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**De-confine Borders: Towards a Politics of Freedom of  
Movement in the Time of the Pandemic**

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COMPAS does not have a centre view and does not aim to present one. The views expressed in this document are only those of its independent author

## **Abstract**

This paper takes stock of the momentous transformations in bordering practices, migration and global mobility that have been sparked by the new coronavirus pandemic, and seeks to forge a progressive agenda for research and nongovernmental practice in this context. Focusing on Europe, it argues that states have conflated the “war on the virus” with the “war on migrants” and imposed drastic new restrictions on international mobility. What has long been referred to as a “global apartheid” which in effect uses the category of citizenship to police (im)mobility according to global geographies of race and class, is being supplemented by a “sanitary apartheid” through which states aim to keep virus-free “bubbles” apart from populations designated as contagious. Illegalized migrants will however continue to cross borders in search of protection and a better life with or without the approval of states. It is only by recognising migrants’ right to move that one may implement measures to mitigate the risks of contagion so as to protect migrants and sedentary populations alike. At the same time, the excessive mobility of the privileged through air travel that has been a major factor in spreading the virus and contributes to ecological destruction should also be limited. Re-thinking the politics of (im)mobility in the context of the pandemic must be part of the process of transformation towards a more just and sustainable world.

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<sup>1</sup> While I write this article in my name and thus bear the responsibility for any shortcomings, I am indebted to the collective thinking within the Migreurop network (of which I am a board member), as well as the thoughts and comments a number of colleagues have generously shared. I would like to thank in particular Michaël Neuman, Isabelle Saint-Saens, Lorenzo Pezzani, Itamar Mann, Maurice Stierl, Sandro Mezzadra, William Walters, Didier Fassin, Antoine Flahault, Bridget Anderson, Nicholas Beuret and the Heller family.

## Introduction

After three months of stringent restriction on travel to and within the EU, Monday 15 June was heralded by the EU Commission as the “re-Open Borders Day of Schengen Area”,<sup>2</sup> and several European states chose this date to lift travel limitations between themselves for European citizens. After beginning to lift the measures of confinement within their countries, states are now partly “de-confining” their borders. This step, part of a phased process of reopening borders between countries designated as “safe” in terms of the pandemic, is still far from restoring freedom of movement across the EU,<sup>3</sup> and it is even further from granting *all people* – including populations of the global south - the equal right to move and stay. In fact, over the last months, “the war on the virus” has been used by European states to step up their “war on migrants”, and border violence against migrants whose movement has been illegalised and precaritized by restrictive legislations has intensified.<sup>4</sup> “Re-Open Borders day” then marks a step in the return to the “normal” of a highly unequal global mobility regime, which, despite being usually couched in neutral technical language, in effect uses the category of citizenship to police (im)mobility according to global geographies of race and class. The profoundly inegalitarian and discriminatory nature of this regime has led several scholars to qualify it as a form of “global apartheid”.<sup>5</sup> At the same time, with the selective re-opening of EU borders, we see the emergence of the risk of infection as a crucial new category organising the (im)mobility of people, giving rise to what I will call a “sanitary apartheid”. I argue these old and new logics organising global (im)mobility are distinct, but enter into complicated relations - at times overlapping and reinforcing each other, at others entering into contradiction.

This paper, primarily focusing on Europe, takes stock of the momentous transformations in bordering practices, migration and global mobility that have been sparked by the new coronavirus pandemic, and seeks to forge a progressive agenda for research and nongovernmental practice in response to these changes. It aims to contribute to the collective process of rethinking and transforming the world towards one in which we actually want to live in the wake of the pandemic, focusing here on the dimension of human mobility. It is divided in three main sections. *First*, I analyse the relations between mobility and the

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<sup>2</sup> Eudebates.tv. 2020. “June 15 will be the re-Open Borders Day of Schengen Area”. *Eudebates.tv*, 15 May 2020.

<https://www.eudebates.tv/debates/eu-policies/transport-and-travel/june-15-will-be-the-re-open-borders-day-of-schengen-area/>

<sup>3</sup> Abellán, Lucía and Álvaro Sánchez, “European borders are reopening, but there is a lot of small print to digest”. *El País*, 21 Jun 2020.

[https://english.elpais.com/spanish\\_news/2020-06-21/european-borders-are-reopening-but-there-is-a-lot-of-small-print-to-digest.html](https://english.elpais.com/spanish_news/2020-06-21/european-borders-are-reopening-but-there-is-a-lot-of-small-print-to-digest.html)

<sup>4</sup> Migreurop, “From the « war against the virus » to the war against exiles: security responses to Covid-19 exacerbate violence at borders”, *Migreurop*, 2 April 2020. <http://www.migreurop.org/article2974.html?lang=en>. Throughout this paper, I use the term “illegalized migrants” to highlight that migrants illegality is a product of state law rather than an intrinsic feature of migrants. Migrants’ illegalisation in turn precaritises their status and social condition. See Bauder, Harald. 2013. “Why We Should Use the Term Illegalized Immigrant.” *RCIS Research Brief*, no. 2013/1: 1-7.

<sup>5</sup> Balibar, Etienne. 2004. *We, the People of Europe? Reflections on Transnational Citizenship*. Princeton: University Press. Many other scholars have developed the global apartheid analysis since, including Van Houtum, Henk. 2010. “Human blacklisting: the global apartheid of the EU’s external border regime.” *Environment and Planning D, Society and Space* 28: 957-976 and more recently Hage, Ghassan. 2016. “Etat de siège: A dying domesticating colonialism?” *American Ethnologist*, Vol. 43, No. 1, pp. 38–49.

spreading of the virus, arguing that while the global air travel of privileged classes has been an important factor, the restrictions on travel have had a limited effect in slowing down this spread. However, as states have conflated the “war on the virus” with the “war on migrants”, border violence has been heightened, particularly along the EU’s maritime frontier. Now, as states are progressively lifting their internal and external measures of confinement, a new geography of inclusion and exclusion is emerging. *Second*, I discuss how the demand for and the practical support to migrants’ freedom to move must be rethought in the context of the pandemic. Illegalised migrants continue to cross borders in search of protection and a better life with or without the approval of states, but denial of the right to move leads to large-scale border deaths along the fault-lines of the world-system such as the Mediterranean, and precarises the statuses, social and working conditions of those who survive perilous border crossings. This in turn prevents migrants’ effective access to the means allowing to protect themselves and others from Covid-19. As such I will argue that while a policy founded on the freedom to move has long been the best way to mitigate the risks migrants face in the course of their journeys, in the context of the pandemic allowing all migrants to move in safe and legal ways is also the condition to implement sanitary measures to protect the health of migrants and sedentary populations alike. *Third*, I argue we should also challenge the excessive mobility of the privileged through air travel that has contributed to spreading the coronavirus and ecological destruction. Re-thinking the politics of mobility in the context of the pandemic must be part of the process of transformation towards a more just and sustainable world.

### **Covid-19 and the transformation of the geographies of borders and (im)mobility**

If the term “pandemic” etymologically refers to a disease affecting “*all people*”,<sup>6</sup> it quickly became clear that despite the new coronavirus spreading globally it would not affect us all in the same way. On the contrary, this paper shows that state policies deployed in response to the pandemic have exacerbated existing social boundaries, inequalities and conflicts, but also partly reconfigured them. In the process, these policies have exposed the different segments that compose our societies to differential forms and levels of vulnerability.<sup>7</sup> This is true of the policies of confinement applied by states across the scales of cities and regions within their territories, as well as limitations on international travel imposed at their borders through which they have sought to confine their countries as a whole. The term “confinement”, with its etymology linked to *confines*, an older term for borders at present rarely used in English but

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<sup>6</sup> See <https://www.etymonline.com/word/pandemic>

<sup>7</sup> Balibar, Etienne. 2020. “Nous ne sommes égaux ni devant le risque ni devant les mesures prises pour le conjurer”. *Le Monde*, 22 April 2020. [https://www.lemonde.fr/livres/article/2020/04/22/etienne-balibar-l-histoire-ne-continuera-pas-comme-avant\\_6037435\\_3260.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/livres/article/2020/04/22/etienne-balibar-l-histoire-ne-continuera-pas-comme-avant_6037435_3260.html) ; Fassin, Didier. 2020. “L’illusion dangereuse de l’égalité devant l’épidémie”, *Collège de France*, 16 April 2020. [https://www.college-de-france.fr/site/didier-fassin/L-illusion-dangereuse-de-legalite-devant-lepidemie.htm?fbclid=IwAR3-84sk57NPwre8RNFeSPxWBSgasvPnd69JcfoQ74pHAbl\\_lhRaeFz-zx0](https://www.college-de-france.fr/site/didier-fassin/L-illusion-dangereuse-de-legalite-devant-lepidemie.htm?fbclid=IwAR3-84sk57NPwre8RNFeSPxWBSgasvPnd69JcfoQ74pHAbl_lhRaeFz-zx0)

common in most Latin languages, suggests a connection between these internal and external policies, which hinge on imposing new *limits* to human sociality and mobility.<sup>8</sup>

Throughout history, human mobility has repeatedly been singled out as a major factor in the spreading of infectious diseases. Historians show us that the plague or cholera epidemics spread along sinuous paths, through the movement of armies, traders, pilgrims, and then proliferated within Europe as a result of overcrowded cities and work places as well as lack of sanitation.<sup>9</sup> The global spread of the new coronavirus has been enabled today by a dense network of mobility infrastructures, in particular of global air travel. As in the past however, it is also *particular* mobile subjects – racialized, classed, gendered – that have been targeted by popular resentment and state sanctions alike.<sup>10</sup> In early March 2020, after Hungary detected nine cases of infection among Iranians (mostly university scholarship-holders), Hungary's Prime Minister Viktor Orban declared, “Our experience is that primarily foreigners brought in the disease, and that it is spreading among foreigners”. He was quick to seize upon these cases to conflate the declared “war on the pandemic” with the war on migration he and other European states have been waging for years, stating: “We are fighting a two-front war, one front is called migration, and the other one belongs to the coronavirus, there is a logical connection between the two, as both spread with movement”.<sup>11</sup> Orban’s statement exemplifies the articulation of the containment of an invasive pathogen, with the containment of certain kinds of “invasive” people.<sup>12</sup> While the simple equation (racialised) migration = virus is absurd, it would be just as absurd to deny the impact of human mobility across different scales (including that of migrants) on the spread of the virus. After all, as one epidemiologist put it: “it is not the virus that moves, but people”.<sup>13</sup>

The analysis of epidemiologists suggests that it is less the insecure movement of illegalised migrants that contributed to the global spread of the virus than the mobility of privileged travellers – those with the right passport and the right amount of cash – jetting across global transport hubs for business and tourism.<sup>14</sup> Human movement in and of itself does *not* spread the virus as long as long as it does not

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<sup>8</sup> [https://www.etymonline.com/word/confine?ref=etymonline\\_crossreference](https://www.etymonline.com/word/confine?ref=etymonline_crossreference)

<sup>9</sup> Huber, Valeska. 2006. “The Unification of the Globe by Disease? The International Sanitary Conferences on Cholera, 1851–1894”. *The Historical Journal*, 49(02): 453 – 476. See also Morse, Stephen S. 2001. “Factors in the Emergence of Infectious Diseases”, in Andrew T. Price-Smith (ed.) *Plagues and Politics: Infectious Disease and International Policy*. Palgrave MacMillan.

<sup>10</sup> Amnesty International. 2020. “Policing the Pandemic - Human rights violations in the enforcement of COVID-19 measures in Europe”. *Amnesty International*, 24 June 2020.

<sup>11</sup> AFP. 2020. “Hungary's Orban blames foreigners, migration for coronavirus spread”. *France 24*, 13 March 2020.

<https://www.france24.com/en/20200313-hungary-s-pm-orban-blames-foreign-students-migration-for-coronavirus-spread>

<sup>12</sup> Ticktin, Miriam. 2017. “Invasive Others: Toward a Contaminated World”. *Social Research: An International Quarterly*, Volume 84, Number 1.

<sup>13</sup> Pittet, Didier. 2020. “Didier Didier Pittet insiste vraiment: Ce n'est pas le virus qui circule mais les gens”. *Le Temps*, 19 March 2020.

<https://www.letemps.ch/societe/didier-pittet-insiste-vraiment-nest-virus-circule-gens>

<sup>14</sup> Rony Brauman, 2020. “On a cru pouvoir éradiquer les maladies infectieuses mais c'était une chimère”. *Le Temps*, 24 March 2020.

<https://www.letemps.ch/monde/rony-brauman-on-cru-pouvoir-eradiquer-maladies-infectieuses-cetait-une-chimere>

involve close proximity and contact in confined spaces with people who may be infected. However, the collective transport infrastructures that organise our mobility at present such as buses, metros, trains, and aircrafts have been shaped by the imperative of carrying the highest number of people in the smallest possible space. This makes it very difficult for travellers to avoid physical proximity in the course of their mobility, which is conducive to spreading the virus. In addition, mobility infrastructures often converge in hubs that concentrate people in confined space before their paths branch off again. Linka and his colleagues demonstrate that after being brought to several European countries from China, “the novel coronavirus spread rapidly via the strongest network connections to Germany, Spain, and France, while slowly reaching the less connected countries, Estonia, Slovakia, and Slovenia. Although air travel is certainly not the only determinant of the outbreak dynamics, our findings indicate that *mobility is a strong contributor to the global spreading of COVID-19*”.<sup>15</sup> While high connectivity has long been a marker of power and privilege within a highly uneven world order, it had now become a source of increased vulnerability.<sup>16</sup>

While the first cases of Covid-19 in Europe were detected in early January 2020,<sup>17</sup> most states only implemented widespread confinement measures within and at the borders of their countries in mid-March.<sup>18</sup> The virus was thus allowed to spread at great speed across the EU, overwhelming national health systems - particularly where these had been diminished by years of imposition of neoliberal management logics and cuts to their budgets.<sup>19</sup> On March 13, the WHO declared Europe “the epicentre” of the coronavirus pandemic with more reported cases and deaths than the rest of the world combined. After failing to offer early and united responses within and beyond Europe, EU states scrambled late and national(ist) ones. As Josef Borocz summarises, “each member state turned inward, in almost complete unison”. Europe was “carved up into twenty-seven “national” fortresses, ostensibly to “flatten” the *national* curves of coronavirus infections”.<sup>20</sup> Lockdown policies involving varying degrees of constraint confined most people in Europe to their homes, a space, which, while representing an imaginary of security for some, is highly problematic for other segments of our societies – such as the

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<sup>15</sup> Linka, Kevin, Mathias Peirlinck, Francisco Sahli Costabal and Ellen Kuhl. 2020. “Outbreak dynamics of COVID-19 in Europe and the effect of travel restrictions”. *Computer Methods in Biomechanics and Biomedical Engineering*. May 2020.

<sup>16</sup> Amilhat Szary, Anne-Laure. 2020. “Les confinés, ce sont les plus mobiles!” *Libération*, 27 April 2020. [https://www.liberation.fr/debats/2020/04/27/les-confines-ce-sont-les-plus-mobiles\\_1786544](https://www.liberation.fr/debats/2020/04/27/les-confines-ce-sont-les-plus-mobiles_1786544)

<sup>17</sup> Spiteri, Gianfranco et al. 2020. “First cases of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) in the WHO European Region, 24 January to 21 February 2020”. *Euro Surveill.* 25(9).

<sup>18</sup> For an extensive data set on travel restrictions and border control, see <sup>18</sup> For an extensive data set on travel restrictions and border control, see <https://nccr-onthemove.ch/news-covid-19-and-mobility/migration-and-mobility-in-a-pandemic/>

<sup>19</sup> For Italy see Celata, Filippo. 2020. “Cartographie d’un désastre: la santé publique en Italie face au coronavirus”. *Visions Cartographiques*. 7 April 2020. <https://visionscarto.net/hopital-et-coronavirus-en-italie>; Wallace, Rob, Alex Liebman, Luis Fernando Chaves and Rodrick Wallace. 2020. “COVID-19 and Circuits of Capital”. *Monthly Review*, 27 March 2020. <https://monthlyreview.org/2020/05/01/covid-19-and-circuits-of-capital/>

<sup>20</sup> Borocz, Jozsef. 2020. “Could a Global Pandemic Defeat the Rule of European Difference?” *Criticatoc*, June 8, 2020. <https://www.criticatoc.ro/leftcast/could-a-global-pandemic-defeat-the-rule-of-european-difference/>

homeless, or women for whom the home represents a space of domestic violence.<sup>21</sup> The little movement we have been able to exercise within our cities has been channelled by lines of bright colours that have proliferated, on the floor in shops for example in the name of ‘physical distancing’. New lines of control have also proliferated at the extremities of states, as one after the other they sealed their national borders<sup>22</sup> – and this despite WHO advice not to do so.<sup>23</sup> On March 16, 2020, the European Union as a whole announced the closure of all its external borders to non-citizens, confining the continent itself.<sup>24</sup> In Europe as across the world, these drastic lockdown measures “immediately affected the side of production and circulation of goods and services”, triggering an economic crisis of a scale comparable to (and in some sectors more severe than) the 2007-9 financial crisis, which will continue to have dire repercussions for the foreseeable future.<sup>25</sup>

On March 26, the EU celebrated a bleak 25th anniversary of the Schengen Agreement that guarantees unrestricted movement for EU citizens between member states while all external and most internal borders of the EU closed. By then, the average passenger air travel in Europe had been cut in half. The month of April saw continued drastic reduction in global travel both to and from the EU, with according to Eurocontrol an overall reduction of 91% in the number of flights.<sup>26</sup> In short, as Frontex, the European border agency summarizes, what has ensued within the EU “goes well beyond the reintroduction of border controls within the Schengen area. Rather it constitutes a *closing down of the borders* to whole groups of travellers, in some cases even Union citizens”.<sup>27</sup> If the denial of the right to move faced by most citizens of the global south has long been at odds with the privileged right and access to international mobility of citizens of the global north, in the wake of new coronavirus pandemic, restrictions on movement have been generalised. EU citizens in particular, who normally benefit from the freedom to move within the EU and face few restrictions in their travel across the globe, have been getting a taste of the *unfreedom* experienced by those at the bottom of the global mobility hierarchy.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Bagnato, Andrea. 2020. “Staying at Home”. *E-Flux*. <https://www.e-flux.com/architecture/at-the-border/329404/staying-at-home/>

<sup>22</sup> Italy had introduced a national lockdown on March 9; Germany had implemented school and border closures starting March 13; Spain followed on March 14; and France on March 16. For an extensive data set on travel restrictions and border control, see <https://nccr-onthemove.ch/news-covid-19-and-mobility/migration-and-mobility-in-a-pandemic/>

<sup>23</sup> WHO. 2020. “Updated WHO recommendations for international traffic in relation to COVID-19 outbreak”. 29 February 2020.

<https://www.who.int/news-room/articles-detail/updated-who-recommendations-for-international-traffic-in-relation-to-covid-19-outbreak>

<sup>24</sup> European Commission. 2020. “COVID-19: Temporary Restriction on Non-Essential Travel to the EU”. 16 March 2020. 16 March 2020.

<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:52020DC0115&from=EN>

<sup>25</sup> Lapavitsas, Costas, Lluís Torrens, Sergi Cutillas, Pablo Cotarelo. 2020. “Confronting the Coronavirus Crisis: A case for a Pandemic Basic Income with evidence from Spain”. *Brave New Europe*, 11 June 2020. <https://braveneweuropa.com/costas-lapavitsas-lluis-torrens-sergi-cutillas-pablo-cotarelo-confronting-the-coronavirus-crisis-a-case-for-a-pandemic-basic-income-with-evidence-from-spain>

<sup>26</sup> European Commission. 2020. “On the second assessment of the application of the temporary restriction on non-essential travel to the EU”. 8 May 2020. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:52020DC0222&from=EN>

<sup>27</sup> Frontex. 2020. “Risk Analysis for 2020”. March 2020. <https://frontex.europa.eu/publications/frontex-releases-risk-analysis-for-2020-070727>

<sup>28</sup> Ben Lazreg, Houssein and Wael Garnaoui. 2020. “The Passport Paradox and the Advent of Immobility Justice”. *Resetdoc*, 8 June 2020.

[https://www.resetdoc.org/story/the-passport-paradox-and-the-advent-of-immobility-justice/?fbclid=IwAR2yMRBaAgQ\\_uw-2nHQKsLSI7ORnCPraZNPdutKMj7jwy7IR\\_WxbIQR5S2M](https://www.resetdoc.org/story/the-passport-paradox-and-the-advent-of-immobility-justice/?fbclid=IwAR2yMRBaAgQ_uw-2nHQKsLSI7ORnCPraZNPdutKMj7jwy7IR_WxbIQR5S2M)

If the relation between global mobility and the spreading of the virus is recognised, the closing of borders to prevent the spreading of a pandemic is a highly contested measure among epidemiologists.<sup>29</sup> The WHO has advised against travel restrictions with the exception of very specific circumstances,<sup>30</sup> and Meier and his colleagues have argued that these violate international law.<sup>31</sup> Generally, limitations on travel are considered a double-edged sword that should be wielded carefully by weighing positive and negative effects, and always as part of a broader range of measures.<sup>32</sup> Crucially, the consensus among experts that the EU agencies such as the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) and Frontex acknowledge, is that drastic lockdown of borders can only be effective if they are implemented *early on, before* a virus has been introduced into the population. This means that while the swift closing of borders across the African continent appears to have contributed to delaying the initial spread of the virus,<sup>33</sup> because in Europe these measures were introduced *after* the continent had become the epicentre of the pandemic, they had limited effect.<sup>34</sup> Border closures in Europe and elsewhere have mostly served a *performative* function, allowing states to demonstrate their resolve through the spectacular exercise of their sovereign power, even as the spread of the virus demonstrated their weaknesses and failures at so many other levels.<sup>35</sup>

While the closing of borders thus appears to have had limited effects in terms of slowing the spread of the pandemic across Europe, these measures did have dramatic effects on the lives of illegalised migrants. While the privileged classes who have benefited the most from global mobility could protect themselves by staying immobile within the confines of their homes, this was not a luxury that illegalised migrants seeking to reach the EU could afford. While the EU Commission's statement on the application of "temporary travel restrictions" contained a limited number of exceptions, including concerning "persons in need of international protection or for other humanitarian reasons", these have not been used to

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<sup>29</sup> These debates have emerged in relation to past epidemics as well. See Flahault, Antoine. 1990. "HIV and travel, no rationale for restrictions". *The Lancet* 336(8724):1197-8.

<sup>30</sup> WHO. 2020. "Updated WHO recommendations for international traffic in relation to COVID-19 outbreak". 29 February 2020.

<https://www.who.int/news-room/articles-detail/updated-who-recommendations-for-international-traffic-in-relation-to-covid-19-outbreak>

<sup>31</sup> Meier, Benjamin Mason, Roojin Habibi, Tony Y. Yang. 2020. "Travel restrictions violate international law". *Science*, 367(6485):1436.

<sup>32</sup> Chinazzi, Matteo et al. 2020. "The effect of travel restrictions on the spread of the 2019 novel coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak". *Science* 368: 395–400.

<sup>33</sup> Petit, Véronique and Nelly Robin. 2020. "Covid-19 et migrations en Afrique: la réduction des mobilités, une riposte efficace?" *The Conversation*, 31 May 2020. <https://theconversation.com/covid-19-et-migrations-en-afrique-la-reduction-des-mobilites-une-riposte-efficace-139283>

<sup>34</sup> Kevin Linka, Mathias Peirlinck, Francisco Sahli Costabal & Ellen Kuhl (2020): Outbreak dynamics of COVID-19 in Europe and the effect of travel restrictions, *Computer Methods in Biomechanics and Biomedical Engineering*.

<sup>35</sup> Brown, Wendy. 2020. "A Worldwide Mutual Pact". *The Drift*, 24 June 2020. [https://thedriftmag.com/a-worldwide-mutual-pact/?fbclid=IwAR10dOJEYKj34hvGTk4m0bGQjZtWaAADQqX-n\\_DoMDvylDnF9IEcjEjHy3o](https://thedriftmag.com/a-worldwide-mutual-pact/?fbclid=IwAR10dOJEYKj34hvGTk4m0bGQjZtWaAADQqX-n_DoMDvylDnF9IEcjEjHy3o)



keep pathways open.<sup>36</sup> Instead, several EU states seized upon the occasion of the “war against the virus” to legitimize and intensify the war against migrants they had been waging for years.<sup>37</sup> The violence migrants are subjected to at and through borders has intensified across the internal borders of the EU – such as between France and Italy<sup>38</sup> - as well as its external land borders and along the Balkan routes<sup>39</sup> where migrants face conditions of extreme precarity amplified by the virus<sup>40</sup>.

It is fair to say that in few places has border violence been exacerbated to such an extent as along the Mediterranean frontier, the area that has been the focus of my research within the Forensic Oceanography project over the last 10 years,<sup>41</sup> and where border violence has long been endemic. Across this fault-line of the world system, profound inequality and racialised difference overlap. The movements of the people of the global south across the sea violently clash with bordering operations deployed since the early 90s by European states to impose their restrictive migration policies. While the EU’s visa policies are usually couched in neutral technical language, these policies use the category of citizenship to allocate differentially the right to move to populations of the global north and south.<sup>42</sup> The geography of inclusion and exclusion that emerges as a result in effects maps onto a global geography of race and class. As such, Etienne Balibar has long written of a “global apartheid”, referring to the South African regime to underline the logic of *separation* at work on a *global scale*, which in turn shapes enduring inequalities of status and conditions *within* societies.<sup>43</sup> Populations of the global south are however not the passive recipients of this regime of differential (im)mobility. It is contested by migrants who seize their freedom to move despite state policies that deny them their rights. It is the very contestation of global apartheid by migrants that leads to an enduring “mobility conflict” that crystallizes most starkly along particular border zones, such as the Mediterranean.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> European Commission. 2020. “COVID-19: Temporary Restriction on Non-Essential Travel to the EU”. 16 March 2020. 16 March 2020. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:52020DC0115&from=EN>

<sup>37</sup> Migreurop, “From the « war against the virus » to the war against exiles: security responses to Covid-19 exacerbate violence at borders”, *Migreurop*, 2 April 2020. <http://www.migreurop.org/article2974.html?lang=en>

<sup>38</sup> Rosini, Gianni. 2020. “Malgré le coronavirus, la France continue de refouler les migrants à Vintimille”. *Courrier International*, 22 March 2020. <https://www.courrierinternational.com/article/vu-ditalie-malgre-le-coronavirus-la-france-continue-de-refouler-les-migrants-vintimille?fbclid=IwAR0MRzOKeptoaa3tLDfJAGe4lZJdjhCkQ1gvnGG6myq9NkH18rrUJLaC8Y>

<sup>39</sup> Le Courrier des Balkans. 2020. “Réfugiés: la haine se réveille tout au long de la route des Balkans”. *Le Courrier des Balkans*, 22 March 2020. <https://www.courrierdesbalkans.fr/Refugies-la-haine-se-reveille-tout-au-long-de-la-route-des-Balkans>

<sup>40</sup> Brauman, Rony. 2020. “Le coronavirus rappelle que, sans Etat, les plus vulnérables sont écrasés”. *Heidi News*, 8 March 2020. <https://www.heidi.news/articles/rony-brauman-le-coronavirus-rappelle-que-sans-etat-les-plus-vulnerables-sont-ecrases>

<sup>41</sup> <https://forensic-architecture.org/category/forensic-oceanography>

<sup>42</sup> See the Global Passport Power Rank: <https://www.passportindex.org/byRank.php?f=>

<sup>43</sup> Balibar, Etienne. 2004. *We, the People of Europe? Reflections on Transnational Citizenship*. Princeton: University Press. Many other scholars have developed the global apartheid analysis since, including Van Houtum, Henk. 2010. “Human blacklisting: the global apartheid of the EU’s external border regime.” *Environment and Planning D, Society and Space* 28: 957-976 and more recently Hage, Ghassan. 2016. “Etat de siège: A dying domesticating colonialism?” *American Ethnologist*, Vol. 43, No. 1, pp. 38–49.

<sup>44</sup> Heller, Charles and Lorenzo Pezzani. 2018. “The Mediterranean Mobility Conflict: Violence and anti-Violence at the Borders of Europe”. *Humanity Journal Blog*. <http://humanityjournal.org/blog/heller-and-pezzani/>

While European states and agencies have deployed militarized means of border control to police the movements of illegalized migrants from the global south across the sea, it is generally not the bullets of border guards that inflict harm onto their bodies. Rather policies that illegalise migrants' journeys force them to resort to smugglers and embark on overcrowded and unseaworthy vessels. While this leads to frequent situations of distress at sea, the reluctance of European states to rescue migrants results in them frequently being abandoned to the winds and currents. At work across the maritime frontier then is predominantly a form of *indirect violence* that kills without EU states directly touching migrants' bodies. Instead, this violence is inflicted by policies and operations that turn the sea into a hostile environment for migrants: more than 40,000 deaths have been documented at the EU's borders over the last 30 years, the majority from drowning.<sup>45</sup> At the *external edges* of its compartments, the global mobility apartheid then structurally leads to the "premature death" for classed and racialised migrants,<sup>46</sup> who, like the racialised victims of police violence *within* states, can't breathe.

The mechanisms operating this form of indirect violence at and through the sea have mutated over the last months. In the eastern Mediterranean, after a peak of border violence in early March this year following the temporary collapse of EU-Turkey collaboration, the Greek coast guard has been using a new tactic of calculated abandonment by forcing migrants into rescue rafts in the aim of pushing them back to Turkey.<sup>47</sup> In the central Mediterranean, over the last three months migrants attempting the crossing have not been able to count on the presence of rescue NGOs, which were forced to stop their activities.<sup>48</sup> Italy and Malta, followed by Libya, declared their ports unsafe in light of the pandemic and retracted themselves from the organisation of rescue activities. This has led to an escalation in the politics of abandonment as well as the brazen organisation of privatized pushback operations to Libya with the help of merchant or fishing vessels.<sup>49</sup> As a result of this practice that violates the principle of non-refoulement, migrants have continued to be brought back to the "hell" that Libya represents for them. Those who have succeeded in reaching the shores of Italy and Malta have been quarantined for

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<sup>45</sup> See United for Intercultural Action's List of deaths: [www.unitedagainstracism.org/pdfs/listofdeaths.pdf](http://www.unitedagainstracism.org/pdfs/listofdeaths.pdf)

<sup>46</sup> Ruth Gilmore Wilson defines racism as "the state-sanctioned or extralegal production and exploitation of group-differentiated vulnerability to premature death". Gilmore, Ruth Wilson. 2007. *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

<sup>47</sup> Keady-Tabbal, Niamh and Itamar Mann. 2020. "Tents at Sea: How Greek Officials Use Rescue Equipment for Illegal Deportations". *Just Security*, 22 May 2020. <https://www.justsecurity.org/70309/tents-at-sea-how-greek-officials-use-rescue-equipment-for-illegal-deportations/>

<sup>48</sup> Ziniti, Alessandra. 2020. "Coronavirus, le Ong fermano le missioni di salvataggio in mare. Migranti senza più soccorsi". *La Repubblica*, 18 March 2020. [https://www.repubblica.it/cronaca/2020/03/18/news/coronavirus\\_le\\_ong\\_fermano\\_le\\_missioni\\_di\\_salvataggio\\_in\\_mare\\_migranti\\_senza\\_piu\\_soccorsi-251590974/](https://www.repubblica.it/cronaca/2020/03/18/news/coronavirus_le_ong_fermano_le_missioni_di_salvataggio_in_mare_migranti_senza_piu_soccorsi-251590974/)

<sup>49</sup> Alarm Phone. 2020. "Twelve Deaths and a Secret Push-Back to Libya". 16 April 2020. <https://alarmphone.org/en/2020/04/16/twelve-deaths-and-a-secret-push-back-to-libya/>

weeks on ferries used as floating detention centres.<sup>50</sup> Conditions of detention reserved to migrants here and elsewhere across Europe do not respect migrants' dignity and rights in general, and their right to protect their health from the virus in particular. While European States have demanded their citizens protect themselves and others by confining themselves to their homes, the forced confinement of migrants in secluded and overcrowded camps knowingly exposes them to a serious and imminent risk of contamination.<sup>51</sup>

Illegalized migrants have thus been facing increased violence, denial of their rights and risk to their lives within and at the borders of Europe as a result of policies deployed in the name of slowing the spread of the virus. Violence against migrants and racialised populations – starting with Asian-looking populations – proliferated as fast as the coronavirus pandemic, across Europe and much of the rest of the world.<sup>52</sup> In Europe, this exclusionary violence was peaking at the very same time as migrants and racialised segments of the population were contributing an important share of the precarious but “essential” work that could not be interrupted – or which the state and employers refused to. This has been particularly true of the health sector: in OECD countries, 16% of nurses and 24% of doctors are born abroad.<sup>53</sup> As a result, migrants and racialised populations (and among them women, who for example make up almost 70% of the health care workforce),<sup>54</sup> have been made more vulnerable to the virus,<sup>55</sup> while at the same time being excessively targeted by what Didier Fassin calls the “sanitary police” deployed to enforce the lockdown measures.<sup>56</sup> As Ruth Gilmore Wilson has noted this differential vulnerability in the face of the virus, along the lines of class, gender and so glaringly race, have laid the ground for the global uprising

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<sup>50</sup> ASGI. 2020. “Rights in route. The “quarantine ships” between risks and criticisms”. *Inlimine*, 17 June 2020. <https://inlimine.asgi.it/rights-in-route-the-quarantine-ships-between-risks-and-criticisms/>; Azzopardi, Karl. 2020. “From overcrowded facilities to floating prisons, Malta’s current struggle with migration”. *The Independent*, 14 June 2020. <https://www.independent.com.mt/articles/2020-06-14/local-news/From-overcrowded-facilities-to-floating-prisons-Malta-s-current-struggle-with-migration-6736224156>

<sup>51</sup> Médecins sans frontières. 2020. “COVID-19: Evacuation of squalid Greek camps more urgent than ever in light of coronavirus pandemic”. 13 March 2020. <https://www.msf.org.uk/article/covid-19-bbc-panorama-investigates-squalid-greek-refugee-camps-risking-virus-outbreak>

<sup>52</sup> Alan Gamlen, 2020. “Migration and Mobility after the 2020 Pandemic: The End of an Age?” COMPAS Working Paper No. 146. University of Oxford. <https://www.compas.ox.ac.uk/2020/migration-and-mobility-after-the-2020-pandemic-the-end-of-an-age-2/>

<sup>53</sup> Scarpetta, Stefano, Jean-Christophe Dumont, Karolina Socha-Dietrich. 2020. “Contribution of migrant doctors and nurses to tackling COVID-19 crisis in OECD countries”. *OECD brief*, 13 May 2020. <http://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/contribution-of-migrant-doctors-and-nurses-to-tackling-covid-19-crisis-in-oecd-countries-2f7bace2/>

<sup>54</sup> OECD. 2020. “Women at the core of the fight against COVID-19 crisis”. *OECD brief*, 1 April 2020. <https://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/women-at-the-core-of-the-fight-against-covid-19-crisis-553a8269/#blocknotes-d7e2908>

<sup>55</sup> Similarly, to what has been observed in the US, in the UK, one of the few European countries that considers “ethnicity” within its public statistics, found that “death rates from COVID-19 were higher for Black and Asian ethnic groups when compared to White ethnic groups”. Public Health England, 2020. “Disparities in the risk and outcomes of COVID-19”. *Public Health England*, June 2020. [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/889195/disparities\\_review.pdf?fbclid=IwAR1uTq-JRQpu4iAUT-iFP73KslXTuF1XdFa9MstxJM5fToVe115ayhECKs](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/889195/disparities_review.pdf?fbclid=IwAR1uTq-JRQpu4iAUT-iFP73KslXTuF1XdFa9MstxJM5fToVe115ayhECKs)

<sup>56</sup> Fassin, Didier. 2020. “L’illusion dangereuse de l’égalité devant l’épidémie”, *Collège de France*, 16 April 2020. [https://www.college-de-france.fr/site/didier-fassin/L-illusion-dangereuse-de-legalite-devant-lepidemie.htm?fbclid=IwAR3-84sk57NPwre8RNFesPxBWBSgasvPnd69JcfoQ74pHAbl\\_lhRaeFx-zx0](https://www.college-de-france.fr/site/didier-fassin/L-illusion-dangereuse-de-legalite-devant-lepidemie.htm?fbclid=IwAR3-84sk57NPwre8RNFesPxBWBSgasvPnd69JcfoQ74pHAbl_lhRaeFx-zx0). In its recent report, Amnesty International concluded, “police enforcing COVID-19 lockdowns across Europe have disproportionately targeted ethnic minority and marginalized groups with violence, discriminatory identity checks, forced quarantines and fines”. Amnesty International. 2020. “Policing the Pandemic - Human rights violations in the enforcement of COVID-19 measures in Europe”. *Amnesty International*, 24 June 2020. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2020/06/europe-covid-19-lockdowns-expose-racial-bias-and-discrimination-within-police/>

against anti-Black racism that we are witnessing as I write.<sup>57</sup> However, just as state borders were being sealed and social boundaries within societies hardened, channels of labour recruitment were being opened by states in a hurry. The precaritized migrant labour already present within EU countries was apparently not sufficient for certain sectors of the economy to keep on running – such as agriculture. Flights were specifically chartered to carry seasonal workers from Eastern Europe to work in Germany's all-important asparagus harvest,<sup>58</sup> without the slightest care for their protection either during the travel or during their labour, which led to cases of infection and death amongst the recruited workers.<sup>59</sup> Just as in the management of the 19<sup>th</sup> century cholera outbreak analysed by historian Valeska Huber,<sup>60</sup> borders in the time of the new coronavirus have operated as “semipermeable membranes”, selectively blocking and channelling mobilities. In the process, we are seeing simultaneously the reproduction and the transformation of profoundly racialised and classed geographies of inclusion/exclusion.

This variegated geography of inclusion/exclusion is apparent as well in the current “reopening” of the EU's borders. While the process is meant to be organised by the logic of bringing together states with “similar overall risk profiles”,<sup>61</sup> EU member states are lifting travel restrictions within complicated geographies and at variegated pace, reflecting the same lack of coordination the closing of borders had three months ago.<sup>62</sup> The initial announcements of the re-opening of Western European states between themselves – at the exclusion of Italy and Spain for example – could appear to replicate the intra-European core-periphery geography, which we have seen at work with regard to austerity policies for example. However, this enduring European hierarchy is also troubled by instances such as Greece, which, in its reopening, offered privileged access to Eastern European countries with low rates of infection rather than to travellers from Western European airports deemed “high risk”.<sup>63</sup> Recently, the EU defined a list of non-EU countries from which citizens should be able to travel again to the EU, which

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<sup>57</sup> Ruth Wilson Gilmore in conversation with Paul Gilroy, *UCL Sarah Parker Remond Centre for the Study of Racism and Racialisation*, 7 June 2020. <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/racism-racialisation/transcript-conversation-ruth-wilson-gilmore>

<sup>58</sup> Borocz, Jozsef. 2020. “Could a Global Pandemic Defeat the Rule of European Difference?” *Criticatoc*, June 8, 2020. <https://www.criticatoc.ro/lefeast/could-a-global-pandemic-defeat-the-rule-of-european-difference/>

<sup>59</sup> On 22 April 2020, *Der Spiegel* reported the death of Nicolae Bahan, a Romanian farm worker employed in an asparagus harvest in Bad Krozingen, Germany. See: Klawitter, Nils and Keno Verseck. 2020. “Ein Leben für den Spargel.” *Der Spiegel*, 22 April 2020. <https://www.spiegel.de/wirtschaft/bad-krozingen-tod-eines-spargel-helfers-mit-corona-ein-leben-fuer-den-spargel-a-ff21540c-8fa9-429d-b69d-0a54cc5c3462>

<sup>60</sup> Huber, Valeska. 2006. “The Unification of the Globe by Disease? The International Sanitary Conferences on Cholera, 1851–1894”. *The Historical Journal*, 49(02): 453 – 476.

<sup>61</sup> Graham-Harrison, Emma and Helena Smith. (2020). “What is the future for travel and migration in age of Covid-19?” *The Guardian*, May 12. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/may/12/what-is-the-future-for-travel-and-immigration-in-age-of-covid-19>

<sup>62</sup> For a timeline of these reopening measures, see <https://www.schengenvisainfo.com/news/timeline-of-eu-member-states-reopening-their-borders/>. For a useful summary see Euronews, “Which European countries have opened their borders ahead of the summer holiday season?” *Euronews*, 21 June 2020, <https://www.euronews.com/2020/06/15/which-european-countries-have-opened-their-borders-ahead-of-the-summer-holiday-season>

<sup>63</sup> Berger, Miriam. 2020. “The coronavirus is reshaping an old hierarchy: Who can travel where”. *The Washington Post*, 6 June 2020. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2020/06/06/coronavirus-passports-travel-borders/>

excludes the all-powerful USA because of the country's rising infection rate.<sup>64</sup> The matrix of categories of race, class and citizenship that durably structures the global mobility regime is thus being complicated by a new criterion: a country's rate of Covid-19 infection. Sanitised "travel corridors" or "travel bubbles" allowing for smooth mobility for those who are labelled "Covid free" are emerging in Europe and across the world.<sup>65</sup> The term "bubble" that is being used is intriguing, since as Huub Dijstelbloem and William Walters have noted, it does not designate "fixed or permanent enclosures", but rather temporary, adaptable and fragile spheres.<sup>66</sup> Transport bubbles will expand and retract as a function of changing rates of infection and diplomatic bargaining. They may also burst without notice. The bubble metaphor may conjure harmless childhood memories, but travel bubbles will be predicated on the hardening of sanitary policing and exclusion around them.

In short, the new coronavirus pandemic has complicated the geographies of inclusion/exclusion: the global apartheid which uses citizenship and visa restrictions to police the differential access to mobility founded on race and class, is now being supplemented by a fluctuating "sanitary apartheid", the mobile borders of which are beginning to emerge as states ease their internal and external lockdown measures. In some instances, the old and new logics of inclusion/exclusion overlap and reinforce each other – as when Greece opens up to (some) summer tourists but keeps migrants sealed off in overcrowded camps and pushes back those who seek to reach its shores.<sup>67</sup> In others, the pandemic introduces a disjuncture, or even temporary reversals – as when African states introduced travel restrictions to travellers coming from Europe, and Moroccans began crossing the sea illegally but this time in the opposite direction.<sup>68</sup>

Today, as the EU selectively reopens its internal and external borders, it is maintaining its external borders violently closed to the majority of the citizens of the global south whose mobility is illegalised. Those who wish for a more just and sustainable world to emerge in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic should refuse this return to an unjust and murderous "normality". As so many scholars and activists concerning different issues, I believe we should seize this moment to envision anew the world we wish to live in. While the demand for a regime founded on the *equal right of all* to exercise their

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<sup>64</sup> Boffey, Daniel. 2020. "US visitors set to remain banned from entering EU". *The Guardian*, 29 June 2020.

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/jun/29/us-visitors-set-to-remain-banned-from-entering-eu>

<sup>65</sup> Gamlen, Alan. 2020. "Migration and Mobility after the 2020 Pandemic: The End of an Age?" *COMPAS Working Paper* No. 146. University of Oxford. <https://www.compas.ox.ac.uk/2020/migration-and-mobility-after-the-2020-pandemic-the-end-of-an-age-2/>

<sup>66</sup> Dijstelbloem, Huub and William Walters. 2019. "Atmospheric Border Politics: The Morphology of Migration and Solidarity Practices in Europe". *Geopolitics*. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/14650045.2019.1577826>

<sup>67</sup> Fallon, Katy. 2020. "Greece ready to welcome tourists as refugees stay locked down in Lesbos". *The Guardian*, 27 May 2020.

<https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2020/may/27/greece-ready-to-welcome-tourists-as-refugees-stay-locked-down-in-lesbos-coronavirus>

<sup>68</sup> Ben Lazreg, Houssein and Wael Garnaoui. 2020. "The Passport Paradox and the Advent of Immobility Justice". *Resetdoc*, 8 June 2020.

[https://www.resetdoc.org/story/the-passport-paradox-and-the-advent-of-immobility-justice/?fbclid=IwAR2yMRBaAgQ\\_uw-2nHQKsLS7ORnCPraZNpDutKMj7jwy7IR\\_WxbIQR5S2M](https://www.resetdoc.org/story/the-passport-paradox-and-the-advent-of-immobility-justice/?fbclid=IwAR2yMRBaAgQ_uw-2nHQKsLS7ORnCPraZNpDutKMj7jwy7IR_WxbIQR5S2M)

freedom to move was already a minoritarian position, the current association of “foreigners” with the fear of contagion and the deployment of police measures in the name of protecting life, makes it even more difficult to defend. Yet I believe there is no more urgent time to re-open and re-articulate this perspective than at the time when the global mobility apartheid is mutating and when migrants face new risks associated with the pandemic that urgently demand our response.

### **The politics of freedom of movement in the time of the pandemic**

Activists and researchers alike have long argued that state policies aiming to deny migrants from the global south the right to move across borders are unjust and ultimately fail precaritising migrants’ lives and generating profound political crises.<sup>69</sup> As I have argued elsewhere,<sup>70</sup> European citizens and policy makers alike must realise that in an interconnected world marked by sharp inequalities and crises of all sorts, the question is not whether migrants will exercise their freedom to cross borders, but at what human and political cost. State policies can only create a legal frame for human movement to unfold and thereby partly organise it; they cannot block it completely. Only a more open policy would allow migration to unfold in a way that threatens neither migrants themselves nor European citizens. With legal access to Europe, migrants would no longer need to resort to smugglers and risk their lives crossing the sea. Since states would no longer police migrants through military means, the border surveillance industry could be defunded, and migration could appear as a normal process that does not generate fear. With such a policy, borders would cease to be a “sign or elements of the impossible” and become more fully, in the words of Edouard Glissant, spaces of “passage and transformation.”<sup>71</sup>

There are many challenging issues that the demand for a policy founded on the freedom to move conjures – starting of course with the fact that it is far from being on the European political agenda. One must also address seriously the ambivalent effects such a policy might lead to on different levels. For example, one of the arguments coming both from the nationalist left and right – and even from some more sympathetic critics such as Etienne Balibar, has been that institutionalising the freedom to move risked ending up realising the neoliberal dream of abundant and disposable labour, threatening the labour

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<sup>69</sup> Pécoud, Antoine and Paul de Guchteneire. 2006. “International Migration, Border Controls and Human Rights: Assessing the Relevance of a Right to Mobility.” *Journal of Borderlands Studies* 21.1: 75-76. Anderson, Bridget, Nandita Sharma, and Cynthia Wright. 2009. “Editorial: Why No Borders?” *Refuge* 26, no. 2.

<sup>70</sup> Heller, Charles. 2018. “For an open migration policy to end the deaths and crises in the Mediterranean”. *Open Democracy*. 28 June 2018. <https://www.opendemocracy.net/can-europe-make-it/charles-heller/for-open-migration-policy-to-end-deaths-and-crises-in-mediterranea>. This is an argument I have also developed collaboratively: Heller, Charles, Lorenzo Pezzani and Maurice Stierl. 2018. “Toward a Politics of Freedom of Movement”. In Reece Jones (ed.), *Open Borders: In Defense of Free Movement*, University of Georgia Press.

<sup>71</sup> Glissant, Edouard. 2006. “Drawing Lines in the Sand”. *Le Monde Diplomatique*, November 2006. <https://mondediplo.com/2006/11/13frontiers>

conditions of more sedentary workers.<sup>72</sup> This critique must be taken seriously, all the more so in the context of a major recession that is already heightening anti-immigrant sentiments.<sup>73</sup> One can respond to it productively by arguing that the equality of rights that legalizing migration fosters is precisely a shield against “social dumping”. Furthermore, the right to move across borders for people must be accompanied with limitations on the movements of capital and the upholding of decent working conditions – which can be imposed by labour solidarity across the migrant/citizen divide.

Today, in the context of the pandemic, we must take seriously another possible negative affect of the (free) movement of people: the risk that it contributes to spreading the virus.<sup>74</sup> Taking this risk seriously is the condition to devise solutions to mitigate it without compromising on migrants’ rights and freedoms. As I have acknowledged above, this risk is very real, as the virus spread across the globe through the movement and contact of people enabled by global transport systems. However, as I have also argued, the drastic closure of EU borders has had limited effects in preventing the spread of the pandemic, while it had dramatic effects on migrants’ lives and beyond that entailed “societal and economic disruption in the EU”.<sup>75</sup> As a result, instead of blanket closure, epidemiologists, including those of the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC), advocate a careful reopening of international travel “allowing people to move within or between countries”.<sup>76</sup> While the current form of collective transport infrastructures that involves the physical proximity of passengers will not allow the reduction of the risk of transmission to zero in the course mobility, the ECDC suggests a number of measures that can be introduced to mitigate it. These start with information to travellers *before* departure about the risks and symptoms of COVID-19. Since risks will remain, one may hope that we will collectively limit our travels to those that are necessary. For those who choose to or must travel, the ECDC recommends the application *during* travel of all the standard measures of physical distancing, hand hygiene and facemasks. Upon *arrival*, passengers may be screened and even quarantined if a risk has been identified.

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<sup>72</sup> Balibar, Etienne. 2004. *We, the People of Europe? Reflections on Transnational Citizenship*. Princeton: University Press. 176.

<sup>73</sup> Gamlen, Alan. 2020. “Migration and Mobility after the 2020 Pandemic: The End of an Age?” *COMPAS Working Paper* No. 146. University of Oxford. <https://www.compas.ox.ac.uk/2020/migration-and-mobility-after-the-2020-pandemic-the-end-of-an-age-2/>

<sup>74</sup> Sandro Mezzadra and Maurice Stierl have offered the first robust argument in this direction, upon which this contribution builds. “What happens to freedom of movement during a pandemic?” *Open Democracy*, 24 March 2020. [https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/can-europe-make-it/what-happens-freedom-movement-during-pandemic/?fbclid=IwAR2MYSd4eIzvcUIGf1i\\_7Vuj-tYfXDe9JTVuOMSArbxxmAhWomszOIp5ec](https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/can-europe-make-it/what-happens-freedom-movement-during-pandemic/?fbclid=IwAR2MYSd4eIzvcUIGf1i_7Vuj-tYfXDe9JTVuOMSArbxxmAhWomszOIp5ec)

<sup>75</sup> European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC). 2020. “Considerations for travel-related measures to reduce spread of COVID-19 in the EU/EEA”. ECDC, 26 May 2020. <https://www.ecdc.europa.eu/en/publications-data/considerations-travel-related-measures-reduce-spread-covid-19-eueea>

<sup>76</sup> European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC). 2020. “Considerations for travel-related measures to reduce spread of COVID-19 in the EU/EEA”. ECDC, 26 May 2020. <https://www.ecdc.europa.eu/en/publications-data/considerations-travel-related-measures-reduce-spread-covid-19-eueea>

The ECDC's recommendations concerning these basic sanitary measures to mitigate risk in the course of our mobilities across different scales appear sound. The modalities of international travel can and must be transformed, without limiting the right of people to do so. We should however bear in mind the lessons of historians concerning the ambivalence of measures of risk mitigation.<sup>77</sup> Today as in past pandemics such as cholera, it is likely that the imperative to perpetuate “productive mobilities” while limiting the spread of the coronavirus will lead to a speeding up in the development of new tracking technologies – such as the many Covid applications designed to trace contacts if a person is found to be infected,<sup>78</sup> and new means of identification – such as the “Covid-19 passport” mulled by the EU to identify the health status of its owner.<sup>79</sup> While we can not rule out that some technologies may indeed be helpful to detect infected cases early and trace their contacts so as to avoid the spread of the virus, there is a real risk that the deployment of new means of “bio-digital-surveillance”<sup>80</sup> heighten the already existing trend towards more invasive forms of control that turn the body itself into a border.<sup>81</sup> Whether they are used within or at the border of states, it will be essential to ensure collective ownership and oversight of these means so that they do not infringe on rights and liberties, and that equal treatment is guaranteed.<sup>82</sup>

Coming back to the movement of people who today are illegalised, it is clear that with or without the recognition by states of their right to move, many are continuing to cross borders. Without migrants having access to legal and formal means of travel however, adopting the precautionary measures described above (and which the UNHCR also advocated for early on) is far more difficult.<sup>83</sup> How can one imagine illegalised migrants adopting physical distancing in overcrowded boats or wearing facemasks after they have been deprived of everything for months by their Libyan captors? It is the very illegalisation of migration that puts migrants' lives at greater risk in general and of infection of the Covid-19 virus in particular. Unable to protect themselves, they are less able to protect the people they encounter. Granting migrants the right to cross borders in legal ways has long been the best way to

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<sup>77</sup> Huber, Valeska. 2006. “The Unification of the Globe by Disease? The International Sanitary Conferences on Cholera, 1851–1894”.

*The Historical Journal*, 49(02): 453 – 476. See also Morse, Stephen S. 2001. “Factors in the Emergence of Infectious Diseases”, in Andrew T. Price-Smith (ed.) *Plagues and Politics: Infectious Disease and International Policy*. Palgrave Mcmillan.

<sup>78</sup> Holmes, Oliver, Justin McCurry, and Michael Safi. 2020. “Coronavirus mass surveillance could be here to stay, experts say”. *The Guardian*, 18 June 2020. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/jun/18/coronavirus-mass-surveillance-could-be-here-to-stay-tracking>

<sup>79</sup> Schengenvisainfo. 2020. “EU Mulls ‘COVID-19 Passports’ to Restore Tourism Industry”. *Schengenvisainfo*, 29 April 2020. <https://www.schengenvisainfo.com/news/eu-mulls-covid-19-passports-to-restore-tourism-industry/>

<sup>80</sup> Bigo, Didier. 2020. “Covid-19 tracking apps, or: how to deal with a pandemic most unsuccessfully”. *About: intel*, 3 June 2020. <https://aboutintel.eu/Covid-digital-tracking/>

<sup>81</sup> See Mbembe, Achille. 2019. “Bodies as borders”. *From the European South*, 4: 5-18. <http://europeansouth.postcolonialitalia.it>

Amoore, Louise and Alexandra Hall. 2009. “Taking people apart: Digitised dissection and the body at the border”. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 27(3):444-464.

<sup>82</sup> Holmes, Oliver, Justin McCurry, and Michael Safi. 2020. “Coronavirus mass surveillance could be here to stay, experts say”. *The Guardian*, 18 June 2020. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/jun/18/coronavirus-mass-surveillance-could-be-here-to-stay-tracking>

<sup>83</sup> UNHCR. 2020. “Statement by Filippo Grandi, UN High Commissioner for Refugees, on the COVID-19 crisis”. UNHCR, 19 March 2020. <https://www.unhcr.org/news/press/2020/3/5e7395f84/statement-filippo-grandi-un-high-commissioner-refugees-covid-19-crisis.html>



mitigate the multiple risks that affect illegalized migrants' lives. Today it is also a contribution to mitigating the risk of Covid-19 infection for them and others. In this sense, adopting policies founded on the freedom of movement of all people should be a measure we demand of our states *now*, not in some distant (post-Covid) future. Likewise, granting legal status and the right to stay to irregular migrants already present in our countries, as has begun to be initiated in countries such as Portugal and Italy, are essential measures to guarantee that they have access to health care and welfare.<sup>84</sup> Recognising migrants' right to move and stay, and ensuring that they are able to exercise their social and labour rights as well as their right to health is the condition to protect migrants and sedentary populations alike.

What the above suggests is that rather than nationalist "folding in", the imposition of authoritarian sanitary measures and the fencing off of sanitized travel bubbles, what is necessary are new means of protection and solidarity at the local level – such as the minimum basic income implemented in Spain<sup>85</sup> and universal health care - and international level. International solidarity should not be reduced to sending facemasks and testing kits but should include broad debt cancellation, increased aid, and fair terms of trade so that populations and states of the global south can redirect resources towards addressing the health crisis.<sup>86</sup> Popular participation is also essential to seize the very real risks of contamination away from the state-imposed sanitary police that entails the denial of rights and dignity, and foster instead "sanitary justice".<sup>87</sup> While Didier Fassin uses this term to denote the way public health policies may take into account social inequalities<sup>88</sup>, I find it useful as well to account for claims to justice emanating from the governed with regard to the health policies targeting them – or precisely failing to do so. Based on solidarity and the recognition of rights, this approach allows us to engage in collective practices of "care for others and ourselves"<sup>89</sup> and engage in common struggles to guarantee our access to the conditions that are essential to our protection.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Waldersee, Victoria. 2020. "Portugal to treat migrants as residents during coronavirus crisis", *Reuters*, 28 March 2020.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-portugal/portugal-to-treat-migrants-as-residents-during-coronavirus-crisis-idUSKBN21F0N7>

<sup>85</sup> Lapavistas, Costas, Lluís Torrens, Sergi Cutillas, Pablo Cotarelo. 2020. "Confronting the Coronavirus Crisis: A case for a Pandemic Basic Income with evidence from Spain". *Brave New Europe*, 11 June 2020. <https://braveneweuropa.com/costas-lapavistas-lluís-torrens-sergi-cutillas-pablo-cotarelo-confronting-the-coronavirus-crisis-a-case-for-a-pandemic-basic-income-with-evidence-from-spain>

<sup>86</sup> For a broad range of progressive internationalist responses, see Transnational Institute. 2020. "Coronavirus: the need for a progressive internationalist response". *Transnational Institute*, 26 March 2020. <https://www.tni.org/en/article/coronavirus-the-need-for-a-progressive-internationalist-response?fbclid=IwAR3VO6iJJW8YusAuaSsnoKjMTwzcYylz1v472YJeToZb8zC2FCt8OeVIGZQ>

<sup>87</sup> Fassin, Didier. 2020. "L'illusion dangereuse de l'égalité devant l'épidémie", *Collège de France*, 16 April 2020. [https://www.college-de-france.fr/site/didier-fassin/L-illusion-dangereuse-de-legalite-devant-lepidemie.htm?fbclid=IwAR3-84sk57NPwre8RNFesPxBWBSgasvPnd69JcfoQ74pHAbl\\_lhRaeFx-zx0](https://www.college-de-france.fr/site/didier-fassin/L-illusion-dangereuse-de-legalite-devant-lepidemie.htm?fbclid=IwAR3-84sk57NPwre8RNFesPxBWBSgasvPnd69JcfoQ74pHAbl_lhRaeFx-zx0)

<sup>88</sup> I thank Didier Fassin for expanding on this notion in an email exchange.

<sup>89</sup> Sotiris, Panagiotis. 2020. "Against Agamben: Is a Democratic Biopolitics Possible?" *Viewpoint Magazine*, 20 March 2020. <https://www.viewpointmag.com/2020/03/20/against-agamben-democratic-biopolitics/>

<sup>90</sup> For some broad principles of a rights-based approach in relation to the new coronavirus see UNAIDS. 2020. "Rights in the time of COVID-19 Lessons from HIV for an effective, community-led response." UNAIDS, 20 March 2020. <https://www.unaids.org/en/resources/documents/2020/human-rights-and-covid-19>

All these combined measures and approaches are essential to ensure that populations can be protected and protect themselves from the virus *wherever they are*, including in the course of their travel across borders. With greater equality and cooperation between countries as they seek to protect their populations from the pandemic, the need for the privileged to police sanitary bubbles would disappear. These are approaches that we must demand from (our) states, but that may also be adopted by nongovernmental actors supporting migrants. In addition to the tools NGOs have developed in the past to effectively act in solidarity with migrants, today they must also consider the new risks they face in relation to the coronavirus pandemic. Migrants rights' NGO across Europe have engaged in this shift admirably in relation to migrant detention for example, demanding that migrants' be released so as to be able to adopt the same protective measures as any other citizen, and be granted access to health care. The rescue NGOs that have been able to resume their operations at sea in June have adopted a range of sanitary measures to protect the health of their "guests" and crew. More work can however still be done to formulate specific demands and practices in relation to the new health risks that migrants face while on the move.

What might this attempt to articulate the demand for and direct support to migrants' freedom to move and their protection from the coronavirus look like concretely? Let us think of how the call for "Ferries not Frontex" formulated by the WatchTheMed Alarm Phone in 2015 might be transformed in the present. In the wake of the largest shipwrecks in recent Mediterranean history – leading to the death of 1200 people in only a week, the activist network that manages an emergency hotline for migrants crossing the sea, demanded the freedom to move for all migrants. As a means of operationalising this demand, the network proposed the idea of a humanitarian ferry "that should travel to Libya and evacuate as many people as possible" and bring them to Europe where they should receive unconditional protection.<sup>91</sup> Five years later, whereas the deployment NGOs to rescue migrants in distress *after* they have left the southern shores has become a reality – if a highly contested one – this radical proposal of a ferry has not. The risk of being attacked by militias on Libyan shores and of not being able to disembark on European soil have made it too challenging to implement. It remains nonetheless effective as a utopian vision that opens up our political imagination. Merrily envisioning this possibility denaturalises the daily images of migrants cramped in small rubber boats, and presents us with what might be one of the concrete manifestations of the institution of freedom of movement: the banal movement of people on board a ferry, such as those that have long connected the shores of the Mediterranean, and which, from

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<sup>91</sup> Alarm Phone. 2015. "Ferries not Frontex! 10 points to really end the deaths of migrants at sea". *Alarm Phone*, 23 April 2015. <https://alarmphone.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/25/2015/10/10points-A5-folder.pdf>

the end of the Second World War to end of the 90s transported migrants who could relatively easily access visas to reach Europe.

How would the ferry the Alarm Phone imagined five years ago look today, in the context of the pandemic? Following the ECDC's recommendations, passengers might receive additional information on sanitary measures upon embarking, and would be handed face masks; they would be spatially spread out in small groups throughout the space of the ferry so as to maintain physical distance all the while allowing for collective discussions concerning access to the right to asylum and the right to health on European soil; upon arrival, passengers would be screened and, should risk of infection be detected, some might be put into quarantine in spaces that allow to respect their dignity and rights. The "ferry with a facemask" we can imagine today is certainly different from the one envisioned a few years ago. Just like our societies, it has been transformed. However, guided by the principles of solidarity, freedom and equality, it remains a beautiful sight. In the time of the pandemic then, freedom of movement remains as fundamental a demand as ever before, and a crucial political compass to guide our practices of solidarity across land and sea in the present.<sup>92</sup>

### **Limiting the exercise of destructive mobility privileges: towards mobility justice**

If it is essential to rethink the politics of freedom of movement in the context of the pandemic, one cannot abstract it either from the global uprising against anti-Blackness and racism, the acute economic crisis and finally the climate crisis. Today, more than ever, it is impossible to maintain the different crises that intersect in our global conjuncture separate, either analytically or politically.<sup>93</sup> The concept of "mobility justice" which has been developed by Mimi Sheller, offers a useful lens to think of the way mobility operates across these nested crises, and more importantly, how mobility might be thought of and practiced in a way that contributes to global justice. "We can think about mobility justice occurring at different scales", Sheller writes, "from micro-level embodied interpersonal relations, to meso-level issues of urban transportation justice and the "right to the city," to macro-level transnational relations of travel and borders, and ultimately global resource flows and energy circulation".<sup>94</sup>

Importantly, through the perspective of mobility justice one is able to locate within the *same analytical frame* the movement of the othered and dispossessed which is limited and precaritized by the global

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<sup>92</sup> For an important initiative connecting both land and sea, see <https://fromseatocity.eu/>.

<sup>93</sup> Mohandesi, Salar. 2020. "Crisis of a New Type". *Viewpoint Magazine*, 13 May 2020. <https://www.viewpointmag.com/2020/05/13/crisis-of-a-new-type/>

<sup>94</sup> Sheller, Mimi. 2018. *Mobility Justice: The Politics of Movement in an Age of Extremes*. London: Verso.

apartheid, and the high-speed and comfortable travel of those who are located at the top of the hierarchies of mobility. In continuity with colonial discourses, the movement of populations of the global south is today framed as “excessive”,<sup>95</sup> while it is in fact the privileged citizens of the global north who have exercised their freedom to move at an excessive cost for the environment, and for the communities that are most affected by it.<sup>96</sup> While global air travel has grown exponentially and until recently “more than a million people were literally flying through the air at any given moment”,<sup>97</sup> less than 10% of the global population has ever taken a flight.<sup>98</sup> High-speed carbon intensive air travel – which accounts for about 2.5 percent of global carbon dioxide emissions,<sup>99</sup> is one more manifestation of the destructive consumption of the privileged – mostly located in the global north – that must be challenged.<sup>100</sup> In this respect, the temporary interruption of air travel discussed earlier in this paper can be seen as a positive outcome of the pandemic. Going back to the “normality” of mass air travel for the privileged is no more desirable than the perpetuation of the planetary apartheid for the othered and dispossessed.

Early on in the pandemic, Mimi Sheller asked what might be the ripple effects and tipping points triggered by this interruption of air travel but also other means of carbon intensive mobility: “If airlines go bankrupt”, Sheller asked, “if trucking is severely reduced, and consumers stop buying new cars, will this actually kick-start the transition away from fossil fuels? As countries seek to recover and pull out of this mobility shock, will we seek to return to the high-mobility, high-energy, high-carbon economy of the past? Alternatively, will we begin the urgently needed shift to a low-carbon economy, one premised on more resilient, regenerative, and circular forms of local exchange? Could this be the push we needed to truly implement the low-carbon transition that scientists have warned us is necessary to stop the global climate emergency?”<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Kotef, Hagar. 2015. *Movement and the Ordering of Freedom: On Liberal Governances of Mobility*. Durham: Duke University Press.

<sup>96</sup> Harrabin, Roger. 2020. “Climate Change: The Rich are to Blame, International Study Finds”. *BBC*, March 16, 2020.

<https://www.bbc.com/news/business-51906530> Harrabin’s article is based on Oswald, Yannick, Anne Owen, and Julia K. Steinberger. 2020.

“Large inequality in international and intranational energy footprints between income groups and across consumption categories.” *Nature Energy* 5: 231-239.

<sup>97</sup> Gamlen, Alan. 2020. “Migration and Mobility after the 2020 Pandemic: The End of an Age?” *COMPAS Working Paper* No. 146. University of Oxford. <https://www.compas.ox.ac.uk/2020/migration-and-mobility-after-the-2020-pandemic-the-end-of-an-age-2/>

<sup>98</sup> Stay Grounded. 2019. “Degrowth of Aviation: Reducing Air Travel in a Just Way”. *Stay Grounded*, December 2019. <https://stay-grounded.org/report-degrowth-of-aviation/>

<sup>99</sup> Tabuchi, Hiroko. 2019. “Worse Than Anyone Expected: Air Travel Emissions Vastly Outpace Predictions”. *New York Times*, 19 September 2019. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/09/19/climate/air-travel-emissions.html>

<sup>100</sup> For instance, the charity Oxfam has found that the richest 10% of people produce half of the world’s carbon emissions, while the poorest half contribute just 10%. See Beuret, Nicholas. 2019. “Emissions inequality: there is a gulf between global rich and poor”. *The Conversation*, 28 March 2019. <https://theconversation.com/emissions-inequality-there-is-a-gulf-between-global-rich-and-poor-113804>

<sup>101</sup> Sheller, Mimi. 2020. “Some Thoughts on What Comes After A Mobility Shock”. *Critical Automobility Studies Lab*, 17 March 2020. <https://cas.ihs.ac.at/some-thoughts-on-what-comes-after-a-mobility-shock/>

Since Sheller formulated her open-ended questions, some of the worst scenarios she considered have materialised: rather than investing massively in making their economies and societies sustainable, states have offered bailouts to airlines even as they lay off their employees.<sup>102</sup> We have further seen how the interruption of urban mobilities has led to new hierarchies – such as among those who can work from home through digital technologies, and those who cannot and must take the risk of commuting in crowded public transport in which they run the risk of being infected.<sup>103</sup> But we have also seen some of the more optimistic scenarios Sheller considered being realized: to help people substitute their use of public transport without resorting to cars, “thousands of miles of new bike lanes have been built in cities from Milan to Mexico City, huge swathes of residential streets in places from New York to Bogotá are being closed to traffic”.<sup>104</sup>

While contradictory tendencies coexist, a recent study by banking group Lombard Odier bets on a green “mobility revolution” in the wake of the Covid pandemic.<sup>105</sup> What is certain is that the interruption of our socialities, motilities and economies has positioned us at a crossroads, in which radical changes that were deemed impossible only a few months ago are contemplated in a polyphonic debate. As Andreas Malm argues, “this is a moment where we can say to governments: “If you were able to intervene to protect us from the virus, you can intervene to protect us from the climate crisis as well, the implications of which are much worse”.<sup>106</sup> In other words, even as states and societies are still struggling to slow the curve of the rate of covid-19 infections, it is urgent we act to slow the curve of carbon emissions as well.<sup>107</sup>

The question then, as Achille Mbembe has put it, is how we can turn the interruption the pandemic has forced upon us into a voluntary and conscious one? <sup>108</sup> Alternatively, in the terms of the degrowth approach, we face a choice between “slowing down by design” or by disaster.<sup>109</sup> In turn, in light of

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<sup>102</sup> See the bail out of Air France. Dutheil, Guy. 2020. “Air France envisage jusqu’à 10 000 suppressions de postes”. *Le Monde*, 17 June 2020. [https://www.lemonde.fr/economie/article/2020/06/17/air-france-envisage-de-reduire-fortement-ses-effectifs\\_6043206\\_3234.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/economie/article/2020/06/17/air-france-envisage-de-reduire-fortement-ses-effectifs_6043206_3234.html)

<sup>103</sup> Bagnato, Andrea. 2020. Staying at Home. *E-Flux*. <https://www.e-flux.com/architecture/at-the-border/329404/staying-at-home/>. It is important to note as well that digital communication has its own ecological footprint, which is far from negligible.

<sup>104</sup> Taylor, Matthew. 2020. “A new normal”: how coronavirus will transform transport in Britain’s cities”. *The Guardian*, 18 May 2020. <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/may/18/a-new-normal-how-coronavirus-will-transform-transport-in-britains-cities5>

<sup>105</sup> Church, Kristina. 2020. “The mobility revolution”. *Lombard Odier*, 18 June 2020. <https://am.lombardodier.com/contents/news/investment-viewpoints/2020/june/the-mobility-revolution.html>

<sup>106</sup> Malm, Andreas. 2020. “To Halt Climate Change, We Need an Ecological Leninism”. *Jacobin*, 15 June 2020. <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2020/06/andreas-malm-coronavirus-covid-climate-change>

<sup>107</sup> Descamps, Philippe and Thierry Lebel. 2020. “Un avant-goût du choc climatique”. *Le monde diplomatique*, May 2020. <https://www.monde-diplomatique.fr/2020/05/DESCAMPS/61750>

<sup>108</sup> Mbembe, Achille. 2020. “The Universal Right to Breathe”. *Critical Inquiry Blog*, 13 April 2020. <https://critinq.wordpress.com/2020/04/13/the-universal-right-to-breathe/>

<sup>109</sup> Paulson, Susan, Giacomo D’Alisa, Federico Demaria, and Giorgos Kallis with Feminisms and Degrowth Alliance. 2020. “From pandemic to care-full degrowth”. *Interface: a journal for and about social movements*, 30 April 2020.

principle of freedom of movement that I seek to defend, we must ask how the interruption of air travel (and other mobilities that feed upon and fuel the carbon economy) might be perpetuated as states and societies partly open up, without compromising the freedom of all to move across borders? One can answer this difficult question by being attuned to the inequalities of contemporary (im)mobility, and challenging the dominant understanding of freedom. As Anne-Laure Amilhat-Szary has argued, in the time of the pandemic the privilege of mobility has partly been replaced by the privilege of immobility.<sup>110</sup> In this context, those who cannot stay where they are, because of wars, political and economic crisis, the lack of prospect to realise their lives, will continue to move no matter what restrictions states impose, and they *must* have the right to travel with safe and legal means. But those who are privileged enough to be able to stay put and limit their travel – such as researchers as myself for whom most conferences have been cancelled or shifted online – should do so, as one among many other necessary contributions to the decarbonisation of our economies and societies. This collective process of self-limitation of movement, which should be accompanied by state regulations and taxes on polluting fuels, and investments into alternatives to air travel, such as rail systems,<sup>111</sup> need not however be seen as an unfreedom. Once one “decolonizes our imaginaries from the ethics of limitless expansion” and the associated understanding of freedom as “doing as you please, which means freedom for the strong”,<sup>112</sup> one may begin to perceive instead the self-limitation of movement as another form of exercise of the freedom to move.<sup>113</sup>

This (self-)limitation of polluting movement, which should first target the privileged populations who enact the most their destructive mobility at present, is consistent with the “mobile commons” approach advocated by Mimi Sheller, which does not simply imply “maximizing mobility for all people”, but means instead “protecting the capability for human and more-than-human shared mobilities and free spaces for movement by regulating excessive mobilities, limiting unnecessary speed, regulating corporations, pricing the externalities of transportation, and preventing its harms”.<sup>114</sup> Reflecting on the need to undermine the excessive mobility of the privileged, and recognising that in the context of the pandemic immobility itself

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<sup>110</sup> Amilhat-Szary, Anne-Laure. 2020. “Nous avons eu l'impression que nous pouvions effectivement fermer les frontières”. *France Culture*, 30 May 2020. <https://www.franceculture.fr/geopolitique/anne-laure-amilhat-szary-nous-avons-eu-limpression-que-nous-pouvions-effectivement-fermer-les>. See also Ben Lazreg, Houssein and Wael Garnaoui. 2020. “The Passport Paradox and the Advent of Immobility Justice”. *Resetdoc*, 8 June 2020. [https://www.resetdoc.org/story/the-passport-paradox-and-the-advent-of-immobility-justice/?fbclid=IwAR2yMRBaAgQ\\_uw-2nHOKsLSt7ORnCPraZNPdDutKMj7jwy7IR\\_WxbfQR5S2M](https://www.resetdoc.org/story/the-passport-paradox-and-the-advent-of-immobility-justice/?fbclid=IwAR2yMRBaAgQ_uw-2nHOKsLSt7ORnCPraZNPdDutKMj7jwy7IR_WxbfQR5S2M)

<sup>111</sup> The Green New Deal for Europe. 2019. “Blueprint For Europe’s Just Transition”. *The Green New Deal for Europe*, December 2019. <https://report.gndforeurope.com/#2>. See also Stay Grounded. 2019. “Degrowth of Aviation: Reducing Air Travel in a Just Way”. *Stay Grounded*, December 2019. <https://stay-grounded.org/report-degrowth-of-aviation/>

<sup>112</sup> Kallis, Giorgos. 2020. “Questioning Our Limits to Leave Scarcity Behind”. *Brave New Europe*, 9 March 2020. <https://braveneweuropa.com/giorgos-kallis-questioning-our-limits-to-leave-scarcity-behind>

<sup>113</sup> See Sandro Mezzadra and Maurice Stierl’s important argument along this line. “What happens to freedom of movement during a pandemic?” *Open Democracy*, 24 March 2020. [https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/can-europe-make-it/what-happens-freedom-movement-during-pandemic/?fbclid=IwAR2MYSD4eIzvcUIGf1i\\_7Vuj-tYfXDe9JTVuOMSArbxxmAhWomszO1p5ec](https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/can-europe-make-it/what-happens-freedom-movement-during-pandemic/?fbclid=IwAR2MYSD4eIzvcUIGf1i_7Vuj-tYfXDe9JTVuOMSArbxxmAhWomszO1p5ec)

<sup>114</sup> Sheller, Mimi. 2018. *Mobility Justice: The Politics of Movement in an Age of Extremes*. London: Verso.

has become a new marker of privilege should lead us in turn to always articulate the demand for the freedom to move with the right *not to be displaced* by political and economic turmoil as well as ecological destruction, all of which are the outcome of the capitalist world system.<sup>115</sup> Echoing the words of the late Edouard Glissant, as scholars and activists focusing on illegalised migration we should never forget that “to have to force one’s way across borders as a result of one’s misery is as scandalous as what founds that misery”.<sup>116</sup>

The intersectional politics pioneered by Black women has taught us that the forms of oppression that aren’t “separate in our bodies” should not be separated in our struggles either.<sup>117</sup> Today, one of the expressions these oppressions manifests itself in the growing impossibility for many to *breathe*. Black women and men can’t breathe – as other categories of racialized subjects – as they encounter the violence of the police on firm land; illegalised migrants who are denied the right to move on the basis of race and class hierarchies also can’t breathe, as their precarious movement leads thousands to die in the Mediterranean;<sup>118</sup> predatory capitalism is destroying global ecosystems, including the forests that serve as the lungs of the earth, leading to suffocating heat for humans and non-humans alike while unleashing new deadly viruses, such as the Covid-19, which attacks our respiratory capacities.<sup>119</sup> Considering the interlocking crisis of the pandemic, economic crisis, ecological crisis, and the crises of border, racist and sexist violence, all of which are making life unbreathable for so many, I can only join Achille Mbembe in calling for a universal *right to breathe* as the basis for profoundly transforming our planetary life in common.<sup>120</sup> Radically *de-confining borders*, that is, undoing the limits borders impose on the movement of populations of the global south within the global apartheid, but also ending the exercise of destructive mobility privileges, must be a part of this entangled struggle.

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<sup>115</sup> Bacon, David. 2013. *The Right to Stay Home: How US Policy Drives Mexican Migration*. Boston MA: Beacon Press; Van Naerssen, Tom. 2014. “Imagining the Future of International Border Crossings”. Lecture given at the “Geographies of the Future” series, University of Bonn, November 27, 2014. Novak, Paolo. 2016. “The Double Pincer of Migration. Revisiting the Migration and Development Nexus through a Spatial Lens,” *Colombia Internacional* 88 (September 1.): 27–55.

<sup>116</sup> Glissant, Edouard. 2006. “Il n’est frontière qu’on n’outrepasse”. *Le Monde diplomatique*, October 2006. <https://www.monde-diplomatique.fr/2006/10/GLISSANT/13999>

<sup>117</sup> Davis, Angela. 2016. *Freedom Is a Constant Struggle: Ferguson, Palestine, and the Foundations of a Movement*. Chicago: Haymarket Books: 19.

<sup>118</sup> Turati, Sofia. 2020. “Black lives matter in Italia: le manifestazioni in programma”. *Pressenza*, 3 June 2020. <https://www.pressenza.com/it/2020/06/black-lives-matter-in-italia-le-manifestazioni-in-programma/>

<sup>119</sup> Wallace, Rob, Alex Liebman, Luis Fernando Chaves and Rodrick Wallace. 2020. “COVID-19 and Circuits of Capital”. *Monthly Review*, 27 March 2020. <https://monthlyreview.org/2020/05/01/covid-19-and-circuits-of-capital/>

<sup>120</sup> Mbembe, Achille. 2020. “The Universal Right to Breathe”. *Critical Inquiry Blog*, 13 April 2020. <https://critinquiry.wordpress.com/2020/04/13/the-universal-right-to-breathe/>

## Conclusions

Bridget Anderson condenses the contradictions and inequalities of the global mobility regime that have been revealed and heightened by the new coronavirus when she writes that, “the multiple intersections of (im)mobilities of capital, of food, of humans, of animals, of the microbiological have produced the contemporary situation where the ‘cure’, it seems, is human immobility”.<sup>121</sup> Capitalism strives upon and generates massive global motilities, of money, goods and people. Capital’s tendency to expand and tear down any limit that stand in the way of accumulation, including those of ecosystems, has led to the unleashing of new viruses – including probably the new coronavirus. The global web of transport infrastructures enabling human mobility for business, tourism and migration, which is a major contributor to global heating, has in turn led to spread of this new virus at lighting speed. The fear of the virus and the way it has been coupled with the fear of foreigners has generated restrictions on travel and heightened border closures. The othered and the dispossessed – who had least access to the webs of mobility infrastructures woven across the globe – are paying the heavyset price for this hardening of borders and social boundaries. At the same time, Anderson underlines, the scapegoating migrants diverts attention from these entangled geographies, and makes us unable to transform them in a way that might durably prevent the new emergence of deadly pathogens.<sup>122</sup> It is urgent that we address these multifarious contradictions, and right these wrongs.

In this paper, I have argued that the conflation of the “war on the virus” with the “war on migrants” by states has led to heightened border violence. Now, as states are progressively lifting their internal and external measures of confinement, a new geography of inclusion and exclusion is emerging, in which the global apartheid founded on race, class and citizenship is being supplemented by a sanitary apartheid, that aims to keep virus-free “bubbles” apart from populations designated as contagious. While in the current climate of nationalist folding in, defending the *right of all people to move freely across borders* may appear counter-intuitive, I have argued in fact that there is no more urgent time to do so. Illegalized migrants will continue to cross borders in search of protection and a better life with or without the approval of states. While a policy founded on the freedom to move has long been the best way to mitigate the risks migrants face in the course of their journeys, in the context of the pandemic allowing all migrants to move in safe and legal ways is also the condition to implement sanitary measures to protect the health of migrants and sedentary populations alike. Such a policy would involve radically *de-confining borders*, which

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<sup>121</sup> Anderson, Bridget. 2020. “No more ‘back to normal’ – ‘normal’ was the problem: thoughts on Coronavirus”. *COMPAS blog*, 6 April 2020. <https://www.compas.ox.ac.uk/2020/no-more-back-to-normal-normal-was-the-problem-thoughts-on-coronavirus/>

<sup>122</sup> Anderson, Bridget. 2020. “The nation and the state”. In Martin Parker (ed.) *Life After COVID-19: The Other Side of Crisis*. Bristol: Bristol University Press (forthcoming): 115-123.



is going beyond the lifting of temporary travel restrictions imposed by states in response to the pandemic to undo the enduring limits imposed on the movement of populations of the global south within the global apartheid. At the same time, the temporary interruption of global air travel – and thus of the associated CO<sub>2</sub> emissions – has led me to argue that we should also challenge the excessive mobility of the privileged which has contributed to ecological destruction and spreading the coronavirus. It is my hope that these proposals, which would contribute to greater mobility justice, will resonate with the polyphonic chorus of voices seeking to steer us out of the conjunction of multiple life-threatening crises we find ourselves in, and towards a more just and sustainable world.