his characterisation of a total institution (1961). Being admitted to the Centre for the Temporary Stay of Immigrants is akin to entering a total institution: residents live collectively in shared spaces, under the same authority, and are expected to attend collectively scheduled activities throughout the day. Though residents receive a magnetic card that allows them to enter and leave the Centre, the geographical context of the enclave makes the CETI an open Centre of a peculiar kind. Since migrants are not authorised to leave the border city, which requires travelling by

boat or plane, the authority of the institution operates in similar conditions to those of a closed Centre. It is this peculiar in-between-ness of any borderland that produces liminality, an ‘interstitial condition, a journey from one state of being to another’ (Donnan and Wilson 1999, 66).

By unpacking the integration discourse, defined below, that characterises migrants’ governance inside the CETI, this article contributes to our understanding of the contradictions that traverse the border city of Melilla in particular, and that underpin the construction of the humanitarian border (Walters 2011; Williams 2015) more broadly. The CETI, situated three hundred metres from the militarised fence, hosts undocumented migrants and asylum seekers awaiting transfer to the peninsula, i.e. mainland Spain. After being registered by the police, most migrants are accommodated for an indeterminate period of time in the CETI, the duration varying according to individual administrative cases and the broader context of the temporal economics of illegality (Andersson 2014a). Migrants are transferred to different type of centres according to their administrative status. Asylum seekers are usually transferred to a reception centre, while undocumented migrants are transferred to a detention centre. Admission to the CETI might lead to deportation after the person’s transfer to a detention centre in mainland Spain, yet deportations do not take place directly from Melilla.<sup>2</sup> There is no clear timeline as to when a transfer will take place, and individuals in seemingly similar administrative situations might have significantly different experiences.

The integration discourse refers to the rules set out to arriving migrants, in a first meeting with the administration and in the distributed presentation documents, as well as through diffuse elements of discourse that altogether form the dominant modalities of migrants’ governance inside the Centre. From supervising hygiene to managing relations among residents, the discursive and material practices of the Centre’s social, healthcare, and administrative workers are framed under the umbrella of the integration discourse. The comment quoted above by an ‘integration worker’, about the need to be attentive to the sub-Saharan’s habit of leaving mayonnaise in the rooms, illustrates anecdotally how the discourse translates into practices enacted within a specific structure of relations that this article explores.

In the context of the militarisation of European borders (Andersson 2015), the prevalence of the integration discourse within a first reception structure situated at a European periphery might seem odd at first sight. This incongruence is summarised neatly by Ruben Andersson’s ethnography of a similar Centre in the other Spanish enclave of Ceuta<sup>3</sup>: ‘the “integration” work of the camps remained an absurd exercise. How could anyone learn Spanish ensconced in a faraway hillside, suspended in time, and fearful of deportation?’ (2014a, 805). Yet the paradox is only superficial, and this article argues that the integration discourse fulfils functions and carries meanings with material implications for the residents. Discourses around what the institution officially does are mobilised by workers at all times to display, legitimate, implement, and impose actions. In that sense, the integration discourse is functional to the institution and needs unpacking: What functions does the integration discourse carry out? How do the Centre’s workers perform this discourse? And, importantly, what conditions of life are created in this context?

After a brief presentation of the methodology, these questions are first addressed through the study of the functions, meanings, and implications of the integration discourse. This third section presents the main tenets of this discourse and analyses how it

is performed by workers and what type of authority this establishes. Then, the fourth section identifies three forms of dispossession – material, role and time related – carried out against the background of a fictional integration that serves everyday practices of management and discipline.

## 2. Methodology

This article results from fieldwork conducted over a period of three months in the Spanish enclave of Melilla, from August to October 2016. Several interviews were also conducted during a shorter stay in January 2017. My fieldwork in Melilla was part of the ERC-funded project EU Border Care with the PI and colleagues conducting research in other European borderlands (Italy, Greece and France). After submitting an authorisation application to the director of the Centre, I was granted access pursuant to receipt of the corresponding authorisation from Madrid. The European scope and funding of this research might have positively contributed to obtaining this authorisation; as a matter of fact, I have met individual researchers whose entry to the Centre had been refused. For a period of six weeks, I visited the CETI frequently, spending several hours inside the Centre on each visit and conducting interviews with the Centre's workers as well as with its residents. Among the professionals working inside the Centre, I interviewed social workers, healthcare workers, administrative workers, and a lawyer. These workers were employed either by an NGO or directly by the Centre. Social workers were comprised of *mediadoras*, who work inside the offices, and *integradoras*, who manage many 'little' issues hands-on in the courtyard and other living spaces of the residents; the title of *integradora* is here translated as 'integration worker'. Among the residents, I mostly conducted interviews with pregnant women and recent mothers, in keeping with the focus of the research project on maternity care. I spent additional informal time with several women on a regular basis inside and around the Centre. I interviewed 18 women coming from Syria (7), Algeria (7), Morocco (3) and Yemen (1). They were between 17 and 36 years old and had spent on average three months in the Centre (anywhere from four days to 11 months). Prior to their migratory journey some of these women worked at home with the family; others worked in manual jobs, administration and schools. This composition broadly reflects women's nationalities in the Centre at the time of my research, since close to half of the women residing in the CETI were of Syrian origin, 17% were Algerians and about 15% were Moroccans. None of the women from Western African countries residing in the CETI (14% of all women, mainly from Sierra Leone and Guinea) were known to need perinatal or maternal care over the period of this research. The significant presence of women (15%) and children (19%) overall was in contrast to the mainly male migrants present in the Spanish enclave of Ceuta (Andersson 2014b). In recent years, Melilla has become a doorway to Europe for Syrian refugees unable to follow shorter routes, and most travelled as families; in September 2016 they represented 30% of the Centre's residents.

## 3. Functions, meanings and implications of the integration discourse

### 3.1. Deployment of the integration discourse

First, the overarching integration discourse of the CETI constitutes an official component of the institution's aims as defined by the Ministry of Employment and Social Security.

The Centre's mission, as specified on the Ministry's website, covers 'services of accommodation and support, of social assistance, of psychological assistance, sanitary assistance, legal assessment and training, leisure, and free time'.<sup>4</sup> In itself, the Centre's administrative supervision by the Ministry of Employment implies a promise of integration. The Ministry indeed presents the Centre as an integration structure, while, at the same time, 'identification procedures and medical checks'<sup>5</sup> are carried out. This discourse trickles down to the directors and staff of the Centre, while being appropriated, developed, and transformed in the process. Key elements of this discourse feature in the presentation documents distributed to the residents as well as in those given to various categories of authorised visitors, as in this case to a researcher on the occasion of an interview with the director. By scrutinising an institutionally produced integration discourse in the context of a Southern European borderland, I aim at contributing to the specific task of grappling with the ideological construct of Europe that 'is coming to play an increasingly prominent role in the complex humanitarian-security nexus at the borders' (Andersson 2017, 68). I emphasise the liminal condition of the borderland where national and ethnic identities 'are configured at borders in ways that often differ from how these same identities are constructed in less peripheral areas of the state' (Donnan and Wilson 1999, 64).

The integration discourse addresses the external visitor, conjectural embodiment of the general European public, at least as much as it speaks to internal actors. Arguably, much of the internal performance of this discourse stems from the need to showcase the institution to the external gaze. [Figure 1](#) reproduces a translated section of a document, printed with the Ministry's header, which defines the reception programme. Internally, this is translated into a document entitled 'Basic Norms of Cohabitation', distributed to residents upon arrival. These rules, formally aimed at organising life inside the Centre, establish some of the manifest forms of authority available to the managing actors and imply relationships between workers and residents structured around deference. For example, this document reminds residents to 'listen to the announcements per megaphone'. The Centre's administration makes announcements and summons individuals to the offices through a megaphone, loud enough to be heard in every corner of the Centre, including every sleeping quarter. This penetrating sound is emitted, starting at 8 am, on every working day, as a tool for both general announcements and calls to specifically named persons. Residents can be called to the offices for various reasons. Amongst the most common ones are administrative procedures and appointments (for instance picking up a card, meeting with the psychologist, etc.), and most messages follow the structure 'Name/list of names, to the control post [the administration's building]'. A striking feature of life in the Centre to the outsider, and a symbol of the administration's authority over the residents, the megaphoned voices progressively become yet another dimension of this collective life. Residents are expected to listen to the information and instructions so transmitted at all times. This feature of institutional life in the Centre is but one example of how private spaces are subsumed under the Centre's administrative authority to the point of leaving no physical space outside it. As distinct from a fully-fledged panopticon (Foucault 1975), the notion of a myopic panopticon (Whyte 2011) suggests how the megaphone becomes in this context a technology of power, structuring space and determining one's positionality within the latter.

### **Programmes of the Centres for the Temporary Stay of Immigrants**

In order to improve the cohabitation and facilitate the future socio-economic insertion of the persons residing in the CETI, a series of precautionary and integrative programmes are being carried out. These programmes are designed and coordinated by the Centre's direction, and are developed in a multidisciplinary fashion by the professionals that compose the team (social workers, psychologist, lawyers, healthcare personnel).

These programmes need to be adapted continuously to the needs and characteristics of the residents, who, in general, present a low level of education and professional training and an important lack of knowledge of the new host society. In addition, they come from different continents and countries, with different cultures, languages, and with different value systems; so that when engaging with them different methodologies are used and different activities are prepared, taking into account this diversity.

Programmes that are carried out in the CETI (among others):

- Reception programme: it aims at helping immigrants and asylum seekers during the adaptation period to their new reality. This programme, in which all professionals in the Centre take part, intends to provide them [the residents] with a global overview of their legal situation in Spain, basic hygienic-sanitary rules, social skills, and motivation to take part in future activities carried out in the Centre.
- Programme for health habits: it focuses on health habits, adequate use of sanitary services, and how to deal with certain diseases, especially chronic ones.
- Literacy programme and language courses.
- Specific programmes – among others: prevention and attention to possible victims of human trafficking and gender violence and programme for equality.

**Figure 1.** Presentation of the CETI, document produced by the Ministry of Employment and Social Security, 2014. Source: Document handed in to the author in August 2016 by the Director of the CETI (author's translation).

The document also presents a series of points framed as 'cohabitation rules' stating the administration's expectations of residents, such as 'You always have to turn off your phone before speaking with the professionals' or 'We won't attend to you if you don't come clean/with clean clothes'. Such rules grant the Centre's workers specific powers over the residents through the permanent injunction to comply with a set of norms that leave room for interpretation. These sets of rules place the resident in a position of cultural inferiority and establish a hierarchy whereby the authority of the professional workers is conflated with moral superiority. The assumption of such cultural inferiority appears already in

the Ministry document, which revolves around the figure of the non-educated migrant who needs to be educated into the ways of the host society, from ‘hygienic-sanitary rules’, to ‘social skills’, to ‘value systems’ (see [Figure 1](#)). The multiplication of rules functions as the foundation of the disciplinary apparatus, in foucauldian terms leading to the institution of a ‘micro-penalty of time, of activity, of speech, of the body, of sexuality’:

It was a question both of making the slightest departures from correct behaviour subject to punishment, and of giving a punitive function to the apparently indifferent elements of the disciplinary apparatus: so that, if necessary, everything might serve to punish the slightest thing; each subject find himself caught in a punishable, punishing universality. (Foucault 1975, 178)

The conjunction of simultaneously specific and undetermined rules is performed by CETI workers. I construe the latter as composed of workers employed by the Centre (secretaries, social workers, psychologists, doctors, interpreters) and workers employed by NGOs (with medical, legal, and social responsibilities).<sup>6</sup> These differences notwithstanding, the displayed mission of ‘integrating migrants’ brings these categories of CETI workers together by emphasising a shared identity as ‘integrators’, which overrides differences in terms of profession, status and employer. The document in [Figure 1](#) constructs the unity of the professional workers in the Centre: different categories of workers – in practice responding to different employers – are incorporated within a broad narrative of reception and integration. The presentation of the role of this NGO by a coordinator is in line with the Ministry’s framing, which places the different organisations under the same umbrella:

Our role in the CETI, as first reception, first assistance, is to reduce the intercultural shock that will happen when they will transfer to the peninsula, through language classes and culture, not only Spanish but also European.

By defining a subject ‘to be integrated’, the integration discourse thus homogenises the category of CETI workers. The reference to a European identity effectively constructs an opposition between ‘us’ and ‘them’, constituting a means of homogenising the group of workers at the Centre as both representatives and agents of integration into Europe. Given the long-lasting mobilities that have produced the border city of Melilla, such emphasis on the us/them binary seems, at the very least, ironic. The construction and discursive use of this divide is, however, intelligible as a key tenet of the integration discourse. The following section examines how the integration discourse translates into a series of specific rules performed daily, through both discursive and material practices.

### ***3.2. The discourse in words and actions: performing Europe***

While the translation of the integration discourse aims at daily life management inside the Centre, it draws its force from assimilation of the CETI to a ‘mini Spain’ run by the Centre’s workers. This limited space of first reception serves to perform Europe to the racialized Other, be it the figure of the Sub-Saharan or of the Arab. Reminding us of the borderland context of this theatricalisation, Soto Bermant traces the crystallization of the meaning of ‘Europe’ in Melilla to Spain’s inclusion in the European Economic Community, after which the term Europe ‘began to operate as an authoritative discourse of exclusion pointing not so much to what one is, but to that which one is not: whatever else they may be, Europeans are not Africans’ (Soto Bermant 2017, 135).



Within the CETI, performing Europe was articulated around several themes, from self-presentation and hygiene to gender equality to multiculturalism, presented as core European values. Actions and reprimands were legitimised by the need to adjust to a European way of life and to display the will to integrate into Spanish society. This overarching discursive frame governed every action carried out by the social workers.

Self-presentation and hygiene were among the most common themes foregrounded by the Centre's social workers. One integration worker presented her role as observing whether residents were 'adequately dressed and with their hair done when they go to the canteen in the morning'; she continued, 'it's Europe here, there are certain norms'. Integration was understood and implemented as an educational programme; residents were to be educated to the established norms. The function of the integration discourse is key: it empowers social workers to regulate the lives of the residents not merely on the grounds of what collective leaving would require, but in the service of higher aims, as they position themselves as gatekeepers of Europe and by the same token position residents as requiring constant justification of their very presence on European soil.

A significant part of the integration discourse was related to the theme of gender relations. Space management techniques were discursively attached to questions of gender. After the birth of a baby, the Centre's administration usually attempted to place parents and baby in the same room for a couple of days (the period of time varied and not all were granted this possibility). The usual configuration of the camp separated families upon arrival, with children sleeping with their mothers (in the same bed in the case of young children). The exceptional reunions granted after a birth aimed at providing the woman with some support and facilitating her recovery. This practice was presented as fostering greater gender equality by encouraging the father to play a role in the aftermath of the birth. Yet, for those on the receiving end of these practices, it was the scope for arbitrariness, rather than a gendered concern, that shone through most clearly. Mounia, a 36-year-old Algerian woman in her 8th month of pregnancy, commented on the issue of room distribution:

In this matter it depends on the social worker; here there's a bit of racism. For example, if you state a law you need to apply it to everyone, not 'with her because she's sweet' ... I don't like this because it's not fair.

Beyond the perception of racism caused by unclear attribution criteria, it is the very framing of gender equality in educational terms, and its instrumental use in relation to assignment of beds, that reveals the underpinning racialisation. Social workers appeared to present their task as one of enlightenment of an orientalised Other (Said 1978). Appealing to gender equality within processes of othering is increasingly a practice of European far-right political parties (Farris 2017). Here, the fundamentally racial politics of migration (De Genova 2017) reveal themselves to be equally gendered, one aspect being substantially entangled with the other.

A third dimension of the integration discourse entailed educating residents to tolerance and diversity, to 'European multiculturalism'. A social worker stated: 'We have to make them realize that the Algerian is equal to the Syrian; they need to learn to live together, they're already in Europe'. Undoubtedly, the material living conditions, in a Centre built for 480 individuals and accommodating close to double its capacity, were conducive to incidents and conflicts among residents. Much of the Centre's life was organised along

national lines of division and this constituted an important source of tension, not least through the circumstance that Syrians used to leave the Centre much earlier than Algerians and Moroccans, whose duration of stay was even more ‘undetermined’ – police and administrative files were usually processed faster for Syrian nationals, with, however, important differences within the group of Syrians. Displaying ‘multiculturalism’ as a European value that migrants of different nationalities were supposedly not accustomed to served here to further empower the social workers, holders of a unique and superior knowledge that justified the education of migrants. The equality statement appeared, however, to contradict the empirically unequal situations in which residents of the CETI found themselves according to their nationality of origin. Against the background of physical proximity created by the institution, and endured by residents who were deprived of intimacy in the absence of private spaces, the integration discourse cleverly reversed the situation to provide a simple explanation for any tension that was likely to arise as a result of these living conditions: the incapacity of residents to adapt to a multicultural environment.

Inseparable from this structure of relations between CETI workers and migrant residents is the paternalistic tone in which this discourse was performed. In Erving Goffman’s study, staff across various types of total institutions were perceived to be condescending towards inmates (1961), and these patterns were equally to be observed in the Centre described here. If residents of the CETI were to be integrated, it was, after all, because they lacked fundamental knowledge and capabilities. The morally superior position of the Centre’s workers appeared most clearly in their attempts to educate parents in how to raise their children. An integration worker insisted, for instance, that it was necessary to explain to parents the danger of keeping a boiler in the room since a child could burn him or herself: ‘We do it for their well-being’. Or, in the words of the director emphasising the Centre’s role in educating residents about hygiene: ‘Children, they tend to be very receptive but we want the parents, the mother or the father to accompany that child to the shower, so that he/she doesn’t go alone, so to educate them as well’. Professional workers, by claiming such responsibility, were denying parents’ agency. Children were placed under the authority of the Centre’s administration and parents’ authority was put on hold. The multiple identities of residents were reduced in the process to that of the unauthorised subject being temporarily accommodated and disciplined by a higher authority. The preservation of the family unit and the exercise of parental authority are not compatible with the workings of a total institution; thus stripping parents of the legitimacy of their parenting by claiming a higher responsibility is merely a consequence of the parents’ own subjugation to the authority of the Centre.

The injunction to comply with a set of rules, presented as replicating key features of European societies, and the consequent structure of relations so produced, created the conditions for permanent disciplining of residents.

### ***3.3. The ever-present potential disciplining engendered by the integration discourse***

The disciplining and control engendered by the integration discourse supposes both positive reward and punishment. Compliant residents are to be praised for their efforts, while those regarded as not compliant are to be visibly blamed. Whereas the latter situation

seemed to occur most often, displaying praise and displaying blame represent two sides of the same coin. When asked what she considered sources of satisfaction at work, an NGO worker recalled an instance of residents' efforts to please her:

For example I give a hygiene workshop, because I've seen the children with messy hair, not brushed, in the pyjamas that are given in the kindergarten ... And when I come back two days later, the mothers are waiting at the entrance, with the children with their hair well done, clean clothes, and they say 'Look, look'. This for me is a big satisfaction. Because it's been useful.

The encounter was pleasant for the NGO worker, whose work and emotional investment was positively acknowledged by the migrant women who came up to her to show the well-groomed children. The women, too, might have been pleased by the compliments that the NGO worker gave them. The encounter illustrates nevertheless the deference that is expected from residents, with praise working in a similar manner to blame in this regard: it establishes who is in a position to morally judge the other's behaviour and supposes the possibility of sanction. Foucault writes: 'in discipline, punishment is only one element of a double system: gratification-punishment' (1975, 180).

The integration discourse being culturally inflated, the rules themselves can fluctuate, which reinforces the power of those who can determine what these rules are. How much blame does bringing a packaged snack to the room deserve? More or less than leaving a piece of a sandwich? What form should this blame take? Once the power to discipline is granted to an entire group of professionals, a significant space for arbitrary use of that power is attached to it. A vignette recounts the story of Mounia, disciplined by a social worker for having taken a tray out of the canteen. Pregnant at the time of the incident, she slept outside the Centre for two days.

During the month of Ramadan, we could eat at lunch but dinner was uneatable, even a dog wouldn't eat it. And I was fasting, so I took a tray out to eat it in the evening, around 7/8pm. They created a problem; they said look, she has stolen a tray ... What would I do with a tray? She [the social worker] has thrown all of my stuff on the floor, the Koran, she insulted me, words ... in front of everyone. [...] She told me if you don't want to stay here you go outside. I stayed outside for two days, two nights, I didn't even have water to drink.

Being excluded from the Centre as a failure to demonstrate one's integration inside was a common punishment. A fight among residents or a conflict with the administration could lead to one's being expelled from the Centre for some time. In Mounia's story, several elements reveal how the disciplining worked and its different functions. The social worker decided to blame Mounia publicly, displaying her administrative power and attempting to shame Mounia for having disrespected the stated rules of the Centre. This brought the social worker to further violate territories of the self (Goffman 1961, 32) in the act of searching Mounia's room and leaving her private belongings for everyone to see. The organisation of life inside the Centre relies on the possibility of such violation at any time: no space is entirely private and no space can be withdrawn from the Centre's authority. Residents are merely tolerated, their presence is precarious, and authorisation to be accommodated in the Centre can always be withdrawn. The integration discourse was thus translated both into a series of practical norms (e.g. 'no food in the rooms') as well as malleable principles (e.g. 'presenting well') that left it up to the 'frontline workers' to decide what constituted compliance with and deviation from these norms.

Finally, these dynamics had yet another important consequence for residents' lives. The fundamental divide – between those who organise life in the Centre on the one hand, and those to whom these discursive and material practices were addressed on the other – deprived residents of a legitimate voice. Wrapping the exercise of power in an integration discourse effectively disarmed the residents a priori, since protest itself represented a failure to integrate. Contestation happened on a daily basis; however, as the following story recounted by a nurse, Rosa, illustrates, it was not perceived as protest.

So at some point you get tired, you want to go to Europe and you want to live together with Europeans, you have to adapt. Grandparents come requiring from you milk for the baby, I can't give them milk if the doctor hasn't given a written prescription because there are programmes in place to favour breastfeeding. It's better but they don't understand it. (...) If the paediatrician considers it appropriate I give her the milk, but if the paediatrician says no, I won't give her milk. They get angry, throw things in your face, they're upset and slam the door.

Rosa was getting tired of tensions with patients, as conflict frequently followed medical personnel's refusal to provide formula milk. The fatigue expressed by Rosa is not surprising, given the intense emotional labour carried out by healthcare professionals in this context on a daily basis. It is nevertheless revealing that Rosa framed these tensions as a matter of integration. Yet the more loudly this injunction to integrate is expressed, the more obvious its inherent paradoxes become. The following section examines how the proposed integration is emptied of meaning. First, the fiction of the Centre as a mini-European society supposes integration into liminal spaces, floating somewhere in-between, disconnected from the local social life of the border city and totally cut off from the European continent. Integration would have equally supposed acknowledgement of residents' subjectivity, yet the following section demonstrates how the imposed deference jeopardises such participation. Finally, life within this liminal space suspends time for residents: their lives unfold without their being able to exercise much control over it.

## 4. The impossible integration: naming multiple dispossessions

### 4.1. *Integration into liminality through spatial and material dispossession*

The integration discourse constructs the CETI as a space of preparation for life in Europe. Its location, spatial organisation, and material conditions of life, however, empty any such pretence of its meaning. The city centre is about an hour away on foot from the CETI, which is situated right next to the border. This open Centre is indeed better described as semi-open, since the enclave constitutes a sort of 'open-air prison', or as one report puts it 'an open-air sorting hot spot' (Migreurop/GADEM 2015), with residents allowed to leave the Centre but not authorised to travel outside Melilla. This is a determinant feature of life in the CETI, given that residents do not know how long they will stay. While young men do walk to the Centre, for many this distance effectively cuts them off from the city. This was particularly the case for pregnant women, for whom visits to the hospital represented a major inconvenience since they, more often than not, had to return to the Centre on foot. Pregnant women who did not have a partner in the CETI

were probably the most constrained, and most did not leave the CETI at all. Hanae, a 30-year-old Algerian woman who had been living in the Centre for three months, felt confined: ‘I spend my days like in a prison, there’s no oxygen. Before giving birth I struggled to breathe, the room, the room, the room’.

Feeling stuck in spite of formally residing in an open Centre, most women did not access social environments other than the immediate one of the CETI. After we struggled to find a spot in the Centre for our conversation, Amal commented during the interview, ‘That’s not a life; we have to stay ... look, even the smallest thing, there isn’t even a quiet place where we could stay and talk’.

The separation of families constituted another key principle of space management in the Centre and added to the feeling of confinement. Family life was disrupted, further dispossessing residents of yet another dimension of their lives since ‘no meaningful domestic existence’ was possible (Goffman 1961, 22). To Souad, this was an important source of suffering; she was five months pregnant at that time:

I           What is the most important thing for you now?  
Souad    That they give me a room with my husband. That’s it.

Far from the city and offering no opportunity for family life, the spatial and material conditions of life in the Centre limited for residents the possibility of preserving a sense of self. Newer rooms were equipped with small lockers for the residents to keep their personal belongings in, but most did not have access to such a locked space. Undoubtedly, the migration journey itself constituted the first instance of material dispossession. Most women I met emphasised that they had lived well before they had to leave their homes; they worked, had a car, had a place to live, etc. After the migration journey, they would have only a couple of things to hang on to, usually a couple of photos saved in their smartphones. While they felt that they had lost their previous lives, the conditions of the Centre did not allow for reconstruction. Rather, the loss was re-enacted daily through the absence of private space, regular thefts, and the impossibility of safely storing one’s belongings. By precluding the possibility of being/remaining oneself, this spatial and material context exacerbated residents’ sense of vulnerability. With few personal belongings left, a suspension of family life and difficult hygienic conditions, residents were unable to maintain a sense of identity. One of the women residing in the Centre often commented to me *à propos* other women ‘She didn’t look like this when she arrived’ or ‘Her appearance really changed’, as if expressing in her own words what Goffman (1961) called ‘dispossession of the self’ or ‘personal defacement’, both terms describing the impossibility of being wholly under the conditions of a total institution.

The spatial and material dimensions of life in the Centre thus efficiently negated the possibility of meaningful social engagement. Pulled away from the city, with neighbours consisting of the fence, the airport, and a golf club, residents were supposed to integrate into Spanish society at its margins, figuratively as much as literally. Material conditions of life in the Centre, by denying the possibility of intimacy and privacy, emptied the integration pretensions of any possible meaning. If there was no meaningful sociality to integrate, life in the Centre equally constrained the possibility of a fully autonomous subjective existence.

#### 4.2. Gendered implications of role dispossession: integrating whom?

The integration discourse is not merely superfluous; it effectively promotes its very opposite, disintegration (Collyer et al. forthcoming 2019). The notion of ‘role dispossession’ (Goffman 1961, 24) sustains the analysis. As in any total institution, most residents could not formally work (Bondanini 2011).<sup>7</sup> With few or no material belongings and without a labour-based income, residents were entirely dependent on the Centre’s care for their most basic needs; i.e. shelter, food, medicine, etc. This led to the establishment of a ‘privilege system’ (Goffman 1961, 51), whereby residents depend on the staff to provide their essential needs, and consequently, the response to any special need or additional request hinges on the professionals’ goodwill, leaving space for arbitrariness. Clearly, the system of privileges is an unavoidable feature of social life under the conditions of such dependence. The story recounted by Amal, a 22-year-old Algerian woman, is a case in point.

I was three months pregnant, I have a blood pressure problem, they always tell me to drink a lot of water, but I don’t have the means, my husband doesn’t work. (...) If I enter the canteen to take a bottle of water,<sup>8</sup> they say no, not the bottle of one litre but the small bottle, so how can it be, they tell us to drink a lot of water and then ... I don’t have money, I don’t have any means.

Everything needs to be negotiated, creating space for uncertainty and vulnerability. The power to hear, ignore, respond to, or reject demands becomes under these conditions a ‘power of life’ through the control of vital objects (Agier 2008, 84). It produces a ‘submissive or supplicant role “unnatural” for an adult’ (Goffman 1961, 45), a process Melanie Griffiths describes in the British context as the ‘broader infantilising tendency of the asylum system, with its structural impediments against adult-like self-determination’ (2014, 1998). The irony of this ‘absurd exercise’ (Andersson 2014a, 805) of integration in a CETI was conveyed by Mounia’s tone:

We’ll work here (laugh), we’ll do a very nice garden with flowers and jasmine. Forced labour ... (laugh, sarcastic tone).

If employment had been possible inside the Centre, it could only have been in the form of imposed activities, since residents did not have control over any dimensions of their lives, as implied by Mounia’s sarcastic remark. The conditions of life created by the Centre annihilated the possibility of recognition of a subjective existence, since only a subdued presence could be acknowledged by those organising life in the Centre. Integration, thus, was not only pointless because residents were kept away from the society they were supposed to integrate, but also because the structure of relations enacted by the Centre’s management of life operated on the premise of an absence of agency, strongly constraining the latter as a result.

By far the main source of concern and worry for residents, the uncertainty as to the duration of stay in the Centre exacerbated all the dimensions of life described so far. The submissive role required of residents via the integration discourse could hardly be challenged, since the administration of the Centre appeared to have the power to decide when a resident was authorised to transfer to the peninsula, as theatrically orchestrated through the weekly public announcements. The administration officially emphasised that they did not have this power, since transfer was a police decision. Residents,

however, recounted how individual workers implied that they had influence over these decisions. Regardless of whether they actually did or not, the belief that any professional might have some power over this decision significantly increased the authority of all workers in the Centre. The ‘deprivation of certitude’ (Warr 2016) that residents faced represents in itself a manifestation of power. Such opacity mostly translated into contradictory pieces of information that the residents found impossible to verify. Unlike the complaints that Griffiths observed in the context of British detention centres about people being released ‘out of turn’ (2013, 277), feelings of frustration and anger I witnessed were mostly directed towards the Centre’s administration, even if cases of residents having left earlier were mentioned to point out the incoherence of the system. The duration of stay in the Centre for pregnant women was a case in point: while it seemed clear that pregnancy overall extended the period of stay in practice, no clear criteria were communicated to the women, creating high levels of frustration. Amal, who was 9 months pregnant and of Algerian origin, stated for instance:

They say that for Algerians and Moroccans the mother needs to stay for over six months after the birth before the ‘salida’ [transfer to the peninsula]. That’s the law. The director said that.

Others, like Sanae, a 20-year-old Algerian woman, were told that they had to stay for 40 days after giving birth to complete administrative procedures such as registering the baby:

Each one says something ... they don’t give true information, that’s how it is. The lawyer had said you stay for a month after giving birth.

The words of Hanae, who also came from Algeria, summarised a widely shared anxiety:

We don’t know anything, we’re always lost, no one gives you any information really so that you can have an idea, black or white. They mix everything, they leave you like this, always scared, always worried.

Unclear as to why they were given different pieces of information, and even more confused when what they observed did not correspond to any of the information they had received, most were left with a sense of arbitrariness. This, if anything, further augmented the Centre staff’s alleged power in the absence of transparent criteria. The uncertainties created by such lack of information were equally symptomatic of the impossibility of managing one’s own time.

#### ***4.3. Time dispossession: pregnancy and childbirth in suspended lives***

Time spent inside the Centre put residents’ lives on standby. Life, of course, carried on, but residents were not in a position to manage different dimensions of their lives for an undetermined period of time. ‘A strong feeling that time spent in the establishment is time wasted or destroyed or taken from one’s life’, as analysed by Goffman (1961, 66), accurately describes the lived experience of the residents, especially those whose duration of stay lasted longest. Sanae, who gave birth in Melilla and was still ‘waiting’ in the Centre for more than two months after the birth, tellingly exclaimed:

I	How old is the baby?
Sanae	2 months and 11 days.
The interpreter	You’re counting days! In Melilla we count each day ...
Sanae	Each minute!

Time is being counted because it has been suspended. These women's perceptions of time were akin to Griffiths' observations in the context of immigration detention: 'Without a maximum time limit, it consisted of an irrational, meaningless and endless time, more a temporal suspension than a queue-like waiting for a goal' (2014, 1997). To be sure, residents lived in the Centre intensely, through new encounters, conflicts, hopes, joys, and disappointments. They were however fundamentally constrained in their capacity to lead a meaningful life on their own terms. Hanae, whose first child had been born in the Centre around six weeks earlier, mentioned the celebrations that her family had held in her absence:

- I            Could you celebrate?  
 Hanae     Yes, the 7th day, in Algeria they threw a party for the birth.  
 I            The family?  
 Hanae     Yes.  
 I            And here?  
 Hanae     No, I'm sick and I don't have the money to buy medicine so a party ...

Stuck in the enclave and rendered immobile, residents' time was appropriated, and the integration discourse served to smooth the appearance of this dispossession. The management of migrants' time, and notably its usurpation, produced a device of migration control (Andersson 2014a). Beyond representing a tool to manage migration, time also constituted a powerful lever for the micro-management of life inside the Centre. 'Waiting is thus about being subordinated to the will of others – an exercise of power that is enacted and re-enacted through acts of waiting', as noted by Sarah Turnbull in her study of immigration detention in the UK (2016, 76). The longer residents were stuck in this limbo, the more they resented this dispossession and attributed malicious intentions to the Centre's administration. As pregnant women's stay tended in most cases to be prolonged as a result of the pregnancy, one of them commented:

To me it seems that this thing of making life complicated for pregnant women they do it on purpose, so that women don't become pregnant with the intention of arriving faster to the peninsula.

The reality of this claim is hard to assert – yet it is clear that pregnant women were *de facto* subjected to a 'double penalty'. On top of the uncertainty and lengthiness of the administrative procedures, their pregnancy was in a sense held against them, since it prolonged their stay significantly, while their main priority was to continue their journey. Mounia, who was about four months pregnant when she arrived in the CETI, was told after several months of stay that, given the advanced stage of her pregnancy, this now took administrative precedence over her migration case, meaning that even in the event of a police authorisation to transfer to the peninsula she would have to wait until after the birth:

It's very difficult (in tears). I've been in Melilla for almost 4 months. They told me I need to give birth here because I've entered the 8th month of pregnancy, I'm waiting for some news. But it's very hard here, especially for a pregnant woman.

The prolongation of stay, always under the circumstance of the total duration remaining an unknown, increased the levels of stress, frustration, and anxiety for migrant women in the Centre. What is more, appropriation of time entails gendered



implications: at times of major changes in their lives such as childbirth, women in the Centre felt these constraints in specific ways, as most deplored the fate of giving birth in such liminal circumstances. The combination of their material dispossession, subordinate position within the Centre and the uncertainty characterising their situation made the appropriation of their time a source of particular pains and difficulties.

## 5. Conclusion

This article has examined the functions, meanings, and implications of the integration discourse of a Centre for the Temporary Stay of Immigrants (CETI) in the Spanish enclave of Melilla. It argued that, if migrants' status as unauthorised outsiders leads to their exclusion, it is the subtler ramifications of the integration discourse that ensure a smooth enactment of these exclusionary dynamics. In this regard, the article analysed how an overarching framing contained in official documents was translated into written internal documents as well as discursive and material practices at the level of the Centre's management. Beyond observing the incongruous character of the integration discourse, the article unpacked the reasons why this claim fulfils an indispensable function within the broader setup of migration control and how it shapes residents' lives on a daily basis. The article argued that life in the CETI presented the fundamental characteristic of an existence inscribed in a total institution, implying a structure of relations based on deference and disciplining, in the specific guise of residents' condition as 'subjects to be integrated'. Furthermore, the integration fiction enhanced the authority of those managing life inside the Centre, producing conditions conducive to constant punishment through discipline as a technology of power.

The integration discourse equally smoothed the multiple dispossessions migrants were subject to as residents of the CETI. The material, role and time-related dispossessions explored in the article reflected aspects of the shared condition of migrants in the Centre as well as the specific effects of these practices on (immobilised) migrant women at times of pregnancy and childbirth. The spatial marginalisation that denied the possibility of meaningful integration was accompanied by a material dispossession that negated the possibility of an independent life inside the Centre. The dependence on the administration for the provision of all vital care, from shelter to food to medicine, in the absence of the possibility of participating in the labour market and conducting a family life, dispossessed individuals of their roles within society. Finally, the immobilisation of migrants in the enclave presumed a time dispossession that in practice exacerbated the powers of the Centre's workers, in that they were collectively ascribed decision-making capabilities that they might not have had as to residents' mobility. The integration discourse played a fundamental role for those organising daily life in the Centre, by bringing meaning to their actions in spite of, or more accurately, through obscuring, the violent dimension of these dispossessions. How could social workers, healthcare workers, lawyers, administrative workers and interpreters, have all played a role in this collective immobilisation without a positive discourse about the Centre's purpose and meaning? In spite of the incongruity of the integration claim, the discourse so produced needs to be taken seriously as it represents a cog in the wheel of the local migration management.

## Notes

1. The capitalisation of EUropean reflects a note of caution as to labels used to refer to political and geographical spaces, since I here refer to borders of the European Union (Bialasiewicz et al. 2013).
2. Yet practices of the *Guardia Civil* in Melilla have long been criticised by human rights organisations for returning migrants ‘on the spot’ when arrested right at the border: the so-called *devoluciones en caliente*.
3. There exist two CETIs in Spain, one in each of the enclaves.
4. Ministry of Employment and Social Security website: [http://www.empleo.gob.es/es/Guia/texto/guia\\_15/contenidos/guia\\_15\\_37\\_3.htm](http://www.empleo.gob.es/es/Guia/texto/guia_15/contenidos/guia_15_37_3.htm)
5. Ministry of Employment and Social Security website: [http://www.empleo.gob.es/es/Guia/texto/guia\\_15/contenidos/guia\\_15\\_37\\_3.htm](http://www.empleo.gob.es/es/Guia/texto/guia_15/contenidos/guia_15_37_3.htm)
6. Also present in the Centre were workers employed by private companies that were contracted to provide catering and cleaning services (preparing food in the canteen, washing sheets once a week or cleaning shared spaces). My analysis focuses on the categories of workers employed by the Centre and the NGOs, whose position in the configuration of power displayed similarities. I did not conduct interviews with workers employed by private companies, yet some migrant women, notably Moroccans, were able to establish relationships with women working as cleaners on the basis of linguistic and cultural proximity, as these workers were themselves of Moroccan origin.
7. After longer periods of stay some managed to be granted a work authorisation, but none of the residents I have met was working formally.
8. Tap water in Melilla is not drinkable.

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