

Abstract

Immigration detention is in constant decrease in Italy. Whereas the detainees held in Italy's immigration detention centers were 10.913 in 2009, they had become 5.254 in 2015. By the same token, if in 2012 the operating immigration detention centers were 13, just 6 centres were operating in 2015, with a detention capacity of a maximum of 720 (471 in 2014, indeed). Moreover, roughly 50 per cent of irregular migrants entering detention centres are actually removed yearly, regardless the total number of detainees. Our hypothesis is that while the use of immigration detention is decreasing, it is becoming more and more selective. Moving from results of empirical researches carried out in Bari (Southern Italy) and Bologna (Northern Italy), the paper is aimed at discussing the idea that immigration detention in Italy nowadays is used not so much for the purpose of fighting back irregular immigration *tout court*, but rather as a *dispositif* for selecting and containing what we might name as a specific "dangerous mobility". We will explore this hypothesis by analyzing the way a specific "rhetoric of dangerousness" is being produced and used in Italy in the frame of immigration control and deportation policies, focusing on the proceedings through which undocumented migrants are selected for entering immigration detention centres. While it should not be inherently surprising that police and the Justice of the Peace, that are in Italy responsible for deportation and immigration detention proceedings, do make use of the rhetoric of dangerousness as a justification for detaining undocumented migrants, as it was precisely the so called Return Directive that established that immigration detention should be considered as a last resort measure for migrants at "risk of absconding", we found that they abuse that rhetoric in a way that is altering the very nature of immigration detention and its functions. Originally intended as a last resort preemptive tool that should be used to ensure the effective enforcement of deportation orders, immigration detention has been turned into a quick surrogate of criminal policies that the police may use for the purpose of managing the "dangerous" populations in the urban space. Rather than by the Justices of the peace, in Italy administrative detention is managed by the police, which uses it as a tool useful not so much at the state level for deporting irregular migrants, but at the local level for *banishing*

them. The paper proposes that administrative detention may be read as a policing strategy to govern one particular part of the urban population perceived as “out of place”, with the purpose of producing a (more ideal than real) ordered and secure public space.