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Interview with Nicholas De Genova and Nandita Sharma

Nicholas De Genova and Nandita Sharma

'This interview was carried out via zoom on 16 November 2022, with Angharad in Wales, Martina in London, Nandita Sharma in Hawaii and Nicholas De Genova in Texas'.

Angharad Closs Stephens: Nandita and Nicholas, thank you for joining us.

Nandita Sharma: Hello, thank you for inviting me into this conversation.

Nicholas De Genova: Lovely to meet you, Angharad, and great to see you again, Nandita and Martina. I'm looking forward to our conversation.

Martina Tazzioli: Good evening from London.

The first question we prepared is about this recent period that has seen a rise in muscular nationalism, as we see in the Presidency of Donald Trump in the US and Prime Minister Narendra Modi in India.

How do you read the current political moment? How can you help us understand the ways in which these figures succeed in establishing their support among the people?

Nandita Sharma: Nicholas, do you want to start us off?

Nicholas De Genova: Yes, I can try to get things started.

It's a big and complex question. I would start by suggesting that it may indeed be a symptom of the *weakness* of this kind of nationalist project that we've seen the rise of so many populist political projects that articulate themselves in such an outlandish, bombastic manner.

So one possibility is not simply that a muscular nationalism asserts itself in correspondence to some larger-scale social shift that embraces it and welcomes it, so much as it is an expression of a certain kind of political weakness around the project of the nation-state.

I think that there are these analogies and correspondences on a global scale that are important to think about, but they also have important differences. So then, when we think about the relative power and impact of the US geopolitically, on a global scale, the resurgence of a sort of 'muscular' nationalism in the form of the Trump presidency and the associated populism of his politics may, in fact, be a symptom of the decline of U.S. power. Meanwhile, although there are striking and stark resemblances with other populist nationalisms elsewhere, there might be important differences to contemplate, compared, for example, to what might be happening in Brazil or India or Turkey or Russia. That's just a preliminary thought to get us started, so perhaps you'd like to pick up, Nandita.

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Nandita Sharma: Yeah, I think that it's interesting. Modi is still around, of course, and you know further consolidating the power of the Hindu far right in India. But we have had a shift in government in Brazil and the United States.

But I think one of the things that we need to pay attention to when we're using concepts like 'muscular nationalism', is that there are different styles of nationalism. We should pay attention to those but at the end of the day, they're all nationalisms. What we can see for instance in political science is that when we have governments that are less 'muscular' in their nationalism, the opposition to them also declines in certain quarters, particularly from the left. So I think that we certainly need to pay attention to the more authoritarian forms of national governance, but also to the more liberal democratic forms of national governance, and how they also may actually be far more effective (in certain ways) in upholding ruling relationships. We need to look at nation-states as a style of governance that produces national subjectivities. It may very well be that we need to pay attention to both: how authoritarian national governments produce particular kinds of subjectivities. But what are the subjectivities produced in the opposition to those authoritarian governments? You can see the kind of Democratic Party version of nationalism in the United States, which appears to some to be more reasonable. They may actually be much more effective in the longer term.

Nicholas De Genova: Yes, I think that's such an important point. I mean one of the important examples to think with is the so-called 'War on Terror', which as we know, was first articulated in the proclamation of a state of emergency following September 11, 2001, and took on a form that was extravagant, bombastic and jingoistic under the George W. Bush regime in the United States, and it corresponded, of course, to neo-colonial military invasions and occupations, which in some sense required a ramping up of this militaristic sort of nationalism. But the accession to power of Barack Obama, in many ways, precisely by routinising, and normalising that state of emergency, and thereby ratcheting *down* the rhetoric or the discourse of emergency, actually institutionalised the state of exception in ways that were extraordinary and far exceeded what had been accomplished under Bush. So it was precisely by stepping back from the more outlandish expressions of that nationalism that it actually reanimated and reinvigorated itself in a much more powerful way. That, of course, was coupled with a variety of other important features of the Obama presidency, in that it served to reanimate a certain kind of liberal mythology about the United States. That was the other side of the self-congratulatory myth-making about the place of the US in the world, and the relevance of U.S. power to the world as some supposedly democratic and emancipatory force.

So, moving forward from that, we have witnessed the ghoulish manifestation of a genuinely caricatured sort of muscular nationalism, so to speak, in the person of Donald Trump. But I think in a variety of ways we see this play of surfaces. It would be better if we take a step back and situate the question in the context of a larger historical analysis that sees continuities, despite the apparent tensions and differences that operate on the surface.

I think there are perhaps two questions at play here. One is really about the utility of more aggressive, and sometimes militaristic sorts of nationalism for the

purposes of an authoritarian or incipient authoritarian politics that capitalises on various expressions of both anti-Muslim racism and nativism – and specifically anti-immigrant racism in many contexts – that serve to refortify a variety of broader political projects. That's one feature.

In a different sense, as I was suggesting, these more aggressive expressions of nationalism seem to also be symptoms of a kind of weakness around the larger nationalist project of state formation as such. And that opens up a different question about political crises and challenges, and potential insurgencies that one can see coming from various manifestations of popular movement and collective social and political struggle. In that respect, we have the Black Lives Matter movement, which in many ways represents a kind of political crisis in the United States, in a particular way in the aftermath of the police murder of George Floyd, and it has global ramifications. But the reality is that that movement first took shape precisely under the political administration of Barack Obama, which was celebrated as 'post-racial' and somehow as an evidence of the possibility of transcending the constitutive racism that defines the US state project. So, in an important way, the Black Lives Matter movement provides another key to seeing the bridge between a certain way that the state and state power in the U.S. context are always implicated in a project of reanimating and inoculating that power from various kinds of popular collective movement threats or challenges. And then with the accumulation of years, and the gradual momentum of that movement, you see the altogether different, more dramatic manifestation of its proto-insurrectionary potential after 2020.

Nandita Sharma: And I think that if we look both at continuities and similarities, if we just boil down the various styles of nationalism, they have very concrete similarities. By identifying those, I think we stand a better chance at mobilising against them. And one of those similarities, of course, is the construction of citizenship – national citizenship and its others. So the different styles of nationalism may have different kinds of elasticity in terms of who gets to be in the category of national citizen. And when I say national citizen, I'm not just referring to a juridical standing, but also a social status in the nation-state.

I think that what we're seeing around the world, either in its liberal democratic guise, or in its more authoritarian guise, is an intensification of nationalism. They're hardening precisely because the national style of governance exists within a world of global capital. And so national citizenship may expand or contract, but never, of course, completely. It's impossible to imagine a world of citizens, right? In its expansion and its contraction, there is the effect of the contradictions of dealing with the national style of governance within a context of global capitalism. So how do nation-states address the contradiction between its promises and its actual accomplishments? There has to be some way to make sense of those. And nationalism is one way of doing that. Never mind liberal democracy in the centre, also from the left to the right, we see an intensified reference to national sovereignty and to the national subject as being the core of politics, as a kind of legitimate basis for being political. So that's another thing that we need to pay attention to.

Whether it is negatively racialised people within any kind of national context or those people who can be constructed as the 'foreign others' to the 'national citizen',

those categories remain regardless of the style of nationalism that we're talking about, and I think that there lies the danger. I don't want to underestimate the danger of authoritarianism and the rise of fascism. I don't want to equate that with liberal democracy. I don't want to say that they're all the same. But at the same time we need to be aware of the dangers of feeling comfortable when those authoritarian regimes fall, and we're left back with Barack Obama or Joe Biden or Lula. There's no opposition in India that's going to challenge Modi at this point. But if there was, is that the end of politics? I think what I hear from Nicholas's comments with regard to Obama's victory is that the presidency of George W. Bush was a very interesting period in U.S. history, because even people in the United States started hating the United States. We know that the rest of the world hates the United States. But even people within the United States were going: 'Oh, this American project! I don't know if I'm down with it anymore.' And then Barack Obama saved it right? I always have thought of him as this contemporary Captain America, that rides in and saves the 'nation' by bringing people back into being proud of it.

I think that it's worth looking at those similarities, about the kind of nationalism that's being expressed.

Angharad Closs Stephens: That makes me think about a theme which appears across this book, which is about the difficulties of opposing nationalism. That ties into the second question, which is about new and emerging political movements, including assemblies or gatherings that we may not recognise immediately as political.

How do emerging movements help us think about the new spaces, sites and forms through which political resistance is taking place?

Nandita Sharma: I think that we need to consider people's movements – people who are moving across national boundaries – when we're thinking of who today is acting politically, and whether they're doing it in recognisable forms as movements – which implies a kind of collectivity, and a kind of shared political demand, if not agenda. There is tension there, because on the one hand, people who are moving across national borders, whether they are articulating a political demand for the abolition of those borders or not, are, in their own actions, trying to abolish the importance of that border in their lives. So there's that one tension. And then there's a second tension of asking, whether we are romanticising those individual movements by calling them political. And I would argue that we're not. I do think we need to pay attention to those individual acts of crossing borders as a form of politics. If politics is about contestation, and not necessarily a fully formed political articulation or demand, then I do think we need to take more seriously people's individual movements across borders as a political act. A political act that is calling into question our taken-for-granted identity as national subjects, and contesting the very power, which I would argue is the basis of nation-states, which is to control people's mobility and in particular control people's membership in the political community.

I think taking more seriously those individual acts as political acts would be helpful.

Having said that, I don't want to then say that all individuals engaged in moving across borders are engaged in collective movements against borders. That would be obviously incorrect, right? But it is to say that there is a spark there. We can see that around the world. No one in this world can move on their own. It's impossible, because to get the financial and emotional wherewithal to start moving is enormous. Moving is never just an individual act. It is a social act. There are other people involved that help to make that happen. And all along the journey, there are other social acts taking place to help facilitate that process. So when we're looking at these acts, we can ask ourselves, what are those everyday acts of solidarity that allow mobility to happen in this world? Because it can't happen on its own.

Nicholas De Genova: You know, I think that's a really important point. I mean, we frequently talk about a variety of issues related to border struggles and fail to recognise that, many times, the most important sorts of protection are actually self-organised endeavours on the parts of migrants and refugees. The most important forms of refuge or safety are self-organised endeavours on the parts of migrants and refugees. The most important expressions of solidarity are enacted among migrants and refugees. In an important sense, we need to retake some of these terms from their entrapment within a governmental and bureaucratic apparatus of assumptions and presuppositions that render these questions and these concepts hostage to a certain kind of global regime for the government of human mobility. So then it begins to be important to recognise that cross-border mobility is enacted by refugees and migrants in a variety of contexts, and in a variety of ways, and are, in my view, objectively political, precisely because they put into practice a kind of challenge to the presumptive authority of a state: they directly confront and defy the law. They put into question the presumptive sovereign right of the state with respect to asserting and enforcing its borders. In practice, they challenge the border police and the various manifestations of border barricading and border enforcement.

But in a still bigger sense, they're challenging the role of states in partitioning the space of the planet. So there in practice, they are enacting an incorrigible defiance with respect to the space of the planet, and what relationship human beings as a species will have to it. That is to say, they objectively challenge and defy in practice the kind of normative metaphysics of nationalism that corresponds to a global socio-political order of so-called national territory defined by states.

In that sense, you know, there's something objectively political about the movements of migrants and refugees across borders in ways that call larger questions that are not reducible to one or another legal regime, or one or another border regime, exclusively. In fact, it presents us with a global question about what kind of world is possible, what kind of future is possible.

That doesn't mean that I would impute to every one of those people involved in those sorts of physical movements across borders some kind of consensus, or some kind of programmatic expression of politics that corresponds to the way that I'm framing it – only that, in an objective sense, these larger movements really do represent movements that are inherently political.

And that is part of the reason that they become so much of an obsession for the projects of these reanimated populist nationalisms. The question of reinforcing borders becomes a central fetish for each of these projects in one way or another, and it manifests itself in a variety of ways. That's abundantly evident with respect to the hysterical anti-immigrant racism of someone like Trump. But it's also true in the case of the Modi regime in India, where you have whole populations of people who are native-born, presumptive citizens of that national state, who are re-branded as 'illegal immigrants' and whose very birthright citizenship itself is being called into question.

We can multiply the number of examples around the world where states are literally stripping their own native-born citizens of citizenship in the name of racialising them as so-called migrants, indeed as 'illegal' migrants, or as presumptive foreigners affiliated with the national identity of a neighbouring state. But in this important way, nationalisms are rearticulating themselves in very specific ways, as a racism that requires the figure of the migrant or the refugee as a central fetish.

Indeed, these analogies and affinities across the globe allow us to break out of the constrictions of a notion that each of these questions is only apprehensible politically within the confines of a particular nation, or state and its regime of citizenship.

Nandita Sharma: Yeah, I think that all those of us who've been working on migration, we've often identified studying migration as a lens through which to see how the global order actually works. Migration is a really wonderful entry point to seeing that, precisely because migrants are the quintessential Other to the national citizen, which is the subject of the world order.

But I think it's worthwhile noting that we would have nothing to study if people didn't move, so just people moving in and of itself is testimony to the fact that the current political order of things does not correspond to reality. It is a governance framework imposed on people's lives, that situates them within that order in a very hierarchical manner. Some people get things through their placement. Other people are deprived of things through how they've been placed within this global system.

That lens of migration studies, and therefore people's movement across the system of nation-state is an important site of political activity, and also an important site of political analysis. Because it really helps us to understand how this system works.

Martina Tazzioli: These are super clear and excellent answers, thank you. Let's move to question three.

In your work you have both radically challenged the methodological nationalism that underpins both academic and non-academic debates around migration. Methodological nationalism reverberates in discourses that see migrants as the cause of citizens' social and economic deprivation. Yet in the present conjuncture, social and political movements across the globe are pushing for new internationalisms from below or for anti-colonial internationalisms. How can we put into practice this idea of a methodological internationalism, that sociologist Bridget Anderson, as well as both of you in your work, have stressed and engaged?

Nandita Sharma: Again, I think a lot depends on what we're defining as a political movement. I think that one of the clearest examples of a political movement that we can recognise in its classic form, where you have very clearly articulated political demands, is the group of people who are together working in the Mediterranean today. Here, we have solidarity movements not only working across, but working against national citizenship. And I think that those kind of solidarity efforts to step in where nation-states, where European Union nation-states, are willing to let people die in the Mediterranean and in the Aegean and in the Atlantic Ocean – any way people can move into the European Union – is an example of how people are beginning to really question the status of national citizenship as the basis of being political. They are acting in solidarity with people who are, through their denial of that status, being left to die. If they're not dead, then they are left to be super-exploited, or completely socially abandoned within the places that they live. So I think that that is one example of it.

I think that there's more or less, in those efforts, better and worse examples of solidarity. I think that to me, one of the better examples is not seeing the end of that politics being in the transport to a safe harbour, but also allowing people enacting the solidarity across people's lives once they land. That's been identified as a major limit – that many of these kinds of civil fleet rescues are then forced to deliver 'migrants' to state authorities, and then they get detained, and often deported, etc. So I think that there are some efforts – I'm thinking of the 'Sea Watch' efforts – where people understand that their arrival at a safe harbour cannot be the limit, that there needs to be further political work done across and against those borders. I think that's a very concrete example. But I do think that there are much smaller-scale examples of this around the world.

There's been a resurgence of interest in a variety of political registers – whether it's a feminist register and an anarchist register (and how those interact with one another) as well as in people's everyday lives, of something outside of either state or class rule, a reconfiguring of what we see as a commons that is ours for the taking, and formulating political demands around these are really important. And I think right now, as I think you mention in a subsequent question, there is still a disconnect between these various movements. The movements for the commons and the movements against national citizenship and against borders are not always connected. But I think that there are easy pathways to make those connections. And there are some efforts at doing that.

One last thing. Again, I think what I'm talking about is still within the classic framework of a political movement – as a kind of identifiable programme and collective. I still think we need to expand our ideas of politics and movement beyond that.

Nicholas De Genova: I'd like to add something to that. It seems to me that it's precisely in the context of everyday life where people are engaged in a variety of struggles, and engaged collectively in a variety of struggles that don't always or don't immediately take a form that expresses itself as 'political'. But it is that context of everyday life where, once people have made it across the border, whatever their status may be, they actually become integrated and incorporated into social

relations that put them into close proximity with people who are citizens, and so non-citizens potentially come to be engaged in struggle and common cause with people who are citizens.

One obvious area where that may be the case is labour, where labour struggles become an opportunity for people to struggle together in spite of, and in disregard of, the question of migrant versus citizen, or more precisely, citizen and non-citizen. Of course, those issues may arise. They frequently have been literally manipulated, very cynically, as a way to penalise and target labour organisers and activists, on the basis of their vulnerability to deportation. So, of course, those kinds of differences can be exploited in predictable ways that have to do with strategies of divide-and-rule, divide-and-conquer, which are often racialised, and in a much more narrow sense, which can be manipulated to target people.

For example, the notorious Red Scare in the United States following World War I was distinguished, among other things, not just by an onslaught of police raids against radical political organising and labour organising, but also by the way that those acts of state repression culminated in the mass deportation of labour radicals who happened to be migrants. In those ways, the difference between citizens and non-citizens can become operative in contexts of common struggle, activated as reaction formations of state power. Prior to that, you actually have the fact that people work together to engage in struggle together.

Similarly, there are important examples of housing struggles where people disregard the question of citizen versus non-citizen in favour of a common fight with respect to the absence of affordable housing. And so, you have a certain legacy of squatting, particularly in the European context, where people disregard that question of citizen versus non-citizen in favour of a shared struggle. And again, there's a continuity between the ways in which people engage in these struggles in the context of everyday life and the ways that they may eventually manifest themselves and articulate themselves as political struggles with a capital P, which take the form of protests, campaigns, organised movements, and so forth. But you know the simple act of organising together in the workplace may not necessarily take on the more grand form of going on strike or having a picket line or a protest rally. Those kinds of struggles can happen in a much more miniscule, diminutive, everyday sense. Similarly, people may find ways to engage in various kinds of solidarity around the need for affordable housing that over time may become more and more robust, more and more militant endeavours.

But I think the bottom line – I need to return to the question – is that people have to actively refuse, resist, and disregard that partition between citizen and non-citizen in the forms of struggle and the modes of struggle that they engage in. That doesn't mean pretending to be naive or incognizant of those differences and inequalities: the simple fact is that, in a radically unequal way, some people are more vulnerable to the recriminations of the state precisely because of their non-citizen status, practically speaking. So there has to be a preparation for mobilising to defend and support people with extraordinary exposure to the recriminations of the state, and at the same time an insistence on organising on a basis that refuses to operate on

the premise that the citizen/non-citizen divide is a valid or meaningful distinction by which to organise social life.

Nandita Sharma: Yeah, I'm really cognizant of how, more often, I'm hearing a call for an end to national citizenship. In the 'no borders' movement the focus has really been much more on freedom of mobility and, relatedly, freedom to stay. Now I'm hearing more and more, whether it's in scholarship or in organising efforts, an explicit attention to the abolition of citizenship. There is something to pay attention to here, namely how our demands for freedom of mobility are actually, and I don't mean to say this in a condescending manner, maturing our political analysis and our understanding of what needs to change. There is increasingly a much more coherent rejection of citizenship itself.

I think that's a deepening of the kind of anti-nationalism, which is at the foundation of the (related) Border abolition movement and No Borders movement. So I think that's very exciting as well.

Nicholas De Genova: Yes. And I think that, in an important way, abolitionism is in the air, so to speak. There are a variety of different abolitionist projects that indeed ordinarily begin as activist projects, and a variety of different formulations and articulations of abolitionism in a whole series of different contexts that draw, of course, from one another, but overall, in general, they really have the potential to liberate political imaginations. Once we begin to conceive of the necessity for doing away with certain institutions and certain frameworks for the organisation of our social and political life, it opens up the possibility to imagine things differently and to envision things otherwise. From that point of view, one of the important insights of these abolitionist frameworks for analysis is always that it's never reducible to simply the abolition of something. It's always about the way that the question of abolition of one thing or another – be it citizenship, be it borders, be it prisons, be it the police – the abolition of something necessarily opens up the question: what else do we need to do? What do those institutions need to be replaced with? These ideas have been famously formulated over the last few decades by prison abolitionists who draw from the whole legacy of W.E.B. Du Bois's idea of 'abolition democracy', in the recognition that the abolition of slavery in the United States was never in and of itself sufficient to create and cultivate a decent life for formerly enslaved African Americans. I think if we put it in that context, we recognise right away that abolitionism was never simply about abolition, and we begin to see that there is this much more expansive social and political range of questions that are opened up by those abolitionist gestures and impulses.

In this regard, again I refer back to the kind of insurgency of protest surrounding the police murder of George Floyd and the Black Lives Matter movement having ramifications on a scale that far exceeded anything that preceded those events in 2020, but also in a way that exceeded the constrictions of the national territory of the United States and had reverberations across the world. That movement and what quickly emerged as a demand for the abolition of the police became readily available for translation in different contexts. So that the abolition of the police could become the abolition of border police, so that the abolition of prisons could

become the abolition of migrant detention facilities, jails, and so forth. There's a kind of cross-contamination, so to speak – or a cross-fertilisation, maybe, is the better way to put it – across movements and struggles, so that a movement begins to find available in another struggle or another collective movement's repertoire of ideas and concepts and tactics, something that can be adapted.

Nandita Sharma: Yeah, if I could just add one thing: when some of us say that people on the move are engaged in political struggle, whether they're explicitly saying so or not, it is useful to look to other struggles for freedom. When we think back to people running away from slavery, we would not now question whether these runaways were fundamentally rejecting the institution of slavery. I think we would recognise that they were being political for doing what they did. So I think it's important for all of us to think about why it's not as easy for us to identify people who are explicitly rejecting state control over their mobility as also rejecting the state's system of immobility as well. And then secondly, if every enslaved person was fighting slavery, and every person on the move is calling into question this world of nation-states, and how it facilitates the global mobility of capital, then I think that we need to pay attention to the alternatives within those systems. I'm really cognizant of what Nicholas just said of how slavery, abolitionism, was contained through turning it into simply an issue of legal standing. Are you enslaved, or are you free in the law?

I'm thinking back to the Haitian revolution here – not the leaders of the Haitian revolution, but the actual people who made it happen – they were calling for the abolition of that entire plantation system, and their enslavement within it. After the success of their revolution, even though they were legally free, they were contained by still having to work within a plantation system. So I think that we need to pay attention to how, as I said earlier, maturation of our No Borders / Border abolition politics is leading to growing calls for the end of national citizenship. We're also starting to understand how No Borders – border abolition movements can be contained. We can respond in advance to those containments by further radicalising ourselves to say, that we're also rejecting national citizenship.

I think that those are very interesting issues that are being dealt with, I think, in our political movements, and the political analysis that's emanating from them. To be able to clearly see that something really important is happening and we need to work to translate that for a wider audience.

Nicholas De Genova: And I think you bring up a really important point, Nandita, in calling our attention to the contrast between the way that people can readily recognise the political character of the future of slaves, refusing, escaping, fleeing from slavery, and the ways in which migratory movements across borders – of migrants and refugees – tend to not be recognised as having that inherently and self-evident political character.

One point that I would add to that insight, which really refers back to the question, is that it's precisely the ubiquity, universality, modularity of the nation-state form, and of nationalism, which then translates into the notion that migrants and refugees are fleeing something that is presumed to be about some 'elsewhere', which is about the political and social conditions that are somehow attributed to

another country, a particular state, someplace else, you know. So then, the forms of their flight as refugees, the forms of their desertion as migrants, are always somehow presumptively contained by a narrative that says it's about what's wrong 'over there' within the borders of some other state, rather than a recognition that it's about a series of circumstances, predicaments, and conditions that fundamentally correspond, socially and politically, to the larger organisation of the globe in the modern capitalist era. So we have the inheritance and the legacies of centuries of colonial capitalism and all of the consequences of that during the era of decolonisation that give us the world in which we live, which produce the predicaments from which people move or flee. And yet the tenacity and the enduring quality of this notion that somehow people live in self-contained, separate, discreet, bounded units called nation-states that are surrounded by other nation-states, persists as this kind of stubborn assumption, the stubborn presupposition that organises the way that academic scholarship and research are conducted, but also that so perniciously contains our political imaginations when we're engaged in various kinds of struggles.

Nandita Sharma: Yeah, so in terms of political sociology, for example, I think that one thing that becomes really evident through people's movements, as well as through social movements for border abolition or No Borders, is the bringing forth of a different understanding of what society is. What is the space of society? Society isn't the national society that we've all been socialised into believing we live in: we all actually already live in a world society. And there are certain political acts that make that more evident than others, and one of those political acts certainly is movement.

So I'm struck by the incoherence between how our political system is actually organised and the reality of people's lives. None of us in our world only live in a 'national society'. All of us are affected by things that are happening all around the globe. And so one thing that is very important about No Borders / border abolition movements is that they're calling for a reconciliation between reality and our ideas of society, and certainly our organisation of those societies.

Martina Tazzioli: Thank you so much both. We can now move to the last question. **Black Lives Matter have been among the most important political movements of the last few years. Their claims have circulated widely, far beyond the US and UK. However, some have contended that Black Lives Matter movement still tend to work within national frameworks. Meanwhile, others argue that pro-migrant mobilisations still struggle to bring to the fore an anti-racist politics. How do you think we might combine these two important movements, or at least, how can we ensure that we don't separate anti-racist mobilisation from struggles for freedom of movement?**

Nandita Sharma: I think that one thing worth mentioning is that the national framing of the Black Lives Matter movement also comes from above. It comes from the state. I'm thinking, for example, the European Union, which did declare 'Black Lives Matter', at the same time that they were refusing to rescue people on the seas who were leaving the African continent in an effort to arrive within European Union States. That was a refusal by the European Union to recognise that *all* Black lives matter. It's not just those who are citizens of their Member States.

I think that kind of national framing is also a response by power to the radical demands of those movements.

Nicholas De Genova: Yes. I would just add that obviously there are greater or lesser degrees to which the politics of race have been codified and trapped, domesticated and ossified, into a politics of citizenship. That's very pronounced in the US context – that struggles over race translate into a politics of 'civil rights' and are thus understood to be inherently a dispute over the rights of citizenship. In a fundamental sense, that fact doesn't preclude, of course, that there has been a whole variety of radical political projects that make the centrality of struggles around racial justice speak to questions that are transnational or global in scope, and which reframe those debates in a way that exceeds and defies the constrictions of a politics of citizenship, or a politics of national insularity. But nonetheless, I think that it's very pronounced in the US that politics associated with race are frequently articulated as the civil rights concerns of US citizen "minorities" and migrants' rights are frequently articulated as somehow separate from that, and in a way that contributes to them often being deracialised when, in fact, they're abundantly racialised. That's one configuration of this dilemma.

In a different sense, I feel there was a quicker readiness in the European context, or a variety of European contexts, to see that the translation of Black Lives Matter into the European context automatically was about migrants, because in a different sense, the discourses around migration in the European context are *always* presumptively about race, even though it serves the ends of systematically silencing and suppressing a frank confrontation with questions of race and racism. So there's a consonance in European contexts between migrants' rights struggles and a certain kind of politics of anti-racism, but one that tends to *not* make 'race' a central concern for political analysis.

Thus, in many European contexts, there's a kind of a posture of anti-racism – not to use the word 'posture' in a pejorative sense – but a kind of anti-racism that's self-confident in its ethical or political commitment, but one that doesn't actually take seriously the *analytical* necessity for the concept of race, and instead moves quickly to a certain kind of political position, but then it doesn't actually operate with a sophisticated enough analysis to think about the question of race precisely as a social and political fact that is, fundamentally, not reducible to some kind of anachronistic notion of biology.

And I'm saying that as a way to say two things: one, that any discourse of migration in the European context tends to be a proxy for race, but in a way that tends to silence and suppress a frank conversation about racism, and, on the other hand, once Black Lives Matter, as a political movement, had the repercussions that it did in the European context, I think it more readily was translatable into a question about borders and migration, precisely because those questions are always already racialised in the European context. Even if they are overtly deracialised, even if they are articulated overtly as race-neutral, they can't escape from the fact that they always are a proxy for a conversation about race which the larger dominant ideological project of each European state, or the EU as such, customarily wants to actually evade and silence.

And so it's interesting that in the US context, the Black Lives Matter movement, at a certain point, started to actually reckon with the specificity of the racial oppression of Black migrants and has paid attention to the fact that the question of racial oppression for Black people is also about migrants. That was something important, which became a more robust, more explicit conversation within the larger context of racial politics in the US. On the other hand, there seemed to me to be a kind of readiness to say that you could translate Black Lives Matter into the insistence in the European context that 'migrants' lives matter'. But it still begged that question of whether people were ready to do the analytical work that could understand both the historical and contemporary ways in which migration was a racialised figure in relationship to 'Europe' as a larger racial formation of post-colonial whiteness.

Again, these things look different in different contexts. So we could ask similar questions in other places. But one of the important differences is that the politics of race and racism tends in certain places to be all about the primacy of indigenous people in a settler colonial context, or the primacy of the legacies of slavery (as is evidently true in the United States and other American contexts), that then over time have become primarily framed as debates about citizenship and its inadequacies or deficiencies, or various forms of duplicity. Whereas in other contexts, the most immediate questions about racism circulate in a more direct and immediate way around questions of borders and migration.

Nandita Sharma: Yeah, I think it's important to recognise the ways in which discourses around racism actually prop up the nation-state. The discussion of civil rights is one way of doing it. But also, there is a kind of deep-seeded methodological nationalism in many anti-racist struggles, because the assumption being that the terrain of society is this nationally contained one.

One of the things that we need to pay attention to is how racism was transformed with the advent of the nation. States, like racism, obviously long predate the existence of nations. The idea of the nation or the institution of the nation-state – and the institutionalisation of the notion of national sovereignty – changed how racism works, so that it's easy to contain racism within the nation, because the nation is in and of itself already a racialised entity. And the construction of minorities is an essential characteristic of national forms of sovereignty. That there is going to be someone, some grouped people who are going to be categorised as the nation's others. And who are not subject to the full rights and entitlements of the majority who belong, or who are said to belong to the nation. So I think that paying attention to the specificity of national forms of racism is very, very important. In part, this is because they are designed to have us not pay attention to the figure of the migrant as an object of racism. We look at the figure of the migrant not as an object of racism, but, as you know, if we have any kind of analysis, we say, 'Oh, they're being affected by nationalism right?' And then that becomes another kind of order of things that refuses to acknowledge the kind of racist basis on which the rejection of migrants and the sovereign claim to control mobility is based.

There's something fundamental about the national form of sovereignty that is going to ensure that we live in racist societies. There's something profoundly definitional about that. So how do we denationalise our social movements to understand

that nationalism needs to be seen in the same kind of ways that we have come to understand racism. So you know, I'm sure you all know this, but after World War II, racism as an ideology was very seriously delegitimised. This is evident in how anyone who gets called a racist runs away from it and vehemently denies it, regardless of how racist they are. Even Donald Trump doesn't think he's a racist, or Modi, or any of these other, 'muscular' nationalists. So people run away from being called a racist because of the political movements after World War II that worked to delegitimize that ideology.

This is, of course, not to say that racism ended, but the political legitimacy of being a racist was very seriously challenged.

Simultaneously, when precisely in the same historical period that racism was being delegitimised, nationalism was being portrayed as a form of liberation, as a form of self-governance, as a form of freedom. So we had this kind of simultaneous set of processes happening. We delegitimize racism while we're valorizing and thoroughly normalising nationalism, thereby creating new objects of racism. But we won't say that they're objects of racism, because racism is now, no longer legitimate. But national forms of controlling people's mobility are now thoroughly legitimate. So all we're doing is enacting border controls. All we're doing is saying that the national sovereign gets to decide who are members of the 'nation'. Yet, border controls, immigration laws, citizenship laws, etc. are the major lines of bringing racism into people's lives.

So I think that there's so much more work that needs to be done to identify racism in our day and time. Because even so many of the examples of racism are actually in the pre-World War II period, and so we're not really taking a cold, hard look at what nationalism is doing. And in so doing we're actually legitimising the racism that deforms people's lives.

Nicholas De Genova: If I could just add something to that … I think it's a really important insight, and one of the remarkable things is that it's precisely in that moment, post-World War II – that moment, historically speaking, of decolonisation – that you have not only the massive-scale delegitimisation of racism, but as you're saying, Nandita, this simultaneous mass legitimisation of nationalism on a global scale. But one of the points that I want to emphasise is that it actually reinvigorates the nationalist projects of the formerly colonial powers. It actually restabilises nationalism and reinvigorates nationalism, reanimates nationalism in places that now had come to see the collapse of their colonial empires, and retreated back into a much more pronouncedly national self-definition. So, then, you have the emergence in that era of a new kind of investment in postcolonial nationalism and a nationalist policing of borders and citizenship for Britain, for France, etc.

And one of the consequences of that is the emergence of neo-fascist movements that are primarily anti-immigrant movements during those decades. And what do they call themselves? They call themselves the *National* Front. They call themselves the People's Party. They call themselves by their *national* names. They actually don't need to name themselves as anything other than their national identity, because the presumption and the insinuation is that the national identity is always already sufficient: the national identity is a racial one. And the foreigner – the

figure of the foreigner, the figure of the migrant – may be more or less explicitly racialised as such – as 'foreigner,' as 'migrant'. Migration and migrant identities are consequently always presumptively racialised in these postcolonial European contexts.

Angharad Closs Stephens: I feel you've both answered so fully, and that we've covered a lot.

I have an additional question, and I hope you won't mind me throwing it in at this point. As you were talking, I was thinking of our students, and I think they would want us to ask something about the climate emergency and the relationship between it and thinking about being political.

There is of course a connection between the muscular nationalist politicians that we've mentioned and the denial of climate change. This book has also developed during the Covid-19 pandemic. Social theorist Bruno Latour, who died very recently in October 2022, claimed that the pandemic should be understood as a rehearsal for other suspensions of everyday life that will be necessary in response to a changing climate. To conclude, I wonder if you could offer your thoughts on the connections between the climate emergency and the topics we have discussed, including global nationalism and political movements. How is nationalism returning in the context of the climate emergency and how does climate politics form part of the resistance of nationalism?

Nandita Sharma: The important thing I think, to note here is that the nation-state system is relatively new. And I would argue that from its inception – I would date it at its earliest in the mid-19th century – there has been a successive intensification of nationalism. There has been a successive intensification of mobility controls from their start to where we're at now.

There has been a growing emphasis on the state's power to determine who its members are, and as we talked about earlier, the stripping of citizenship. All of this is absolutely an essential hardening of fascist politics. I would argue that the nation-state – the national form of state power – is always trending towards fascism, because of the way that it organises the political community as a limited group of always racialised people. And what I am seeing now, because we've known about the impending and existing climate catastrophe for many decades. This is not new, particularly in the realm of think tanks and policy formations, etc. What has been thought out for many, many decades is how nation-states are going to respond to the global climate catastrophe. And so I would argue that the intensification of mobility controls, and the growing limits placed on the accessibility of citizenship rights, and the narrowing of the possibilities of ever gaining national citizenship in more and more states is not so much a dress rehearsal but what's happening and has been happening for some time.

The nation-state is about facilitating the ongoing exploitation of the world and the life on it for profit, while at the same time destroying our capacity to overthrow it by a variety of divisions that have been constructed. And one of the divisions that has been clearly constructed in the world of nation-states is the idea of who belongs to the nation and who doesn't, and which laws can be enacted to mimic that and to control people's movement into nation-states.

So I think that you know I'm kind of weary of this idea that it's a dress rehearsal, because this has been going on for a very, very long time, and it is going to intensify. A UN report (*Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all*) came out this week saying that 700 million people could be displaced and thus be on the move due to stress on water supplies – in the next decade – the next decade. And what will they likely encounter? They will encounter a world in total global lockdown, where they are not allowed to move, and if they manage to move, they will be treated as a despised and disposable kind of life. That is the world that has actively been in construction for a very long time now, and it's intensifying as the contradictions of organising a world society into a world of nation-states also intensifies.

We know more and more what environmentalism is teaching us. Remember that blue marble picture of the world, which changed astronauts' imaginations of the world – they do see it as a world society. So you know, the ray of hope in the climate catastrophe is that we will finally acknowledge that we live in a world society. But of course, nation-states and global capital are doing every single thing in their power to make sure that we do not actually realise that vision – that we continue to imagine ourselves as members of national societies. And of course, we can't underestimate the enormous material force of nation-states in organising rights and entitlements and access to the capitalist wage. We live in a world where your basic means of survival is accessing the capitalist wage. Denying people access to that means that they are being sentenced to death. So I think that those are the major contradictions that we have been dealing with for a very long time, and they will intensify. The trend of all nation-states towards fascism is going to follow that intensification.

Nicholas De Genova: I would just add to that that, referring back to something I said earlier, the notion that migrants and refugees are always coming from someplace else that is understood to be its own self-contained 'national' political and social reality is far harder to sustain in the context of crises that are increasingly recognisable to be specifically climate-related.

So now we have the emergence of the concept of climate refugees. For a very long time, people may have been migrating because of failed crops, for example, and the unsustainability of former ways of life, economically speaking, in the places they came from. But it was hard to actually apprehend that, and recognise its legibility, as being related to global warming and climate change. That's increasingly less so. It is still possible to say, for example, 'Oh, these people are fleeing Honduras, because that's a country that was hit badly by a hurricane' (or two, or three). And so you begin to have a way in which certain kinds of so-called natural disasters are mapped onto the particular sites that become most evidently victimised by those disasters. But there's also this way in which increasing consciousness and an understanding of the planetary character of climate crises makes it harder and harder, less and less tenable, to sustain those methodologically nationalist narratives about migration and refugee movements, and it contributes to the breakdown and blurring of that partition between who is a migrant and who is a refugee. The climate refugee category, in that sense, is, I think, a productive one, precisely

because it contributes to that blurring that customarily means the partitioning of a notion of who is legitimately and recognisably a person in flight from persecution or violence or some sort of political oppression, versus someone who is supposedly simply seeking a better life in a way that's implicitly characterised as opportunistic, which is the social profile of someone who's 'simply' migrating. So I think that in an interesting way it does indeed contribute to a greater sensitivity to the planetary character of our contemporary global condition, and in a new way it therefore begs this question about the relationship of the human species to the space of the planet, which carries with it, of course, these questions about how do we envision a different world or different futures, different ways of organising social and political life.

Nandita Sharma: Yeah, I think that there's two parallel processes happening. I was in Athens in the summer of 2019, and there were fires raging around Athens at that time. As I was listening to the radio – and having it translated for me by my friends – there was talk of a village where everyone had run into the sea in order to flee the flames encircling their village. An older woman was being interviewed and she said: 'Poof! Any one of us can become a refugee in fifteen minutes!' So one kind of way of experiencing climate catastrophe is by expanding our understanding of who we are and the life-saving character of movement. You were just this person, a Greek citizen, living your life, and now it's all gone, and you have to find somewhere else to be now.

But at the same time, I'm really cognizant of the fact that there is a response from above as well. Every climate catastrophe that we've seen in the past – I'm thinking of the massive drought in the US Southwest in the 1920s – 1930s, which John Steinbeck wrote the powerful novel, *The Grapes of Wrath*, about – where people who were fleeing the dust bowl of the Southwest encountered borders at the state boundaries of California. They may all have been US citizens but they were not crossing into California because 'California belongs to Californians'. We saw that with the Covid crisis too. We had different US states saying things like, 'if you're trying to move into our state you're not coming. You need to show your residency paper'. So there is a growing borderisation within nation-states as well. But where is everyone going to live exactly? Where are people in California facing severe drought or severe floods or severe fires going to live?

And these, these are rich world citizens! These are US citizens. They are going to be climate refugees, and whether they will find any kind of safe haven and refuge is highly questionable. So I think that on the one hand, we have a greater impetus for enacting a No Borders politics, and a Border Abolition politics, and at the same time we know that very, very predictably there's going to be more borders – that will be the response to climate catastrophe. That is the response right now.

Nicholas De Genova: Yes, and just to reiterate your point earlier: the classic argument against migration has been for a very long time that 'We just don't have room for these new people to arrive here and make demands on our resources.' And this argument has been particularly strong in the context of a more robust welfare state: you know, the notion that 'We have to preserve our good stuff for our citizens; these are resources to be cultivated and sustained for the national polity.' It then becomes a legitimating rationale for the reinforcement of anti-immigrant policies

and border enforcement. However, very predictably, the more and more that it is indeed the wealthy people in the richest countries who are being affected by climate disasters, you can also imagine that sentiment translates into a notion of scarcity, albeit a dubious notion of scarcity, but nonetheless, a notion of scarcity that says, in effect: 'We have to conserve what we have against the potential demands of the mass of humanity who will have needs that far exceed anything that we could ever be answerable for or take responsibility for.' As I say, this has been a dominant discourse of anti-immigrant policy making and politics for a very long time, but it only promises to become that much more exaggerated and pronounced in these contexts of perceived scarcity and a presumptive rivalry for scarce resources.

Moreover, there's also the important way that Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans produced a mass exodus of generally poor Black people in the United States. And it was hotly controversial for them to be characterised as 'refugees'. Precisely because of the long saga of Black citizens being subjugated in flagrant disregard of their ostensible citizenship, and consequently the legacies of a civil rights politics that is deeply invested in the claim to citizenship, coupled with the longstanding denigration of refugees and migrants as inherently undeserving of relief as non-citizens. Many African Americans were inclined to insist, 'We're not refugees. We're citizens.' In other words, they proclaimed: we have the demands and expectations and deserve the prerogatives associated with citizenship. Today, in contrast, you also have people who live in exorbitantly expensive, suburban enclaves in coastal California, who see wildfires burn down their homes repeatedly. So, in this remarkable way, we confront the possibility in the richest countries of both climate disasters that produce an inordinate effect for poor people, and climate disasters that produce an inordinate effect for people who are not only wealthy, but who are also privileged with respect not only to their own private access to insurance policies, but who are also prioritised at the level of how local governments and the United States federal government respond to climate crises, and thus the possibility of remaking their lives. Mike Davis famously wrote an essay on 'The Case for Letting Malibu Burn,' referring to the absolutely illogical, irrational logic of capital accumulation that drove real estate development in Southern California, such that you have areas that will naturally be predisposed to disasters, such as wildfires, and yet they have become over-built, over-developed, extremely expensive residential areas of property investment.

So we have all of these kinds of accumulated contradictions of modern capitalism, exposed in new ways by the challenges associated with what by now has become readily recognisable as the climate crisis.

But both things are possible. On the one hand, there is the kind of re-entrenchment of privilege, and the defense of a nativist notion of prerogative that gets translated into, among other things, a sense of 'national' prerogative that reinforces borders and wants to enforce the presumptive exclusion of impoverished people from places that have suffered disasters, who are migrating as climate refugees. On the other hand, there is also the possibility for precisely this kind of recognition that we now are confronting crises of a scale and a variety that cannot be adequately comprehended or solved in 'national' terms.

Nandita Sharma: If we reframe the politics of borders as a politics of abundance – people running away from slavery, or running away from a drought or running away from a flood, all in a sense demonstrate that there is a world of abundance. There is life possible on this planet, right? It's just very disastrously allocated. It is a politics of abundance versus today's politics of scarcity, where nationalist politics, racist politics, politics of endless expropriation and exploitation is a politics of scarcity. It's a politics of hoarding versus a politics of abundance – the acknowledgement that we have an entire planet that we share. Surely we can all live on it. There's a way that we can organise this. So I think that it's the work of political organisers, and all of us, to reframe things in a way that will make it clear that we're going to pay very, very dearly for accepting the categories of state and capital that we've accepted so far. We're going to pay really, very, very dearly for it.

Angharad Closs Stephens: Thank you. Thank you so much. I'm so glad I asked that extra question. It must be very late where you are. We are going to have to wrap up. It's been such a full discussion – thank you.

Martina Tazzioli: Thank you very much Nandita and Nicholas.

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