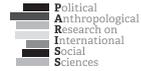




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Migration and the Question of New Political Possibilities: *Nicholas De Genova and Sandro Mezzadra—In Dialogue*

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Abstract

This is a dialogue between Nicholas De Genova and Sandro Mezzadra, two scholars working at the edges of disciplinarity on matters of migration, capitalism, and politics. It includes questions and comments from the audience in attendance for the original public event held in London in 2015, and new questions proposed by the editors of *PARISS* in 2020. Reflecting upon the points of departure, challenges, and turns that have marked their respective itineraries as thinkers and activists, in and beyond academe, this article makes a timely and much needed intervention on the permutations and politics of labor, mobility, and subjectivity.

Keywords

borders – class – labor – race – citizenship – politics – subjectivity – struggle – autonomy – Marxism – postcolonialism – transversal lines and their methods

Returning to a discussion that was had in 2015 and updated with a series of questions raised by the editors of *PARISS*, this piece takes the form of a dialogic interaction between two scholars working at the edges of disciplinarity on matters of migration, economy, and politics: Nicholas De Genova and Sandro Mezzadra. Taking us through the points of departure, pits stops, and turns that have marked their itineraries as thinkers and activists, in and beyond academe, this article makes a timely and much needed intervention on the permutations and politics of labor, mobility, and subjectivity.

2015: A Dialogue between Nicholas De Genova and Sandro Mezzadra

This dialogue was staged as a public event on 26 June 2015, as part of the “Borders, Citizenship & Mobility” Workshop, sponsored by the Spatial Politics research group in the Department of Geography at King’s College London, organized by Nicholas De Genova. The event took place in the context of an international meeting of the research network on “The ‘European’ Question” and the New Keywords Collective.

Sandro Mezzadra [SM]: The first question has a kind of biographical background. More specifically, Nicholas, you told me once about the political background of the ethnography that supplies the foundation for your book, *Working the Boundaries*. How did your encounter with migration in Mexican Chicago challenge your own political understanding of the relations between capital and labor? And how did that understanding evolve in the following years? I am asking these questions because in a way I can say that I had similar experiences with my own encounter with migration as an activist in Italy in the early 1990s.

Nicholas De Genova [NDG]: Maybe the first thing to say is that I always have the feeling that, in European contexts, a lot of people know my work mainly through writings that are more theoretical and I frequently have the sense that the more ethnographic work that I’ve done is sometimes less visible for many colleagues working on similar questions in the European context. So, I’ll start by saying that my doctoral dissertation research was conducted in Mexican/migrant communities and among Mexican/migrant factory workers in Chicago in the mid-1990s, and that interest grew out of what were several years of prior political commitments and engagements. From the age of 15, I was engaged in a would-be revolutionary communist group and a big part of my activism actually involved, on a weekly basis, standing in front of a factory, trying to get

to know people working there, developing a factory newsletter that was circulated every two weeks, on one side of which was a political editorial, on the other side of which was literally a factory newsletter about the events happening inside the plant. What that meant was that I had to develop very extensive networks of various degrees of collaboration with people working there, solicit information about new developments and various kinds of struggles that were happening in particular departments of the factory, and constantly look for ways to get multiple perspectives on the same events, to try to understand the complexity of those struggles, and so it had a kind of quasi-ethnographic character. It was a kind of political engagement that required me always to be in a relationship of dialogue that was about learning what was happening in people's immediate circumstances. Related to that work was a kind of more narrowly organizational work in which many of the people to whom I was closest politically were themselves migrants from Mexico. In a way that won't be entirely surprising to anyone familiar with the sectarian left, there was a kind of working notion that reified the difference between "students" and "workers." At the time, of course, I was a student, but I was from a working-class family, from a working-class background. Nonetheless, it was institutionalized within that organization that people who were "students" (and therefore presumed to be from non-working-class backgrounds) needed to learn about the lives of the workers from the workers within the organization, needed to learn about workers' struggles and conditions and so on, so to make a long story short, the premise was that I was meant to learn about the lives of these workers. Whenever I asked them about their experience as "workers," however, their response consistently was that they were going to teach me about their lives *as Mexicans* (as Mexican migrants specifically). So, with this simple kind of example, we can suggest that already at stake in a certain kind of dogmatic and overly simplified notion of objective class relations there was already, in the immediacy of that encounter, an important insistence on the various dimensions of that experience that were about being socially and legally produced as a "migrant"—and also about the legal status of those migrants—dimensions of that experience which likewise were about being racialized, about the racialization of "Mexican"-ness in the US context. So just to use that simple example, my encounters with Mexican migration began to challenge an overly simplistic notion of class politics, and in that sense, set the intellectual agenda for much of my subsequent academic work.

Let me now ask a somewhat broader conceptual question of you, Sandro, but it's not an unrelated one.

The relation between migration and capitalism has been at the center of much of your work, and the concept of the autonomy of migration evidently has its origins in the concept of the autonomy of labor. How did you come to be interested in migration, and how does it relate to a broader intellectual and political agenda regarding questions of labor and capital?

SM: We share a lot of experiences, a lot of them from very early political commitments. I also started to be very politically active when I was a teenager, basically 15–16 years old. It was the end of the '70s in Italy, quite a tough time. So the setting was quite different. In the kind of environment in which I became politically active, this idea of being educated, or counter-educated, by workers didn't circulate that much at the time. I grew up in the autonomist movement in Italy, and one of the basic notions at the time was the "refusal of work," and this implied a kind of deep criticism of any ethics of labor, which means also [a deep criticism] of every mythology of the ethics of the working class.

Of course, there is a connection between the work that I've been doing on the autonomy of migration, with many other people, and the emphasis on the autonomy of labor, the autonomy of living labor, the autonomy of the working class, in so-called Italian autonomist Marxism. Simply put, I frame this in terms of a specific gaze on migration. Italian Autonomist Marxism takes as its point of departure the critique of any "objective" Marxism, the critique of the standard Marxist over-emphasis on the ways that capital exploits labor. The emphasis in Italian autonomist Marxism has always been on the productive capacity of labor, even from a political point of view, and so on the ways in which the workers' struggles must be considered as one of the fundamental drivers of capitalist development itself. If you grow up within this kind of theoretical framework, then you are in the position when you encounter migration to be skeptical from the beginning in the face of any kind of victimizing discourse. So, I think my emphasis on migration as a kind of creative force, my emphasis on how migration itself must be considered as a kind of social movement, has a really tight connection with this way of framing that I was mentioning.

Needless to say, my encounter with migration has been at the same time the occasion for a kind of moment of crisis in my own theoretical reflections. My encounter with migration compelled me to complexify the way that I was looking at the subjectivity of labor, and in this sense it's not so different from what you were saying. This very notion of flux as the epitome of a specific way of looking at the subjectivity of exploited subjects was productively, I hope, tested and challenged by my encounters with migration.

NDG: I answered your opening question in a more narrative and autobiographical spirit, and maybe a somewhat more theoretical way to frame my answer is to say that that engagement, that political but also ethnographic engagement with Mexican/migrant workers, forced me to pay a different kind of attention to the inherent contradictions and tensions between what, in different language, we could call “concrete labor” and “abstract labor.” It implies in a way a critique of the politics of class that in a sense embraced uncritically the notion of abstract labor as the way in which to understand who is a worker, what is a worker, and so on. So, there is, I think, a deep affinity with the kind of critique of objectivist or structural Marxist accounts. And what that encounter led me toward was a deep sensitivity to questions of the politics of *difference*, particularly the politics of race, but the politics of difference in its multiple registers, and in a different way—as I like to say—an orientation toward the political in “political economy.” Frequently, the notion of “political economy” gets used as a kind of euphemism for Marxism within academic work, but is also often treated in a way that reductively equates that with an economic or structural and objectivist notion, but I’ve been consistently interested in what specifically constitutes *the political* in that relation.

In a way, it allows me to ask another question coming directly from what you’ve just said: There is a persistent emphasis in your work, and also in mine, on “subjectivity”: what is the genealogy in your own thought of that category? Why is it so important?

SM: I could frame my reply in a quite similar way. Over the last several years, both in my individual work and also in the work that I have been doing with Brett Neilson, the concept of abstract labor has played a very important role. Simply put, I have come to criticize in quite a radical way the very possibility of conceiving of the subjectivity of the working class (as a subject capable of radical transformation) as a mirror image of abstract labor. I have come to leave the concept of abstract labor as a way in which capital represents labor, and from this point of view, the dialogue with Dipesh Chakrabarty and other postcolonial scholars has been particularly important for me. The question of the political constitution of a subjectivity capable of transforming the world has become therefore more pressing and more complicated for me, making crucially relevant the issue of the relation between class and “difference.”

Needless to say, other kinds of theoretical and political dialogues have been very important in this regard. First of all, the dialogue with feminists, with

radical feminism, which was for me the first moment of encounter, let us say, with the politics of difference, to pick up the phrase that you were using. Thinking radically of difference as an element that is constitutive of the very subjectivity of labor leads us to reflect upon the complex heterogeneity within labor itself, and this is also the way in which I have tried to make sense of the question of race – particularly through an engagement with African American radical thought starting with the work of W.E.B. Du Bois.

And this has been one of the most important implications of my encounter with migration. How can we make sense of these frictions, these conflicts, these clashes, that are critical within the very composition of living labor, the composition of the working class? And this was a question that did not really exist within autonomist Marxism until quite recently.

Then, from a more theoretical angle, I have been, of course, very much influenced over the last couple of decades, by all the debates surrounding the topic of subjectivity, debates that are often labelled as post-structuralist, that I interpret as important because they try to unpack the very notion of subjectivity. Simply put, through the dialogue with many authors—from Foucault to Balibar and Rancière—I have come to conceive of subjectivity as a field of tensions, and I have tried to work on the idea that this field of tensions is constituted around two poles—the poles of subjection and subjectivation. That's not particularly original; there are many people who are using these notions, notions that are circulating a lot with different meanings. The way in which I try to frame subjectivity is to conceive of subjectivity in terms of a field of tensions that is marked by these two poles. I think that this is a kind of very general scheme, but it is a dynamic scheme that can be operationalized if you want to understand specific, localized, grounded conflicts.

But tell us a little about how you think of subjectivity ...

NDG: I think that there's a deep affinity between my own thinking and yours, and an important source of that is precisely the autonomist Marxist tradition, some of which may be better known for me in a variety of English-speaking engagements with it, so there are also interesting areas of difference in the ways the questions might have been debated over time.

The question that you raise, in which I also feel very strongly invested, involves the question of thinking about living labor, and in a way directly related to something that you said, for me it's also about theorizing the relation between labor and life. If Marx has introduced the distinction between living labor and dead labor—between labor and capital, as we conventionally think of

them—that distinction also opens up the possibility for precisely this ambiguous terrain of subjectivity, which in the end I think is always at the crux of any kind of political project. So a certain kind of dogmatic or schematic or overly mechanistic kind of analysis that fashions labor, or the working class, as subject—for instance, as in the formulation of labor as the proverbial “subject of history”—is one that inevitably proves itself to be inadequate if we can’t therefore ask precisely those kinds of questions about the constitution of subjectivity that get at this blurry zone of indistinction, if you like, between life and labor, and where of course labor-for-capital has to become transposed into the category of abstract labor, but what’s being transposed is precisely an open-ended creative capacity and productive power of life itself. If we start from that point of view, we also then have some leverage on the possibility of a kind of subjection that is historically specific, specific to capitalist social relations, but which also gives us, I think, theoretical room to understand the possibility of something that *exceeds* the capital-labor relation, that exceeds the specific forms of domination that prevail within that historically specific relation. And in that sense, it opens up, I think—the question of the relation between life and labor; that question about living labor; the question about the creative capacities and productive powers of human life—opens up the possibility of thinking about the possibility of something that precedes capitalist social relations and therefore also can exceed capitalist social relations. In this sense, I think it’s politically indispensable if we want to imagine the possibility of another world that we have recourse to a conception of subjectivity that actually is not reducible narrowly to the forms of subjection that operate within the existing regimes of domination and hierarchy that prevail, much as we inevitably have to engage with the historical specificity of those. And in that sense, subjectivity is an important way that I also frame the question.

It’s not unrelated to the variety of ways in which subjectivity gets coded politically. I mentioned that the historically specific productions of migrants *as migrants*, and the juridical regimes and the political and social relations that produce migrants as migrants, became a central concern of my work. What was the historical specificity for the people with whom I was engaged, both politically and ethnographically—as “Mexicans,” as “migrants,” as “illegal” migrants, etc.—brings us back around then to that question of the historically specific socio-political and juridical production of particular kinds of subjection.

I’ll turn that into a kind of a broader question for you. Your disciplinary background and much of your earlier work is concerned with questions of political theory. What was the bridge between those concerns and your work on migration and borders? And I link that to what I was saying earlier—precisely from the point of view, again, of trying to emphasize how the production

of subjectivity, the conditions for various kinds of subjection and subjectivation, are inevitably also about asking the question of the constitution of the political within political economy.

SM: This is for me a quite easy question. The answer is that the bridge between my work in political theory and my work on migration and borders was what I would call my encounter with migration. You have to take into account that Italy has a very specific history regarding migration. We went through a very, very accelerated, quick migratory transition between the 80s and the 90s. I can really frame this in terms of my lived memory. The city in which I grew up, Genova, was until the end of the 80s a white city. In the early 90s, we suddenly realized, in a kind of naive way, that the city was not white anymore, that the composition of the people living in that city had changed dramatically, and within just a few years.

Then there were some clashes in the center, in the old historical part of the city in '93, between migrants and people who were staging an anti-migrant movement, which ended up being politically—again, in a very naive way—the occasion for these migrants and these transformations to really challenge me in ways that I had really not dealt with before, and so migration became a part of my life, became an important part of my political engagement, and I also started to reflect theoretically on migration through some research, and then my research agenda changed dramatically in the mid-90s.

Of course, my own take on migration continues to be shaped by my academic training in political theory. First of all, because I look at migration basically from the point of view of the political challenges posed by the movement and struggles of migrants. Second, because I'm also very much interested in the multiple ways in which migration challenges the basic concepts that we use when we think of politics, such as sovereignty and citizenship. All of these concepts are challenged and tested by migration, and you can say that, from a theoretical point of view, the interest in these challenges has been the driver of all my own work on migration, at least in the beginning, and I'm pretty sure it's still the case.

NDG: There's a striking analogy between what you've described and my own relationship to this particular research background of mine, which is that around the time of my birth, Chicago, the place of my birth, was overwhelmingly a white and Black city. There was a very small Mexican community, but the dramatic acceleration of Mexican migration to Chicago coincided with my life. It began around the late 60s, and in that sense, the burgeoning of a space that I've called "Mexican

Chicago” happened in a way that coincides with my own biography. So, by the time that I was becoming politically active, indeed, you virtually couldn’t find a factory in Chicago, or any workplace that required so-called “unskilled” labor, that wasn’t predominantly Mexican—Mexican/migrant, specifically—in the composition of its workforce. So, again, it meant that the very possibility of thinking about the politics of class or the politics of labor had to encounter the specificity of that experience. Of course, there’s more to say about that, but there’s a striking analogy with what you described. At a certain moment, the limitations of a certain kind of analysis are required to begin to experiment with, or to begin to explore, a new kind of epistemological frame. And so, for me, of course race has been an absolutely integral aspect of my work.

This invites me to ask you a different question. You have been one of the foremost promoters of postcolonial studies in Italy. Tell us a bit more about what postcolonial critiques bring to European studies.

SM: My discovery of postcolonial studies was part and parcel of the process of transformation of my own research agenda that was prompted by the encounter with migration. Postcolonial studies were really unknown in Italy in the 1990s, which is quite striking because in the 1980s, 1990s, everything coming from the US was the “new thing” in Italy, but it didn’t happen with postcolonial studies. Basically, I’d say that reflecting upon migration, I felt the need to get new tools in order to understand the huge transformations on the world scale after the end of the Cold War, to put it very simply. And again, to put it very simply, while the literature on “globalization” in the early 1990s was dominated by the idea that globalization was producing a kind of “smooth” world, my encounter with migration showed me that the opposite was true: that the world that was emerging from the end of the Cold War was one striated by a multiplicity of boundaries, was a very heterogeneous world. And nevertheless, I recognized the power of some homogenizing trends that were promoting a new spectacular capitalist transition at the global level. So, I was aware of both sides. But at the same time, on the ground, the very ways that these homogenizing tendencies were being translated into reality, you could recognize that they were producing a lot of heterogeneity. I am putting it retrospectively in the terms that Brett Neilson and I use in *Border as Method*, but that was really what I was starting to think in the early 90s. And I use the pronoun “I,” but this “I” must always be seen within a wider frame: all of my work on migration has been part of collective processes, so this is an important point.

In order to make sense of the new world that was emerging out of the end of the Cold War, in order to make sense of this re-shuffling of the geographical coordinates that migration was producing—even in the city in which I was living—I started to read postcolonial criticism. And it would be easy to say that postcolonial criticism helped me to redirect my gaze, helped me to “provincialize Europe.” This happened, okay, but this was part of a more general attempt to really make sense of powerful processes that were reshaping the world. It was also reshaping the urban environment, in which I did politics and so on. I think this is the important aspect that I can mention regarding postcolonialism. And of course, I also had the problem of finding some theoretical tools that could help me to rethink the relations between what was called, and is still called, the Global North and the Global South, going beyond established and exhausted traditions of world systems theory. And from this point of view, postcolonialism was critical to my thinking, although later I would encounter some problems with postcolonialism as a paradigm. But my encounter with postcolonialism was a hectic encounter, so to say.

I think, following the lead of your question regarding political theory and migration: Another point that we share is the awareness of the fact that today working on migration and borders necessarily leads you to radically challenge disciplinary boundaries. Not simply to do a multidisciplinary kind of work. What many of us have done over the last 10 to 15 years is precisely to try to work the boundaries between disciplines. In your own experience, there was also this kind of formal academic transition from anthropology to geography. So how do you make sense of this transition? What did you learn from this transition? And do you think that there is kind of a specific interest in a geographical gaze on migration?

NDG: Well, I should say that my jumping disciplines is quite recent, as of only two years ago: all of my prior formal academic experience was in anthropology. All of my teaching career was in anthropology until two years ago when I moved to geography. The more important thing that I would emphasize is that, for me, disciplinarity itself is the problem, and has been, for a very long time, a deep source of suspicion and frustration on my part with the ways in which disciplinary frameworks become to a greater or less extents blinders for investigating what can be called the real interdisciplinary of real life. So that kind of partitioning of life into the kinds of epistemological objects that are the fetishes of one discipline or another is what seems to me to be the root of the problem. So, I always fashioned myself within anthropology as a kind of malcontent, someone who could only operate within a particular discipline as a kind of insurgent

intellectually, academically, within it. And I have always promised that were I to change discipline, I would have the same relationship to any other discipline. And so, my move to geography is not necessarily a permanent or final one, and I'm prepared to be a malcontent in geography as much as I might next be a malcontent in some other field. But I think the deeper problem is that we have to be systematic and persistent and relentless about interrogating the effects of discipline on our thought and on the ways in which we frame our questions, wherever we are. So really, my work has always been located in a series of interdisciplinary kinds of conversation and I have in a sort of flagrant way refused to abide by certain kinds disciplinary conventions about what is permissible to be thinking about, reading about, engaging with, because those are the expectations within any particular academic milieu. Nonetheless, of course, we get different things coming to sharper focus or greater or lesser intensity of focus from one place to another. And so even though I fashioned my own work previously as explicitly *anti*-anthropological, I nonetheless was deeply engaged by what ethnography made possible. Ethnography was of course the methodological signature of that discipline, of sociocultural anthropology, but also the methodological fetish of that discipline. But nonetheless, I wanted to know what ethnographic engagement could make possible, even in spite of its limitations. Of course, there is a very important critique of ethnographic methods, of an ethnographic gaze and its relationship to anthropology which is always inseparable from anthropology's relationship to colonialism, etc. I wanted to engage those critiques and yet still insist that there had to be some possibility to try to use that technique as a way to engage in an intense extended intersubjective encounter with real people and their lives and struggles. So in a way, it was always enabling for me, and part of the original attraction for me of anthropology was precisely that the kinds of questions I was driven by politically could be translated into certain a kind of framework for research that nonetheless required a critique of the conventions of ethnography but could be predicated on an intense intersubjective dialogue that for me is foundational for the possibility of any kind of radical politics.

Nonetheless, it was always a very important feature of my work to think about space. So, inevitably, intellectually, geography provided a series of resources, and there is something refreshingly open about human geography – maybe specifically in the British context, I'm not sure – that has a certain kind of constitutive, at least multidisciplinary, if not interdisciplinary, kind of potential openness to a variety of different orientations. So, I think that is attractive or appealing for me in a way that it would also be attractive or appealing to me in a different discipline if I found that same openness. But for me, the real

question is where can I find that room for maneuver and that breathing space in which to frame research in terms of the questions and problems, rather than in terms of certain kinds of disciplinary straightjackets.

But just to address the second part of your question: for me, the geographical focus on space is inseparable also from the understanding that the body itself is a space, that the body itself produces space, that the body itself in relationship to other bodies is also a scale in which we can think about space. And so the geographical framework is one that allows us to move intellectually from the most immediate embodied palpable experience of subjectivity, and the relations and production of that kind of a kind of space that happens at that level, to the variety of scales in which thinking about migration, and thinking about borders, necessarily requires us to jump scales, to jump from one kind of spatial framework to the next. And so of course, migration being about mobility, being about movement across space, then has always meant that there was an important spatial underpinning or component to the way that I think about these things. And naturally, it means also that then we are challenged to understand the simultaneity and co-production and co-constitution of spatial scales that are not simply reducible to a kind of fixed levels or fixed distinctions that somehow map naturally and in an objective way onto different contexts. Those are really above all about the politics of scale, the politics of space, and the production of space that then is always at the heart of what I was interested in. So, then that is what makes geography one kind of place where I can engage those questions reasonably easily. But as I say, it isn't necessarily the only or last place where I can do that, because I think that in the end, we all are challenged to be able to pursue the kinds of questions that we want in an insurgent way that refuses the kinds of restrictions or constraints of discipline in whichever disciplinary context we might be in.

SM: Maybe I can follow up on this question about space by asking you another question that can be framed again in terms of your experiences over the last several years, but I think also it raises an important theoretical problem. You yourself have been traveling and yourself migrating a lot over the last decade. We share an interest in the work of W.E.B. Du Bois, and I've always been impressed by Du Bois' capacity to transform traveling into a crucial source of knowledge. And this requires of course a great ability in negotiating and traveling across differences, not merely empirical differences, but also conceptual differences. I'd like to hear a bit about your experiences in this regard, which also has to do with the attempt you have been making for the last few years to take up concepts and frames that come out of the Black radical tradition in the U.S. and to translate them into a quite different geographical, social, and

political situation. I'm referring to Du Bois' notion of the color line, but also the Black city, the migrant city, which is a fascinating project which implies of course problems of translation, conceptually.

NDG: My U.S. "American" childhood can be understood under the heading of one word, to a very significant extent. And that one word is: Vietnam. And my U.S. "American" adulthood can similarly be understood to a great extent under the heading of another one word, and that one word is: Iraq. To put it differently, what that means, what it has meant for me, politically and intellectually, to be of that place is to engage with what U.S. historian William Appleman Williams famously called "empire is a way of life." So, in an important and fundamental way, my relationship to postcolonial studies is framed by empire as the real horizon that better shaped what it means to be from the United States. But one could also say that all of my U.S. so-called "American" experience has been also framed under the heading of a particular history, and that history is slavery. And I think that there's no way for anybody to be from the United States without that being true. And as we can see abundantly in the news today, repeatedly over the last year or so, the United States is still a country where the question of whether "Black lives matter" is a question, is a matter of dispute. And in that sense, the Black radical tradition is indispensable for any critical radical politics or critique for anybody operating in relationship to the larger social and political formation of the United States. What that means in fact is that I came to W.E.B. Du Bois by way of Malcolm X and a variety of other key figures in that history in that particular historical moment which really was the immediate prelude to my own awakening to political consciousness. And of course, it's a complex history, it's a complex intellectual genealogy, but Du Bois, in a fundamental sense – and I think you would agree – anticipates virtually every question that otherwise later comes to define much of the field of postcolonial critique. And he does so in an important way that is both explicitly framed as a global question, and refuses to be parochialized as a narrowly "American dilemma," as a narrowly African American question. He's very emphatically, very explicitly framing the question of the color line as a question of the global fact of white supremacy. So that for me has also been a kind of crucial intellectual framework through which to think of the postcolonial. And of course what postcolonial critique has enabled in my work on the United States is actually a way to systematically counter and undermine and interrogate a certain set of complacencies and conceits within the dominant ideology of the United States of its own exceptionalism, and therefore, an insistence on the affinities between the European experience of colonialism and the global experience of European colonialism as frameworks through which to understand the United States. So, in a fundamental way, a big part of my work is

committed to insisting on the non-exceptional character of the specificity of U.S. history and experience, and is about reading the U.S. through the lens of a global history which is about the relationship of Europe and the world. And in that sense, if slavery is a kind of heading that can frame all of my experience as an American, it actually is inseparable from the question of Europe.

But of course, in my own migrations, as you called it – in my own now several years of being located in European contexts, and in my reworking of a series of research agendas and central intellectual and political concerns around the immediacy of my own location here – it means also insisting that there is something that we can understand about Europe (in which I include Britain) from the standpoint of what we can learn from the history of the U.S. and particularly questions of race in the U.S. In many ways, I'm always insisting in a provocative manner – a deliberately provocative manner and often a polemical manner – on the ways in which we have to read these experiences in relationship to each other. We have to interrogate them with recourse to the tools that are available from these places that are otherwise oftentimes systematically partitioned, cordoned off from each other, and treated as separate and unrelated. That's one thing.

I think the other thing to say, just in a more autobiographical sense, is that in an important way, I have indeed had the experience particularly in legal or juridical terms of being a migrant, of being a migrant worker, albeit of a particularly privileged, "skilled" kind in a variety of European contexts. I've had the opportunity to work in Switzerland and the Netherlands and now the UK. And so, in an important way, I've actually now had the curse of studying migration and having to live that experience, for better and for worse, and it becomes productive for my own ability to theorize certain kinds of questions *from within*. On the other hand, part of my experience is also that of an exile. And in a different way, without being overly dramatic, we can say that I've also had the experience of being a kind of refugee. So, there is a way in which my experience also points to the inherent ambivalence and incoherence of these very categories. And in a way, it's been a very productive conversation that we have had in our variety of circles of collaboration and critical dialogue over the last few years that an important part of the contribution of the critical migration and border studies work that both you and I are engaged with, along with many others here in the room, begins to point to the incoherence and instability in the very categories that organize our knowledge and our inquiry about who is a migrant, what is a migrant, who is a refugee, what is a refugee, etc. And the frictions and inconsistencies among those categories, I think, is also a productive place from which to theorize. And I have also lived some version of that.

Let me ask a different question that is related; in your book with Brett Neilson, *Border as Method, or, the Multiplication of Labor* from 2013, Sandro, you propose to take the border not merely as the research object but as an epistemic viewpoint. Tell us more about what that means.

SM: In a way, it has a lot to do with what you have just said about the instability of the categories that we use in our own critical studies of migration and borders. The border is also an epistemic tool, and I think that there is a need to be aware of that. Each concept, including of course the categories related to migration, is predicated upon boundaries. Drawing boundaries is the epistemic operation which plays a crucial role in the production of knowledge. So, we're trying to bring some of the movement, the clashes, even the violence, that characterize existing geopolitical borders also into the epistemic work in which borders operate. The experiment we made was really to take inspiration from the kinds of conflict that are staged in a very dramatic way every day around a lot of borders in our world also as a kind of source of inspiration that allows us to productively challenge the borders between disciplines and the boundaries that are constitutive of the concepts that we use. It's kind of a circular movement that we have tried to make productive. And I guess it's possible to put it also in a very simple way: to look at what is happening everyday around borders, reflecting upon our own experiences with struggles against borders. We've come to the conclusion that the existing conceptual language does not provide effective tools to understand what is going on, on the ground. And so we have tried to stage a productive short circuit between the challenges posited by migratory movements at existing geopolitical borders and the attempts that we are all involved in to forge a new conceptual language that is adequate to make sense of the political stakes that characterize border struggles in many parts of the world. I tried to put it quite simply, but of course it's clear that such a move raises a lot of problems. The kind of relation that you imagine and construct between the materiality of what is happening on the ground and the world of theory, and the status of the concepts that we use in our theoretical work. Our bet, so to speak, is that it can be productive to stage a kind of clash between these two levels, between the materiality of specific borderscapes and scales and the more ethereal kind of dimension of conflict. The bet upon which *Border as Method* is constructed is precisely that in our specific condition, this production of clashes between materiality and concepts can be a way to make some progress in understanding both what is happening on the ground and what is required at the level of more conceptual work.

I think this also has implications for what you were saying about your own experiences and about the history of race and slavery. Meaning that I am convinced that we have to be aware of the resistance that space and geography produce when we try to use some theoretical concepts as universal concepts. Again, there is a gap between the materiality of specific circumstances, to put it very simply, and some general concepts that we tend to use in order to make sense of these specific circumstances. And also these concepts come with their specific histories. So, if we think of the relation between these concepts and these material circumstances as a fundamental problem for the production of knowledge and for the critical understanding of reality, I think that we have quite an interesting angle on some of the most important problems at stake now. Of course, the question of the universal plays an important role in this regard, but I guess that the question can be put in a much easier and maybe more interesting way. How do we use a concept that was forged, for instance, in Italy, within the tradition of autonomist Marxism in Italy, to make sense of what is happening in Buenos Aires or Kolkata or in Chicago? I think this is a very important question, and there is always a moment of friction. *Border as Method* is a book that is constructed upon this idea of the friction between concepts and material circumstances. Similarly, our interest in issues of translation – linguistic and even more so, conceptual translation – arises from a struggle with this question.

NDG: Well, let me use that as a cue to ask you a question about the concept of citizenship. Has citizenship provided a meaningful framework for re-posing the question of migration? What might be some of the limitations or distortions, or as you say, the frictions, of approaching migration through the prism of citizenship?

SM: You said “prism”; I heard “prison”! [*laughter*] Let me say something in general to begin with: the concept of citizenship was *not* an important political concept – not only in Italy, but also, I would say, in continental Western Europe – until the 90s. When I went to the university, there was a very famous dictionary of politics, edited by Norberto Bobbio, a rather famous Italian political theorist. It was translated into several languages (I suppose also into English). It came out with several editions in the mid-80s. If you would look for the term citizenship, you would not find it. It was not considered an important political concept. So, in the 90s, something changed. And in Italy, in particular, it was parallel not only to a general crisis of the political and party system but also to the emergence of migration as a political question. So, it was quite obvious to put the two terms into connection. In the 90s, and also in the early 2000s, I was part of several conversations that aimed at opening

up the concept of citizenship. And again, simply put, I tried to do with citizenship what I was describing before, when speaking of subjectivity. Both in some historical work and in several more theoretical essays, I tried to make sense of citizenship as a field of tensions. On the one hand, you have the institutional legal framework that makes up citizenship in a specific place and time. On the other hand, you have a whole set of practices, of behaviors, of movements, of struggles, which can challenge the existing framework of citizenship. And if you think of citizenship in this sense, then it's quite easy to position migration as a kind of fundamental force within the framework. So, the political character of migration from this point of view is quite apparent. If you work with such a framework, with such an understanding of citizenship, it's quite easy to see the movement of migrants themselves as a challenge to a specific material formation of citizenship. So, I must say, for me, it was very, very effective as a theoretical framework in order to underscore the political aspect of the very movement of migrants, of the very fact that migrants were challenging borders. However, over the last decade, I have become a bit more skeptical regarding citizenship. And I guess this has also to do with my training in political theory, in the legal constitutional theory of history. I have become aware of the fact that this framework, this institutional framework, has its own logics and it is very difficult to emphasize the other aspect – the practices, the subjective movements and struggles – without looking at the way in which these subjective practices and struggles find (or do not find) a kind of recognition within the “objective” legal framework. And if you look at the way in which, for instance, the struggles of the *sans-papiers* in Europe have found recognition from the point of view the legal political organization of citizenship in Europe, I mean, the balance is not particularly encouraging. Moreover, I have also come to think that the very framework that I used in order to understand citizenship is maybe constructed upon specific historical experiences that are over. I've discussed that a lot with Étienne Balibar, and, as you know, Etienne stresses the fact that modern politics is a divided politics. You have the “insurgent” aspect of modern politics and you have the “constitutional” aspect of modern politics. I say this and I acknowledge that my own work on citizenship was not particularly original because it's not that far from this wonderful historical-theoretical reconstruction proposed by Étienne Balibar in the early 1990s. And many friends in the room here today will remember that Étienne puts an emphasis on the insurgent aspect of modern politics, on the fact that new subjects constitute themselves, but in his work, the point has always been the dialectic between the two poles, which you can very well grasp reading another wonderful essay by Étienne on the notion of the social-national state (an idea that he develops through an intriguing discussion of Machiavelli), predicated upon the experience of the wel-

fare state after the Second World War. So, it was predicated upon the idea of the dialectic between labor and capital as the constitutional principal of a specific form of state, the welfare state, and I tend to think that that experience is over. So, it has become a bit more difficult to continue to use the language of citizenship constructed upon that blueprint, or a specific historical interpretation of that experience. And so in more recent years, I have tried to de-emphasize and decenter the reference to citizenship, the language of citizenship.

NDG: It's interesting that you mention the context of the 1990s as one where migration was, in a sense, provoking or instigating an increasing interest in citizenship, because the other context for those renewed debates around citizenship and precisely the context of Étienne's work, was the question of Europe – the question of European integration and therefore of European citizenship. So how do you relate it to those debates and how has your perspective on European citizenship changed over the last 25 years? [*laughter*]

SM: Of course, if you want to understand citizenship status since the early 90s, you can't skip the question of European citizenship. We were witnesses and participants in a process within which a new citizenship was established. At the beginning of the 90s, soon after the Maastricht Treaty, there was quite a lot of enthusiasm surrounding the new European citizenship. There are famous books that emphasized the opportunities that opened up, precisely for migrants, by the establishment of a "post-national" citizenship. My own position at that time, which was made in the context of several collective movements, was that, on one hand, national citizenship continues to be the condition to access European citizenship, that European citizenship is a secondary citizenship. So, to call it "post-national" was misleading, but yes, there were "post-national" elements within European citizenship. And then of course, I also pointed toward what we were describing as a kind of apartheid for migrants within Europe. I pointed to the incipient war against migrants that was being staged at the external frontiers of the European Union. On the other end, and nonetheless, I mean I've been part of several attempts to play *within and against* European citizenship. I think that at least until 2004 or 2005, particularly from the point of view of migrants' struggles and migration-related activism, there have been many attempts to play *within and against* the new field of European citizenship – denouncing the exclusionary aspects of the material constitution of European citizenship, but at the same time, saying, "we want more Europe." Sometimes in demonstrations, even very radical demonstrations – against the detention centers, for instance – we were saying "we want more Europe, but a *different* Europe," of course. The European citizenship was in a way also a tool to struggle against nationalism in many parts of Europe. And if you look back, both at some important No Border camps between the

late 90s and early 2000s, and the European Social Forums in Florence, Paris, and London, you will find several of these attempts to play within and against European citizenship.

And then, there was the referendum in France in which they voted No to the European constitutional treaty in 2005. And after that referendum, this question changed quite a lot in Europe. I emphasize the importance of 2005 because after 2005 there was a tendency toward a kind of re-nationalization, particularly of political rhetoric and discourse in Europe. And this is a tendency that seems to be reaching its climax today. My own sense already at that time was that this tendency was quite dangerous. Because, in Europe, we are confronted with a process of integration that is very difficult to imagine reversing. There is a kind of neoliberalism that is embedded within this process of integration, and not merely in the constitutional treaty that was the object of the referendum in France and in the Netherlands in 2005. So, to keep it brief, I was saying already in 2005, along with many other people, that the risk was that we would have neoliberalism embedded in the integration process and nationalism resurgent at the level of political discourse and also at the level of some varieties of policy. That was what we denounced in 2005 and after: the danger of a kind of ugly monster combining neoliberalism and nationalism. When I speak of neoliberalism embedded in the integration process, I don't refer only to the Euro, to the single currency, which is very important of course, but also I'm referring to processes of standardization, to processes of logistical coordination. It's not only the single currency; it's really at the level of market and logistical integration, which is usually presented and constructed as a "technical" integration, which really translates a certain kind of neoliberalism into the materiality of the everyday life. So, I repeat, for me, this situation that started to take shape in the mid-2000s is a very dangerous situation. Nowadays, I see a kind of intensification of this danger and a possibility of disruption of the very fabric of European citizenship.

So, Nicholas, to ask you a final question before we open up the discussion, you emphasize a politics of incorrigibility, particularly in your analysis of the migrant struggles of 2006 in the U.S., the incorrigibility of migration. So my question is how do you imagine this incorrigibility as a constitutive part of a broader struggle and political project? In other words, for you, what is the potential role and contribution of migrants' struggles in and to processes of democratic and/or socialist transformation?

NDG: It's a good question to end on before we open up the discussion to everybody else. For those who are not already acquainted with the argument, I spe-

cifically look at a slogan or a chant that was recurring throughout the 2006 mass mobilizations of migrants in the U.S. against the then-proposed law that would have criminalized undocumented migrants and would have been hands-down the most punitive immigration legislation in the U.S. history. Everywhere you went, all across the movement, people were repeatedly chanting, in Spanish, a chant that says: “Here we are and we’re not leaving, and if you throw us out, we’ll come right back!” I characterize that as a politics of incorrigibility. And to just keep my answer simple, what I see in that particular articulation of the mass movement of migrants in the U.S. is, on one hand, a politics of presence, insisting: “here we are, this is an irreducible fact: migration is an irreducible fact.” And, to amplify that – because the specific context was all about migrant “illegality” and deportability – it was also: “Here we are, we’re “illegal,” we are declaring ourselves, come and get us, catch us if you can.” Because another slogan alongside this one was, “We are not one, we’re not a hundred, we are millions. Count us well.” And this really was an absolutely unprecedented mass mobilization, overwhelmingly comprised of migrants or the children of migrants. And overwhelmingly composed of the working poor. And overwhelmingly composed of people of color, people not racialized as white. So, here was a politics that was being articulated, on one hand, in terms of presence: “Here we are.” But at the same time, it was a politics that was being articulated in terms of mobility – in the sense of speaking from the other side of the border, saying, “you can throw us out, but you can’t get rid of us.” Because you can’t get rid of a problem that has been systemically generated from within your own regime of borders and migration. You can’t get rid of migrant “illegality” and in fact “we’ll come right back.” And so it radically defined a politics, a politics of incorrigibility, but one which was deeply, in my argument, anti-assimilationist, one that was not asking for anything, that was not appealing for clemency, begging for mercy, asking for anything, one that simply said instead, “here we are!” And so, by implication, it’s a politics that says, “where do we go from here?” In that sense, it’s a radically open-ended political imagination about the possibility of a different world, predicated on the fact of what migrations and borders force us to confront in this conjuncture in which all the existing and available options are completely dysfunctional, or only functional in order to produce more of the same problem. And so, to wrap up then, I think that part of what is at stake is theorizing actually existing struggles and theorizing the openings and possibilities they present to us for understanding the possibilities for something new and different. So maybe on that note, an optimistic note – much more optimistic than the question of European citizenship – we can open it up to questions or comments from all of you.

Discussion with Audience

Martina Tazzioli: I have a question for Nicholas, and then one for Sandro.

For Nicholas: I'm interested in the way in which you conceive of autonomy and the autonomy of migration. You said that life precedes and exceeds the forms of subjection, so you not only say "exceeds," but also "precedes." So, what is the articulation between the political and ontological ways of perceiving autonomy?

And for Sandro: I'm interested in what you said about your post-workerist background, and the way in which you became involved in postcolonial studies. And so, my question is: how has the combination of migration studies, your involvement in migration issues, and in postcolonial issues challenged (or not) your conception, your approach to the post-workerist tradition? In particular with respect to two things: one is about the temporality of struggles, and the other is about the notion of struggle itself, having in mind migrant struggles in the postcolonial context.

NDG: I'll try to be brief and give you a kind of answer. You correctly identify what, for me, is an important ontological point. And part of my analysis here refers to a distinction that Marx introduces between the labor process under capitalism and what he calls the labor process in general, which he depicts explicitly as transhistorical, and which he refers to in terms of a metabolic relation between the human species and non-human nature, so to speak. And so, for me, there is a kind of necessity to be able to have recourse to a conception of human life and therefore, connected to that, various kinds of formulations about subjectivity, autonomy, creative capacity, productive power that are not reducible to the historical specificity of how we know those things within the specific framework of capitalist social relations. And without belaboring what is otherwise a kind of philosophical point, I think that it becomes indispensable to operate with what may indeed be characterized as a kind of strategic essentialism. I don't endorse any essentialist conception of the human, as such. I don't believe that there is such a thing as human nature, as such. I don't believe there is a transhistorical fact of human being or human nature, as such – except in these very broadly ontological terms that I've sketched that have to do with what I take from Marx to be the existential necessity for human life to exist in a metabolic relation with non-human nature that is about the transformation of our material and practical circumstances. And I think that is a necessary sort of framework with which to think in order to be able to conceive the possibility something outside of capitalism. Both beyond capitalism, but therefore also prior to it.

SM: Well, I also like to be short in my reply. For me, an important point is that Italian workerism has been involved in an attempt to understand the new conditions of capitalist development, new formations of capital and labor since the mid-1970s. Italian workerism grasped the radical nature of the transformations with which we were confronted since the mid-70s. If you look genealogically to the debates of 1970s within Marxist critical theory, I think there is a need to acknowledge that workerism was able to grasp better than other Marxist strands, better than other critical theories, the radical novelty of the transformations inaugurated by the end of Bretton Woods in '71 and the oil crisis in '73. And so, there was an attempt to go beyond the rigidity of a conceptual paradigm that was forged within industrial workers' struggles. To jump to the early 90s, my own attempt has been to bring migration and some postcolonial insights into this discussion. Within that discussion, I had the impression that there was a tendency to think of living labor in homogeneous terms. The whole discussion of immaterial labor, for instance, was very much influenced by a kind of bias regarding the homogeneity of labor. As I was saying before, the encounter with migration for me has been the encounter with heterogeneity, with multiplicity, with the problems and also the conflicts within the composition of living labor. So, this is the point that I have stressed since the early 90s in the so-called post-workerist debate. And this of course has to do both with the temporality of struggles and with the very notion of struggles. I will end by saying that at that time, a notion began to circulate among us that became quite famous, or infamous, in the early 2000s – the notion of the multitude. I think this notion had a huge potential, and in the beginning, the problem that we attempted to grasp with this notion was precisely this complex relation of the heterogeneity of the composition of living labor after the end of a specific homogeneous formation of the working class, and thinking that was the working class. It was a specific homogeneous subject formation. Of course, we can criticize that homogeneity: where was the productive work of women within that homogeneity? where was the difference of migrant labor in that homogeneity? But there was that formation of homogeneity. But what happens after the end of that formation? That end was also determined by struggles. This happens to women, for instance, against the missing acknowledgment of the importance of the productive labor of women. This was very important in Italy. After the end of that specific homogeneous formation, the concept of the multitude originally attempted to grasp politically the problem of heterogeneity and the problem of the constitution of a subject capable of making heterogeneity the basis of a different potentiality.

Unidentified questioner: I went to a beautiful migration studies conference a while back, and the keynote speaker at the very end kind of looked at the

audience and said, “You’re all overwhelmingly white and maybe you should think about that, and think about your positionality.” So, I’m wondering if this is a preoccupation that you have had in your academic contexts.

NDG: Well, there was a reference earlier to the Black Lives Matter struggles in the United States at present. It’s interesting to note that in the European context that slogan came very quickly to be transposed into “Migrant Lives Matter.” And so a certain kind of articulation became possible transversally, you could say, between those struggles in the United States, the struggles of African Americans in particular, with the question of the escalation of migrant deaths, particularly in the Mediterranean, and the spectacle of the so-called border “crisis” or “the crisis of migration” at the borders of Europe. And part of what’s interesting to take note of in this context is precisely that this transposition from “Black” to “migrant” in the European context is both instructive for what it says and what it doesn’t say. It’s instructive both because indeed the catastrophe of migrant deaths in the Mediterranean, the unrelenting systemic production of the conditions of possibility for mass death in the Mediterranean, is indeed about the reproduction of a border of Europe that has the character of a color line. And so, I think it’s an important intervention, identifying an important kind of affinity, and at the same time, one that dissimulates precisely the question of race which in the European context is often such an awkward and vexed theoretical concept, both in academic and political terms. And so, what happens when we say that the deaths in the Mediterranean are the deaths of non-white people? What happens when we say that the production of that mass death, the systematic production of that death, is not only about a regime of migration but is also about a global relation between Europe and the rest of the world, much of which was formerly colonized by Europe, and which involves disproportionately the lives of people who are racialized as not-white, not-European? So, I think there are interesting sorts of tensions at stake there. And part of what that means is that migrant struggles, politically, migrant solidarity in the European context, politically, and the translation of those things into a certain kind of critical migration studies in the European context, has an intrinsic and inescapable link to various kinds of anti-racist politics and struggles, but oftentimes one which is not adequately enough elaborated, not adequately articulated, not adequately theorized in part because what prevails in Europe is a notion of racism without race. That is to say, there is a notion of racism without an analytical concept of race. I think that is an absolutely crucial intellectual and political problem. And of course, the rest of your question points to the constitutive inequalities that define what academia is in relationship to these wider fields of struggles. I don’t want to belabor a point that I think is fairly obvious, which is that, within the European context, there

is a radically disproportionate under-representation of people from any kinds of non-European backgrounds amongst the students whom we would actually be teaching in the academic context. And so, of course there's always this kind of constitutive tension between an academic enterprise of critique, and the configuration of the specifically academic way in which a certain kind of question can be pursued, and its relation to a series of wider social struggles. I think that's a permanent kind of tension, one that constantly has to be revisited. It manifests itself both at the level of political organizing outside the academy, but it also has a kind of constitutive role in the vexations, as it were, of translating these questions and struggles into a matter for academic inquiry, intellectual inquiry, and research.

Laia Soto: I was wondering if we could come back briefly to the idea of strategic essentialism. And I'm thinking about that not in relation to the question of human nature. You talked at the beginning about the politics of difference, and I was wondering what you think about the politics of recognition or identity politics; and I was wondering whether you think that is a useful form of strategic essentializing, and if so, whether or how you reconcile that with a more critical historical perspective?

NDG: It's a big question. I'll say quickly that there is a certain tendency to be excessively critical of identity politics without adequate consideration of the fact that nationalism itself requires the production of a certain kind of politics of identity. Certainly in the study of migration, the politics of anti-immigrant hostility, which tends to be called nativism in the United States more so than in other contexts, is instructive in my theorization precisely because it names more adequately what really is at stake, which is the production of the priority and prerogative of the "natives" on no other grounds than that they are "natives," on no other grounds than their *being* "native," on no other grounds than their identity as "natives." Which is to say that for me nativism is the identity politics of nationalism. Every nationalism requires a kind of nativism, and it's absolutely at stake in all migrant struggles, in all border struggles. So it's absolutely crucial that we understand that if, in a variety of ways, people strategically adopt a series of identitarian postures in different conjectures, it's always in response to a larger social framework and a political framework and a regime that is always predicated itself on a certain politics of identity.

Manuela Bojadziew: I'm going to take a risk creating a little bit of tension between the two of us in relation to what has just been asked, because of my own work. This work was very much inspired by anti-racism and a theory of racism, and at a certain point in time, post-workerism was very inspirational in terms of thinking of what you have suggested as having complexified the subjectivity of labor. From what I saw, I have learned that it complexifies the

subjectivity of the anti-racist subject. And then being educated as a political scientist, I went into anthropology. So this is the thing: I think what is the most interesting in social constructivism is actually challenged by anthropology, because in my view the way ethnography works is actually to look at *how* these categories, which we take as assumptions and then which get taken up as strategic essentialisms, are actually made productive within a particular context. And this is the second very important topic, which I would add, being inspired by post-workerism: it's not just socially constructed, it's socially constructed within a particular historically material struggle. Then you can look at how racism and migration work in specific contexts, such as in South Africa today, or the border regions between Bangladesh and India. And you have a theoretical instrument with which you can look at history, as Marx has told us, in terms of struggles, not in terms of identity or capitalism. I think that both ethnography, or an anthropological point of view, and a post-workerist point of view seem to communicate very well on these terms. So I would like to ask you: is that something you see as relating to each other in your works, or is that something where you say "no, these are very different approaches," because it seems to me at this point, it may appear like you frame things in different terms, but I think there is a lot of potential for that.

NDG: In some sense, I don't really disagree at all with what you've described. I think that anthropology as a discipline has been particularly adept at taking certain kinds of deconstructionist approaches or post-structuralist approaches to questions of identity and instrumentalizing them or operationalizing them as ways of asking about the actual production in everyday practice of these kinds of identities. Which means, of course, if one is consistent and if one is systematic, it requires us to then produce an account of the historical specificity of each of those conjunctures where that happens; it requires us to theorize then something that goes beyond the frame of the ethnographic encounter; it points exactly to the material and practical specificity of the conjuncture as manifested in particular places and particular times; and in those ways it can be deeply consonant with some of the kinds of insights that otherwise are available from a range of Marxian theoretical perspectives, and likewise can also be translated into various kinds of historiographic inquiry. Because part of what ethnography is particularly good at, in my opinion, is actually revealing the *continuous* process of production of these kinds of distinctions and meanings. And in that sense, there is no permanent, fixed, unchanging, stable identity as such, so much as a continuous process of the production and reiteration and struggle over and contestation of those kinds of categories. But that would also have always been true, so historians can approach the question in a similar way. So, you have a very important body of historiographic work that emerged

in the United States in the 1980s that has been absolutely central for my own thinking, concerned with the historical production of racial whiteness, and specifically working-class whiteness.

I think those are the kinds of things that I would mobilize with respect to the questions at present not only of national identities but also the question of Europe and European identities. And in that sense, I'm very interested in the production of various kinds of discourses of Europeanness that for me become inseparable from a postcolonial constellation, which is of course also a post-Cold War constellation, but which is also a racial formation of whiteness. A sensitivity to the ongoing production of that heterogeneity, the internal contradictions and conflicts, but also the meaningful struggle over the production and fixing, the process of reifying and fixing, of certain kinds of identitarian categories is exactly of course the outcome of various kinds of struggles that we have to be able to understand as they're happening, that we can engage directly in a variety of ways politically but that we have to be able to engage analytically and intellectually through in one sense ethnographic techniques, in another sense a comparable kind of approach historiographically. In that sense, indeed, that's how I also ended up in anthropology, but I am always reluctant to say anything that celebrates what anthropology contributes without also understanding that there are deep limitations that are constitutive of that enterprise when it remains at the level of upholding various essentialized notions of cultural difference.

In this country, Britain, we have seen at least 15, maybe 20 years, maybe more, of the constant production of the figure of the asylum seeker as a dubious figure, as something presumptively and preemptively equated with the notion of "benefits shopping" and so forth. So you have this perverse spectacle that is well entrenched in the dominant representations, whereby "asylum seeker" has become in and of itself a category of effective de facto denigration. So that in itself would be a very interesting historical study – just to understand the production of the asylum seeker as a presumptively dubious, suspicious, unsavory category in a way that has systematically undermined the possibility of any kind of sincere engagement with the question of refugees seeking asylum. We see it abundantly today where the crisis in the Mediterranean is constructed overwhelmingly, almost unanimously, as a "migration crisis," as a matter of "migrants" in "migrant boats," etc. So there's a remarkable erasure of the idea that many of these people could genuinely be refugees. In that sense, it posits a very specific kind of conjunctural possibility that maybe we need the strategic essentialism of the figure of refugee or the figure of the asylum

seeker *now* – precisely *now*, in the face of that spectacle – as a lever with which to counter what is otherwise a discourse that overwhelmingly treats these as migrants, who therefore are opportunists who are simply coming for some kind of economic benefit. The asylum seeker figure, in Britain at least and presumably in many European contexts, is produced under the cloud of that suspicion, the notion of merely seeking benefits. What's also fascinating is that it turns out that it's precisely many of the so-called pro-migrant, anti-racist activists who are reproducing that same kind of simplistic binary. It's not surprising, but it's an intriguing phenomenon, and what it points to in a way is the manner in which the figure of the asylum seeker or the refugee is so inseparable from a dominant production of a notion of victimization that requires a notion of passive subjects who can be the *objects* of other people's charity, of other people's rescue, of other people's activism, and in that sense, any kind of subjectivity, any kind of agency, becomes dubious, becomes unsavory agency. On the other hand, what I think we need to recognize is that "refugees" never cease to be people who have aspirations and needs and dreams and motives that exceed the specificity of their precise circumstances of asylum-seeking, or persecution, or flight from violence. And likewise, "migrants" never cease to also be, as Sandro has theorized, people who are in an important sense also fleeing from something, seeking to escape something. So there's a dynamic of flight and the seeking of refuge that is important to think with with respect to migration, and likewise there is a kind of migratory project that is inevitable also on the part of everyone who is otherwise seeking refuge, and those two things point to a kind of indeterminacy about the partitions between these essentialized categories, which in the end are really governmental partitions, which are really about the management of these mobilities, which never fit neatly into any of the administrative regimes that are otherwise imposed upon them.

Ash Sharma: I want to ask whether you think, at this conjunctural moment, whether the questions of borders and migrants elides or eclipses in some privileged way thinking about the question of race, because, as I think that you've alluded to, there's an interesting way, at least in the UK, that migration studies is a sub-discipline that has subtly erased race, and de-racializes its subject. What that has meant is that the category of "migrant" seems rather ambivalent. And then I'd like to ask how this is configured in a more global context. In postcolonial theory, for example, Gayatri Spivak has critiqued the problem of seeing the world as a migrant. And there, she's juxtaposing that perspective to that of the subaltern. Or we could think with Du Bois about the problem of

being Black, rather than being a migrant per se. So outside of the specific sites that you've mentioned – Europe, the US – I'm not sure that the migrant or the border provide the strategic site for thinking critically at the global level.

SM: It's a very intriguing question. This could be the topic for a whole seminar. I do think that the category of the migrant has a kind of epistemic potential at the global level. Well, what does it mean to say at the global level? It means at several sites outside of Europe and the US, outside of the West. I could mention many instances where migration is at the root of some of the most important conflicts and dynamics of our times. Just think of internal migration in China, which has completely changed not only the economic landscape of the country, but also the whole relationship between urban landscapes and the countryside. And in China, the migrants have been the protagonists of the most important labor struggles of the last 15 years. Or think of Latin America, of the kind of subaltern economies that have been opened up on a transnational scale by migration. And we could multiply these examples. I could mention the Gulf states, where migration under the kafala system tends to reproduce conditions of indenture, where you have migrants who are basically unskilled laborers – construction workers, but also domestic and care workers – but then you also have the “expats,” who are young, often precarious academics, who go to the Gulf to work on many of the campuses that have been opened by US universities. Across these three different examples, we can speak of the figure of the migrant as mobile subjects who have been subjected to specific forms of discrimination, regulation, domination, which are directly connected to the fact that they are mobile subjects. So, if you take such a very general definition of the migrant, this is a kind of subjective figure that plays a crucial role at the cutting edge of many dynamics and conflicts shaping the contemporary world.

NDG: It's a very complex question, but I'll come at it in a completely different way perhaps. Which is to say, all of these kinds of categories are contingent ones. So just to address the example that you gave, Spivak says that many postcolonial critics see the world from the perspective of a migrant. I don't recall the specific passage in the text where she says that, but it already signals to me a certain ambivalence that could suggest, on the one hand, a kind of productive way that the standpoint of the migrant enables a certain kind of critique, and at the same time, the implicit critique that to see the world from the standpoint of a migrant – and if we're talking about postcolonial critics, we're talking about quite privileged academics who have migrated more like the way in which I myself am a migrant in the UK context – and that's a very rarefied and very particular kind of perspective of the migrant, and also one that, with respect to the transplantation of postcolonial critique from its source to a variety of the richer countries in the world, is also the insinuation of a kind of migrant desire, an

assimilationist, middle-class, privileged perspective. So, in other words, even in that phrase, we can perceive “migrant” to mean two completely opposed things. But I think it’s productive as a way to understand that, as in the example of migration within China, what is and isn’t called “migrant” in different contexts can vary wildly.

So, in a way, it refers back to part of Sandro’s question to me earlier that I didn’t address, which is that an important theoretical resource for my own thinking about what I call “the migrant metropolis” – which in some ways is predicated on my concept of “Mexican Chicago” – actually takes its original inspiration from a classic text from the 1940s by two Black social scientists, called *Black Metropolis*. Part of what is interesting in re-reading that text as a pivotal moment in the history of a certain kind of social science organization of these questions is that the Black metropolis is always-already a *migrant* metropolis. And the Black experience in a place like Chicago and many other places was about internal migration in a way that is useful to theorize and conceptualize in relation to something like the kind of migration that is happening in China and many other places that we might not be as inclined to think of as “migration” within the premises of a notion that now overdetermines “migration” as being about crossing nation-state borders. In other words, of course there are legacies of migration that are “internal” and a politics of migration and a figuration of the notion of the migrant that now have become disproportionately associated with crossing nation-state borders and disarticulate migration from those kinds of experiences.

Once we see all these kinds of internal heterogeneities and complexities and contradictions, even within these categories, it begins to open up the possibility of theorizing affinities and connections. I think that thinking across these lines of difference – precisely in the spirit of problematizing the categories and critiquing the normative presumptive categories that tend to dominate these fields – is an endlessly productive endeavor that actually opens up new ways of asking the questions, and is absolutely vital for getting at those types of perspective that under ordinary circumstances, in the ways that academic knowledge production is cordoned off and partitioned, don’t meet each other. So, my simple point is indeed that there’s something very productive for me in thinking about migration – specifically, transnational cross-border migration, and particularly in relation to the production of urban space – that comes precisely from an example that is best located within Black studies (at least, in a certain US configuration of that). And there again, what Black studies means in different contexts will also vary radically, as you know.

Part of what Black studies signals in an African American/ US context is precisely a set of premises about citizenship and therefore so-called “civil rights,” so there’s a deep and interesting way in which once we ask the question of migration in an African American context, which is largely an historical context now, in terms of some of these other categories that we’re thinking about, it gives us new kinds of tools with which to problematize citizenship itself. Here, I’ll refer back to a comment I made earlier, which is about how my own relationship to Du Bois comes by way of Malcom X, who was deeply committed to a repudiation of the politics of citizenship and therefore the variety of liberal racial politics of civil rights, which were at odds with the notion that African Americans could ever have been understood to be citizens. In other words, the premise of civil rights politics was that their citizenship was “second class,” or that their citizenship was always somehow deficient, and that there was a kind of unfinished business or an unfulfilled promise of citizenship within something that could be called US democracy, which was about the politics of racial inequality. So a certain kind of liberal civil rights politics was always about demanding the fulfillment of that promise, and a more radical Black tradition repudiates that. And that’s a really radical resource to think with in contexts that are different, because it begins to allow us to question the category of citizenship altogether as the presumptive framework for how we think about freedom, or how we think about new political possibilities.

2020: Questions from the Editors

To bring Nicholas De Genova and Sandro Mezzana’s 2015 exchanges up to the present political moment and in conversation with PARISS’ editorial mission, the editors asked both of them to extend their dialogue by responding to a series of additional questions.

Eds: Both Nicholas and Sandro speak about their early political engagements and the ways in which their activism brought them to develop a critique of social theories (be it of migration, of labor, etc.) and, in the words of NDG, ‘pay a different kind of attention’ to the spaces, groups, and processes with which their research was interested. Assuming that this dialectic between politics/activism/autobiographical experience, on the one hand, and science/academic knowledge production/research, on the other hand, still informs both of your intellectual process, could you speak about experiences in your near past that have pushed you in new directions (perhaps even pushing you to challenge your own work and past ways of doing/thinking)?

SM: In very general terms, the connection between activism and research definitely continues to shape my work. But there is a need to be a bit more precise regarding the meaning of “activism.” What is important to me is not only the daily relationship with activists both within and outside the university but a style of thought that is responsive to the requirements and needs of political action. If you read my own work on borders and migration you can easily note that I tend, more than Nicholas does, toward “abstract” conceptualization, toward “theory.” I often say that I never did ethnographic fieldwork in my whole life. But I learned a lot about the working of detention centers participating in militant actions against them, and I learned a lot about the condition and struggles of migrants spending a huge amount of time discussing with them about the problems of self-organization. I do not smuggle such political activism into my academic profile as “fieldwork,” but I believe that I could never have written about detention camps and migrant struggles without such experiences. And I really hope that the style of thought reflected in my writing bears the traces of such engagements. Even beyond the issue of migration, I have been involved during recent years (or rather decades) in several attempts to combine theory production, research, and activism – attempts that took such names as “Uninomade” and “Euronomade” and that are rooted in the traditions of Italian autonomist Marxism. And to come to the last part of your question, I have recently often asked myself whether we are still able to connect to the younger activists, who have a very pragmatic attitude toward politics. But, well, my answer is that we definitely have to test and requalify our approach but in no way give up.

NDG: I have personally been less involved in direct activism for several years, for reasons that have to do with the practical and material consequences of my activism as an academic. When I spoke publicly in opposition to the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, there were rather extraordinary and dramatic repercussions, and I was made to pay a severe price for my politics: ultimately, I was denied promotion, and was terminated from my job at Columbia University, and moreover, I was effectively blacklisted from academic employment in the US for the next 15 years. This also meant that I was compelled to relocate to Europe, where I have lived and worked in three different countries. All of that dislocation, which in many ways was a kind of exile, also had consequences for how well I could remain meaningfully connected to activist projects. In short, it tended to undermine my sense of my own deep implicatedness in the struggles of the places where I was living and my capacity to relate to those struggles as my own. Nevertheless, I continue to understand myself as an activist scholar, and that meant that my work continued to be nourished and

enriched by my intellectual engagements with colleagues, such as Sandro, and students in Europe who have been more directly involved in activist struggles and research. The political and ethical commitments of my scholarship inevitably communicates with junior colleagues and students' activist concerns, so there is almost always a kind of elective affinity. The obvious way that these new relationships have transformed my research is evident in the expansion of my scholarly focus into questions of migration and race in Europe, even as I always remained immersed in my ongoing work on the United States. And these related but nevertheless distinct intellectual and political interests have also thereby challenged me to think about new things in somewhat new ways, and have led me to write on topics that I would have previously not imagined, such as refugees and the politics of asylum, or the specific socio-political conditions of the European Roma, and so on.

Eds.: Both of you are situated in (critical) migration studies. What have you been able to do in an interdisciplinary field that you have not been able to do in each of your respective disciplinary fields? What sort of discussion and developments have been silenced or invisibilized in migration studies and what opportunities do you see for their unsilencing or their visibilization?

SM: Well, this is a kind of uncanny question for me, simply because it is not easy for me to say which is my "disciplinary field." Academically, as I already mentioned, I have a training in history of political thought, and I am now supposed to be a "political theorist" (or "philosopher" according to the Italian academic nomenclature). The work I have been doing over the last twenty years does not easily fit such disciplinary fields. Even more than interdisciplinary, I like to see my work as transdisciplinary, working the boundaries between a set of disciplinary fields – ranging from anthropology to critical geography, from legal studies to history, just to name a few. I repeat that my engagement with cultural and above all postcolonial studies in the early 2000s has been very important for me in this respect. Coming to migration studies, you have to take into account that I have started to work on that topic in Italy in the 1990s. And it was easy to contend at that time that what was invisibilized and silenced was nothing less than migrants' agency, to put it short. In the following years the scope of my work and of my references has of course widened and things have become more complicated. Nevertheless, what I would say today is that migration studies, in its wide heterogeneity, continues to pursue a research agenda that privileges the "host society" and that takes "Western experiences" as epistemically paradigmatic. These are two points that definitely deserve critique in migration studies.

NDG: For me, interdisciplinary work is absolutely necessary, and more to point, utterly liberating. Whatever I may have achieved in my work, I have been able

to achieve because of an intransigent and incorrigible interdisciplinarity in my way of thinking – simply because for me it corresponds to the sheer “interdisciplinarity” of real life, so to speak. Indeed, I prefer to think of myself as *anti-disciplinary*. This doesn’t mean that I don’t value the insights and approaches made possible by my disciplinary background and ongoing engagements with sociocultural anthropology. It only means that I am deeply suspicious if not hostile to the ethical and political complacencies and complicities that are entailed by the intellectual and methodological conceits and presumptions of any discipline. Rosa Luxemburg long ago wrote a delightful little pamphlet called “What is Economics?” in which she playfully lambasts the perfectly ridiculous circular logic of the fetishisms by which institutionalized academic disciplines make an article of faith of their own specializations. So what is Economics? – the discipline that studies something called “the economy.” And what is Political Science? – the discipline that studies “politics.” And what is Sociology? – well, they study “society.” And so on and on. It’s actually quite preposterous. Of course, to adequately investigate anything in which I’m interested intellectually, one has to discern the co-constitution of these ostensibly discrete and rarefied areas of life that we have been conditioned to call economics, politics, society, culture, law, etc.

I agree with Sandro’s remark about the tendency in much of migration studies to remain subordinate to the methodological nationalist and statist mandates to approach the topic from the self-referential and self-serving perspective of the so-called “host” or “receiving society.” I would add that the epistemic privileging of so-called “Western” societies corresponds in a more fundamental way to what is known as the coloniality of power, which then has manifold effects, including a coloniality of knowledge and knowledge production. Nonetheless, the border struggles and migrant struggles that transpire in the countries to which migrations and refugee movements are directed or oriented – such as the rich countries where I happen to have lived and worked – have an irreducible integrity and socio-political force that will never cease to be important and which deserve careful, sustained, engaged critical scrutiny and analysis. We each have our respective sociopolitical locations, and must account for the material and practical conditions of possibility for the research and scholarship that we do, including of course the politics of location.

Something else that I’d like to say about “migration studies,” which I have already argued in various ways elsewhere, is that even as an interdisciplinary field of study, like all other such fields, migration studies is always pressed to legitimate itself by emulating the institutionalized and established disciplines. More precisely, we, as the practitioners of an interdisciplinary field, are pressed

by the material and practical institutional conditions and constraints of our professional labor to aspire toward forms of academic recognition, validation, legitimation, and institutionalization that emulate *disciplinarity* and thereby threaten to corrode or subvert the insurgent character of our interdisciplinary endeavor.

Eds. to NDG: As one of the ambitions of the journal is to transcend disciplinary boundaries and de-disciplinarize academic practice, from the way that we frame questions to the way that we produce knowledge about the world, could you tell us more about what it means, or meant, for you to fashion your work as “explicitly anti-anthropological”? How was this insurgent strategy received by the discipline as a whole? Looking back, to what extent was such an approach productive? What did it succeed to do, and what were its limits?

NDG: Well, the verdict may still be out, so to speak, and it’s probably too early to expect any grand verification or confirmation of the putative “success” of such a gesture at the level of the discipline as such. Disciplinarity is deeply institutionalized and ensconced in the very architecture and infrastructure of academic knowledge production. But the same book where I make that “anti-anthropological” characterization of what I’m trying to do – *Working the Boundaries: Race, Space, and “Illegality” in Mexican Chicago* (2005) – received various forms of recognition, including book awards both within the discipline and beyond it. And in a different sense, I eventually was also able to jump disciplines and was employed for a time in a department of Geography. Nonetheless, I still sit on the advisory boards of some important journals in the discipline of anthropology. So, at the risk of answering the question in a manner that seems overly autobiographical, or which may even seem too self-obsessed, my simple point is to say that such an apparently antagonistic gesture on my part was neither taken to be a mortal blow or lethal threat to the endurance of the discipline, nor did it culminate in my summary expulsion from the respectable precincts of the discipline. But it was indeed liberating, and arguably opened up some new intellectual room to maneuver. In other words, the only lesson from this example is that we must remain insurgent. The most pitiful thing is to see a young academic who is so consumed with the professional mandates of making a career that s/he becomes too inhibited to think and speak freely. That’s not the vocation of an intellectual.

Eds. to SM: Through your approach to studying mobilities, do you think it is possible to simultaneously think about the power relations of international travel in terms of their sociogenesis (including technologies and forms of symbolic power displayed by various authorities) *alongside* the capacity of inventing lines of flights, escape, and transversal lines by the strategic use of

autonomy? What are the limits of conditions of autonomy-freedom in the “milieu” of world circulation?

SM: This is a very important question for me. I have always attempted to make sense of borders and migration in the framework of an analysis of actually existing global processes. In *Border as Method*, the book I published with Brett Neilson in 2013, we propose to take the border not only as a research object but also as a methodological viewpoint precisely on the global. It would be easy to say that what you call the “milieu” of world circulation engenders a panoply of limits to autonomy, or freedom of movement. But I think it is important to add that also the reverse is true. Practices of mobility crisscross the “milieu” of global circulation, they continuously challenge its limits, protocols, and parameters, therefore compelling the whole system to adapt and to reorganize. It’s really a kind of “reciprocal interaction” (*Wechselwirkung*), as one could say adapting a notion that prominently figures in Georg Simmel’s sociology. It is important to analytically keep open the tension signaled by such a notion. And this is even more relevant in a situation as the one we are currently living through, a situation in which the “milieu” of a world circulation is far from working in a smooth way. I am thinking for instance of the critical work done over the last years on the new mobility paradigm associated with the developments of logistics, which in many ways seems to facilitate contemporary operations of capital (it’s a question I have been working on for quite some time now with Brett Neilson, as one can see from our new book, *The Politics of Operations. Excavating Contemporary Capitalism*, 2019). Well, it is easy to realize that such a paradigm of mobility exists in tension with the current trend to reinstate sovereignty as the norm of the international world. Multiple frictions and even clashes arise from such a tension, and the free movement of people is compelled to come to terms with the resulting turbulences that shape the “milieu” of world circulation. But mobile subjects never lose their capacity to negotiate such turbulences and to act as a creative force within and against them.

Eds.: Can this discussion enlighten (or not) the current political situation in Italy in the years to come? Is the situation on the Mediterranean Sea and migration at the core or at the margins of politics?

SM: Well, I think our discussion can indeed enlighten recent political developments in Italy. What I can say is first of all that the maritime frontier and migration are definitely at the core of politics – both in Italy and in Europe. In Italy, Matteo Salvini, who was the Minister of Interior and Deputy Prime Minister until his fall last August, has turned migration into his main issue of political initiative and propaganda. His politics of “closed ports” and the war waged against NGOs are quite well known. It is important to add that the literal ferocity of Salvini’s deeds and utterances has been met by an extremely generous reaction and

mobilization of a panoply of actors in Italian civil society (ranging from radical social centers to important sectors of the Catholic Church). Migration was therefore actually turned into a battlefield. From a European point of view, there is a need to recall that what activists and critical migration scholars called the “long summer of migration” in 2015 led to a deep crisis, to a paralysis of the European border regime amid proliferating fences and efforts to renationalize border control in many European countries. This is something that is considered problematic by large sections of European elites, and we are currently witnessing efforts to restore a kind of “neoliberal” and “securitarian” *normality* of the European border regime. The new European Commission clearly operates in such direction, although of course it is difficult to predict the outcomes of the initiatives that are currently underway. The new Italian government, which is also supported by the center-left Democratic Party, is trying to act accordingly, downplaying some aspects of Salvini’s ferocity but at the same time reaffirming key points of the politics of recent years – above all the “cooperation” with Libya with the aim of an externalization of border and migration control. And this is the case even if everybody knows about the dreadful conditions prevailing in Libyan camps and the complicity of the so-called “Libyan coastguard” with “smugglers” and “traffickers.” Meanwhile, at sea and on land, migrants stubbornly continue to challenge the border regime, although at an unbearable price.

NDG: I would simply add, without going into detail, that the same argument pertains to the United States today, particularly under Trump. Migration and borders, and indeed what I have long called the Border Spectacle, have absolutely and indisputably become a centerpiece of contemporary political life and debate.

Eds.: Nicholas, you speak about how “[M]any of the so-called pro-migrant, anti-racist activists...are reproducing...simplistic binar[ies]. It’s not surprising, but it’s an intriguing phenomenon, and what it points to in a way is the manner in which the figure of the asylum seeker or the refugee is so inseparable from a dominant production of a notion of victimization that requires a notion of passive subjects who can be the objects of other people’s charity, of other people’s rescue, of other people’s activism”. Here you argue, any exercise of agency is deemed suspect. This is a fascinating point and since you first had this dialogue in 2015, the narrative of the ‘refugee crisis’ and the exposure of border violence in the media and domination of political debate can be said to have constrained the space of intervention immensely. Tazzioli (2020) labels the prevailing narrative now as a ‘minimal biopolitical discourse’ between saving lives at sea or letting them die.

Sandro, in this vein, you have famously been involved in high-profile projects involving coordinating rescue ships in the Mediterranean as a means to protest against Salvini's xenophobic policies.

In light of these transformations, my question is how you see the space of intervention and critique with regard this polarisation. Does the rise of right-wing nationalist governments render problematic analyses which concentrate on agency? Can we move away from the narrow biopolitical categories Tazzioli speaks of or is it strategically desirable to operate from within 'humanitarianism' to counter the far-right?

SM: As I was just saying, the stubbornness of migrants' challenge to the border is amazing. Such a stubbornness finds manifold expressions even at sea, for instance in the chant *Freedom, Freedom!* of rescued migrants and refugees, in the active refusal to be brought back to Libya, or in the self-organization that often shapes relations between people on board rubber boats or other precarious vessels. It is impossible not to emphasize migrants' agency in front of such expressions of stubbornness and even autonomy. What you say regarding the rise of right-wing governments raises of course a problem, which means the temptation to take a "defensive" position, simply advocating the respect of human rights, of the rule of law, or of some kind of humanitarian standards – which means to adopt a variety of what Martina Tazzioli calls "minimal biopolitical discourse." I have been firmly criticizing such an attitude, while I think that the criminalization of humanitarianism opens spaces for a re-politicization of the very question of the "human," if you wish, and of the autonomous intervention of non-state actors in border zones. This means of course to go beyond the paternalistic attitude that has historically characterized what Didier Fassin calls "humanitarian reason." As you were mentioning, I participated in the summer of 2018 in a successful attempt to launch a migrant rescue ship in the Central Mediterranean, run by a platform that we decided to simply call "Mediterranea." As far as I am concerned, I consider this project as a tool within a more general framework of a politics of freedom of movement, aiming at connecting sea and land and enabled by the stubbornness and subjective agency of migrants.

NDG: Yes, I agree completely. Coincidentally, Martina Tazzioli and I have just written something together on the emergence and increasing prominence of kidnapping as a tactic of border enforcement, in which we focus on both the US-Mexico border and the Mediterranean. In the face of the escalation in border violence perpetrated by the enforcement authorities and the subcontracted agents of the European border regime, it's also noteworthy that when "rescued" migrants and refugees were being hauled back to Libya against their will, in one prominent instance, they hijacked the ship! Being coercively returned

to Libya was a fate tantamount for them to being delivered into the hands of torturers and brutal exploitation and extortion. Predictably, Salvini and others were quick to castigate these migrants and refugees' autonomous action as an act of "piracy." The ferocity and devious cynicism of the right-wing populists and anti-immigrant racists is only exceeded by the outright atrocities that they commit in practice when they hold political power. In the case of Trump literally abducting thousands of children and babies from their border-crossing parents, these are veritable crimes against humanity. But humanitarianism as such is a woefully insufficient framework for any kind of adequate and meaningful response, and such a timid and cautious response would trivialize the genuine struggles of migrants and refugees who often stake their very lives on challenging and transgressing or subverting border regimes through their autonomous action.