
An interview with Sandro Mezzadra

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Introductions

Sandro Mezzadra is Associate Professor in the Faculty of Political Sciences at the University of Bologna, where he teaches contemporary political theory and post-colonial studies. He is a member of the directors' board of *Studi Culturali* and of the editorial board of *Filosofia Politica*. He has been a frequent interlocutor with Étienne Balibar on issues relating to Europe and has emerged as a leading voice of post-workerism and advocate for critical studies of migration. His latest adventure expands his deep engagements with social movements in Europe and North Africa to an international project on *Transit Labour: Circuits, Regions, Borders* with 'platforms' in Shanghai, Kolkata, and Sydney.

On 9 November 2010, in Chapel Hill, geographers John Pickles and Sebastian Cobarrubias and anthropologist Maribel Casas met with Sandro Mezzadra to discuss complementarities in research interests around the emerging institutions, practices, and geographies of the European Neighbourhood Policy; transit migration and migration routes management; counter-mapping; and the changes in sovereignty and border policies currently occurring in the Euro-Mediterranean region. Our paths had crossed indirectly several times in the past through sharing experiences with social movements and activist efforts (mainly Frassanito, NoBorder, MigrEurope, or Precarias a la Deriva) that were working on similar issues to those we are working on today: new conceptions of rights and mobility, new understandings of borders and policing, and the reinsertion of migrant struggles in a broader social space. The political and intellectual challenges faced by these struggles had led to many of Mezzadra's and our own research concerns. Mezzadra's theoretical work on migration is a particularly important reference point for our current research on European border externalization and its implications for the geographies of migration routes management in North Africa.

Mezzadra has been particularly active in developing a new lexicon in ways that move beyond workerism and narrowly defined class politics to theories of society and space that take much more seriously the partial autonomy of different kinds of work and experience and the spatialities they produce. In engaging with him on these issues, we became increasingly aware that his thinking has been influenced in interesting ways by his reading of geography and cartography. This interview focuses on Mezzadra's engagement with social movements and the emerging geographical imaginaries and logics that are shaping life in and beyond Europe.

The interview is followed by a selected bibliography of works by Mezzadra.

Workerism, post-operaismo, and a political-intellectual genealogy

Interviewers (INT): Sandro, we would like to start by briefly introducing your work in relationship with post-workerism. Particularly in Europe, you have been known for your participation and contribution to the Italian post-workerist actions and literature, could you spell ‘post-workerism’ out for the readers of *Society and Space*?

Sandro Mezzadra (SM): ‘Workerism’ (*operaismo* in Italian) refers to a theoretical and political current of Marxist thought that emerged in Italy in the early 1960s through the work of people like Antonio Negri and Mario Tronti. An original reading of Marx in the framework of the radical workers’ struggles that developed in the country during the whole decade led to the invention of new theoretical concepts (such as technical and political class composition, the mass worker, the refusal of work) and of a new political methodology (the so-called militant investigation or coresearch). A book published in 1966 by Mario Tronti, *Operai e Capitale* (Workers and Capital), laid the foundations of workerism, especially formulating a methodological principle emphatically presented as a ‘Copernican revolution’ with regard to more traditional currents of Marxism: that is, the idea that it was necessary to reverse the classical relation between capitalistic development and workers’ struggles, to identify in workers’ struggles the real dynamic element (the real ‘mover’) of capitalistic development, and to affirm the latter’s subordination to workers’ struggles. Workers’ struggles ‘come first’, one could say, paraphrasing what Deleuze said about Foucault, and this explains the later encounter between workerism and ‘French theory’, or ‘post-structuralism’. An emphasis on the subjectivity of what Marx used to call, especially in the *Grundrisse*, “living labour” was since the beginning a distinctive feature of ‘workerist’ theory, whereas a dynamic concept of class made the investigation of its shifting composition possible.

These elements were particularly important in the years of my theoretical and political training. The dynamic concept of class I just referred to allowed us to critically investigate the early processes of deindustrialization and flexibilization of production that became visible in Italy in the second half of the 1970s. The background of these processes was a dramatic defeat of the industrial working class and a thorough repression of autonomous movements, which led to the incarceration of thousands of militants (among them Antonio Negri, Paolo Virno, and other prominent workerist theorists). Nevertheless, the conceptual tools forged in the previous fifteen years allowed younger people like myself to come to grips with the new social, economic, political, and cultural landscape we were confronted with in Italy. It was in the early 1980s that the discussion on ‘precarity’ started; and while the traditional left was already taking a merely defensive and reactive position on the great transformation of capitalism that was taking place, we ‘reactivated’ the emphasis on the subjectivity of living labour in order to foster a mapping of emerging new lines of conflict and antagonism. We were stressing what especially Paolo Virno, at the end of the decade, began to call the “ambivalence” of post-Fordism. To put it briefly, we insisted that ‘precarity’ was definitely the outcome of capitalist strategies, but that these strategies were to be understood as a reply to practices and struggles of mobility developed by workers against factory discipline. If you are familiar with the book by Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism* (2005), it will be easy for you to see that we were anticipating some of their key theses.

It was in the 1990s, with the birth of new journals such as *Luogo Comune* (launched by Paolo Virno in Italy) and *Futur Antérieur* (launched by Antonio Negri in Paris, where he lived in exile after 1983), that a new season of ‘workerist’ thought started: the season of what came to be widely known and discussed in the Anglophone world as ‘post-workerism’ after the publication of Negri and Hardt’s (2000) *Empire*. I guess the meaning of the ‘post’ in ‘post-workerism’ is to be understood with regard to the fact that we are talking here of a workerism after the end of the traditional industrial working class. Immaterial and care labour, multitude, cognitive, and biocapitalism are among the best-known concepts proposed in the last two decades, not only by Hardt, Negri, and Virno but also by theorists such as Maurizio Lazzarato, Andrea Fumagalli, Cristina Morini, just to mention a few. Particularly important also have been the analyses by Christian Marazzi, who has investigated the ‘financialization of capitalism’ from the point of view of a kind of ‘linguistic turn’ in economics. In the last few years we founded a loose network of activists and researchers (*UniNomade*), which among other things has produced a collective interpretation of the current financial and global crisis. The book has recently been translated into English with the title *Crisis in the Global Economy* (Fumagalli and Mezzadra, 2010).

As far as my individual contribution to ‘post-workerist’ discussions goes, it is very much linked to the issue of migration. I should add here that particularly for the kind of work I was doing on migration and for the conversation with postcolonial criticism I started towards the end of the 1990s, I was always pretty critical of the emphasis placed by some of my friends on the ‘hegemony’ of immaterial or cognitive labour. While I shared their concern with the necessity of providing conceptual definitions of the new nature of contemporary capitalism and of the corresponding composition of living labour, I increasingly stressed the element of heterogeneity of labour regimes and subject positions as constitutive of the present constellation of capital and labour. This was quite a lively discussion ten years ago, but if you take a look at Hardt and Negri’s (2009) new book *Commonwealth*, you can easily see that their own positions on this are now much more nuanced and cautious.

A conceptual lexicon for Europe today

INT: Your scepticism has been productive, particularly in the ways in which you have been able to inflect some of the more ‘traditional’ approaches to social and economic transformation with new ways of thinking and speaking about vital issues. Readers of your work have enjoyed the ways in which you explicitly aim to produce a lexicon and set of concepts that allow for a different kind of thinking and a different kind of engagement with institutional arrangements, their practices and effects, and how those respond to social actors and action. This has been the case mainly through the growing political protagonism of migration. In your writings over the past ten to fifteen years, you have framed the concept of the ‘autonomy of migration’. This concept is probably unfamiliar to many readers of *Society and Space*, so here we ask that you summarize the issue and why you developed this concept.

SM: There is something puzzling in the history of the autonomy of migration approach. When I started to work in this direction, in the mid-1990s, I was basically interested in the Italian discussions on migration. Italy had discovered that it had quite abruptly become a ‘country of immigration’. And both in the academic world and in public discourse the discussion was framed in terms of quite traditional theoretical approaches. Briefly put, it was the heyday of such a theory as the one centred upon ‘push and pull factors’. Migrants were considered as totally determined and overwhelmed by structural forces: in the best case (within the left and

social movements, but also within the world of Catholic voluntary social work) as victims of these forces. I was very much involved in movements and struggles of migration at that time, and I felt the necessity of a different kind of gaze on migrants highlighting their subjectivity. I started to do some theoretical work on migration, connected to several projects of ‘militant investigation’, and I became interested in cultural and postcolonial studies since it seemed to me that independently of many shortcomings, they provided a kind of rich archive for the theoretical work I was beginning to develop. My own rendering of autonomy of migration (a label I started to use much later) is very much influenced by this beginning and by the attempt to combine with my autonomist and ‘workerist’ background insights coming from cultural and postcolonial studies (as well as some classical sources, such as the research of the young Max Weber on peasants’ migration from Eastern Prussia in the 1890s and WEB Du Bois’s analysis of the ‘great migration North’). An old French friend and comrade, Yann Moulrier Boutang, was moreover working in the same years on his great book on wage labour in ‘historical capitalism’, *De l’Esclavage au Salarial* (1999), highlighting the fact that mobility had always been a fundamental stake in workers’ behaviours and struggles: we discussed a lot at the time, and those discussions were crucial for me. Only a couple of years later did I start to work systematically on new theories of migration (I am thinking, for instance, of ‘transnationalism’ and the ‘new economics of migration’) and I tried to readjust my own approach accordingly.

But the major breakthrough occurred at the beginning of the new century, when I discovered (basically through discussions during political events like the contestation of the G8 in Genoa, the European Social Forums in Florence and in Paris, some NoBorder camps) the existence of a new generation of critical migration scholars that were working precisely in the same direction I was trying to follow: to mention a couple of names, I am thinking of Manuela Bojadzjev and Vassilis Tsianos in Germany, Nicholas De Genova in the US, Peter Nyers and William Walters in Canada, Ranabir Samaddar in India, and Angela Mitropoulos and Brett Neilson in Australia. Not all of them would explicitly subscribe to the autonomy of migration approach; nevertheless, they have all been (together with many others) part of the *koiné* (of the epistemic and political community) within which that approach has been developed and ‘transnationalized’ in the last decade.

To speak of an ‘autonomy of migration’ means to understand it as a social movement in the literal sense of the words and not as a mere response to economic and social malaise. Many activists and scholars share today this basic definition of the autonomy of migration, taken from a book by Dimitris Papadopoulos, Niamh Stephenson, and Vassilis Tsianos (*Escape Routes* 2008). The autonomy of migration approach does not ignore, of course, the relevance of social, legal, political, cultural, and economic structures in framing migratory experiences. It rather considers the social process and movement of migration (and not migrants individually considered) as a creative force within these structures. This produces a specific gaze on migration, one that looks at migratory movements and conflicts in terms that prioritize the subjective practices, the desires, the expectations, and the behaviours of migrants themselves. Since theoretical supporters of the autonomy of migration have been often criticized for romanticizing migration, it is important to add that we always kept in mind the *ambivalence* of these subjective practices and behaviours. New *dispositifs* of domination and exploitation are forged within migration considered as a social movement, as well as new practices of liberty and equality. The autonomy of migration approach, in this regard, needs to be understood as a distinct perspective from which to view the subjective stakes within the struggles and clashes that materially constitute the field of the migratory experience. It does not lead to down-playing the role of

power relationships within this field; rather, it is intended to open up a new angle on these very relationships, emphasizing resistance and struggle as their constitutive elements. We are not far from Foucault's theory of power, in this general sense.

As far as I am personally concerned, I have tried [especially in a long essay that has just come out in English, "The gaze of autonomy" (Mezzadra, 2010)] to further develop the autonomy of migration approach in relation to the role played by (labour) mobility in the history and in the contemporary reality of capitalism as well as to the topic of production of subjectivity under capitalism. Labour mobility has always been a contested field in historical capitalism: to put it in a very general way, capital's solicitation of labour mobility has always gone hand in hand with manifold attempts to filter, to curb, and even to block it. It is also by keeping the misunderstandings about 'romanticizing' migration in mind that I stressed in my recent writings that autonomy of migration is also a specific angle on exploitation. I think we really need to overcome the polarity in critical migration studies between an economic consideration of migration under the headline of 'exploitation' and a more positive view, mainly proposed by cultural studies theorists, which highlights migrants' hybridity and 'cosmopolitanism from below'. Maybe it is here that my workerist background is most clear in my discussion of the autonomy of migration. Since the early 1960s Italian workerism attempted to develop Marx's statement that capital is not 'a thing' but 'a social relation', emphasising the constitutive element of antagonism and of labour subjectivity within the very structure of capital. This opened up a very different angle on 'exploitation' from traditional Marxist analyses, one that makes an 'economistic' and 'objective' rendering of the concept impossible. My work can be understood as an attempt to further develop this view of exploitation with regard to labour mobility and migration.

There are, of course, many other points that can be discussed regarding the autonomy of migration: its relationship with citizenship, the concept of social movement that I (we) use, and so on. Your own work on European Neighbourhood Policy and migration routes management, for example, was precisely one of the starting points for this conversation.

INT: Indeed, it is through the various papers, meetings, and movement groups struggling to frame a new lexicon and corresponding set of practices to deal with migration that our own paths crossed. One area of your recent work has engaged increasingly with transit migration. It seems that your framing of the notion of the autonomy of migration and your current projects on transit migration are interestingly inflected by your earlier theoretical and political work. How do you understand this issue in the context of longer engagements with workerism and post-workerist movements in Italy?

SM: "Transit Migration" was the title of a project run by some of my (our) German friends (<http://www.transitmigration.org/>), which resulted among other things in an important book (*Turbulente Ränder: Neue Perspektiven auf Migration an den Grenzen Europas* 2007). I had the privilege to participate in several workshops and conferences organised within the framework of that project, and I must say that it marked really a crucial threshold in European critical migration studies. A new gaze on migration and border management took shape in the development of the project, which is nowadays further developed in Germany by the KritNet network (*Netzwerk kritische Migrations- und Grenzregimeforschung*). The 'Transit Migration' Project focused on Southeast Europe, which is a classical example of 'transit migration area' (that is, in the mainstream and official language, an area through which migratory routes pass without being an 'area of destination' for migrants). While analysing the reshaping

of the European migration regime around the governance of subjects in motion, the researchers were able to map new practices of mobility that make transit migration a much wider experience and category than the official language has it. Patterns of circular and seasonal migration are increasingly shaping migrants' experience in Europe and elsewhere, and this challenges theoretical and political frameworks centred, for instance, on the concept of 'integration'.

More recently, I have become involved in another project, "Transit Labour", coordinated by Brett Neilson at the Centre for Cultural Research at the University of Western Sydney (<http://transitlabour.asia/>). This project investigates changing patterns of labour and mobility in the whirlwind of Asian capitalist transformation, examining the role of creativity, invention, and knowledge production in the new economic order. It focuses on the precariousness and mobility of creative labour across three cities: Kolkata, Shanghai, and Sydney. I mention this project because the concept of 'transit labour' has been developed from within the workerist and post-workerist discussion in Italy and elsewhere. You may be familiar with post-workerist discussions of cognitive capitalism and labour: this project deals with cognitive labour, for instance, in China, the 'factory of the world' often analysed from the point of view of such concepts as 'neo-Fordism' or 'peripheral Fordism'. While also we emphasise the relevance of cognitive and creative labour in China (both from the point of view of capitalist development and from the point of view of the composition of living labour), the concept of 'transit labour' is also meant as a critical intervention in 'our discussion' (where too often there has been a kind of linear interpretation of the transition from Fordism to post-Fordism, from the hegemony of industrial labour to the hegemony of cognitive labour). Briefly put again: at least in my interpretation, transit labour refers not only to 'geographical' mobility but also to a mobility among several labour regimes that exist at the same time. Not only in China!

INT: In discussing the autonomy of migration and transit migration in several of your recent papers, you seem to have become increasingly interested in spatial practices, cartography, and emerging forms of mapping. In what ways are these important in your current thinking?

SM: You are right: especially in the book on borders I am currently writing with Brett Neilson (*Border as Method*), we use a lot of 'geographical' literature. This is because we are convinced that one of the distinctive features of contemporary processes of globalisation lies in the continuous reshaping and intertwining of different geographical scales, which can no longer be taken for granted in their stability. In our book we try to address this problem and to make sense of the different kinds of mobilities that traverse and intersect different kinds of spaces, making the very concept of space increasingly heterogeneous and complicated in its constitution. It is clear, therefore, that we are interested in spatial practices and forms of mapping emerging out of the current crisis of cartographic reason. Both the space of capital and the space of labour have become increasingly mobile (in different ways, of course, but we need to problematise the standard discourse on the mobility of capital and fixity of labour), though there is a need to understand that even the global political space cannot any more be cartographically represented as a stable space. We are, for instance, increasingly aware of the limits and pitfalls of such concepts as 'Third World', 'Global South', and even centre/periphery. Emerging spatial practices and critical forms of mapping are nowadays privileged tools of knowledge production on the spatial revolution we are currently experiencing. Needless to say, these tools can be used with different intentions. One has to think only of the uncanny

analogies between the interactive map produced by the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD)⁽¹⁾ within the framework of the so-called ‘Dialogue on Mediterranean Trans-Migration’⁽²⁾ to track and control the increasing unpredictability and autonomy of migration in that area and the many maps produced by activists and critical scholars to get a sense of this ‘ambivalence’. There is, of course, a politics of knowledge production to be taken into account here: mapping has never been and cannot be neutral nowadays in front of new emerging digital and topologic cartographic techniques, representations, and concepts. This is the reason why I find so interesting your work on *countermapping*, and I think the *counter* in ‘countermapping’ is a fundamental challenge to be taken up. Who are the addressees of our work, which kind of relationship are we able to envision between theoretical practices and activism? These are old questions that we need to ask again and again.

The EU’s emerging foreign policy towards the Mediterranean

INT: As you hinted earlier, one of the main factors currently shaping the EU’s southern borders is the current external policy framework of the EU called the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). The ENP sets out a path for economic integration of neighbouring states and the mechanisms for the control of migration and border management in those states. But unlike enlargement and accession processes in Eastern Europe, ENP partners in the Mediterranean have no short-term chance of EU accession, but are being articulated in a ‘new ring of friends’. In the implementation of this political geography we witness the deployment of a dizzying mix of actors, including partner states, EU agencies, EU member states, international agencies, and NGO’s to name a few. While tensions and even conflict may emerge between these diverse actors, there exists a broader movement toward this attempt to spatially reorganize the Mediterranean. The different goals and jurisdictions of this multiplicity of actors raise interesting questions about the changing role of sovereignty and the emerging forms of governance we are beginning to witness across the region. When writing about the border regime, you speak of governance but also governmentality. Could you explain further how these two concepts might help us here in this complex institutional matrix, and what new kinds of governmentality you see emerging in regard to migration?

SM: The concepts of governance and governmentality come, as you know, from different sources. The first one can be understood as a kind of ‘neoliberal’ concept, emerging out of the attempt to overcome the ‘fiscal crisis of the state’ in the early 1970s and to criticise theories and practices of ‘big government’ (although one should not forget that there are nowadays several ‘critical’ theories of governance). ‘Corporate governance’ and ‘urban governance’ are perhaps the best-known fields, in which the rhetoric and practice of governance have become hegemonic in the last two decades (and it is

⁽¹⁾ ICMPD was created in 1993 upon the initiative of Austria and Switzerland “to serve as a support mechanism for informal consultation, and to provide expertise and efficient services in the newly emerging landscape of multilateral co-operation on migration and asylum issues” (<http://www.icmpd.org>). An international organisation with twelve member states, the ICMPD is today a crucial player in the European “migration management” regime, promoting intergovernmental dialogues, capacity-building programmes, and research activities.

⁽²⁾ The Dialogue on Mediterranean Transit Migration was launched in 2002: the I-Map, a key aspect of the dialogue was launched in 2007. Although access is restricted to partner states and partner organisations, a basic version is open to the public: [http://www.icmpd.org/906.html?&no_cache=1&tx_icmpd_pi1\[article\]=922&tx_icmpd_pi1\[page\]=1089](http://www.icmpd.org/906.html?&no_cache=1&tx_icmpd_pi1[article]=922&tx_icmpd_pi1[page]=1089)

easy to see that ‘corporate governance’ shapes nowadays the whole language of governance—just think of the ubiquity of such terms as ‘share holders’ and ‘stake holders’). Governmentality, on the other hand, is a term one cannot use without a reference to the critical investigation of power proposed by Michel Foucault: it was forged by him in the late 1970s, bringing together several insights he had developed in his previous work (first of all, the connection between power and knowledge, on the one hand, and power and subject constitution, on the other hand) and at the same time trying to open up a new field of investigation (pastoral power, biopolitics, neoliberalism itself).

What I try to do is to combine these very different bodies of literature in order to grasp the peculiarity of what many friends and scholars have proposed, to consider an emerging global border and migration regime. What does ‘global’ mean in this phrase? Of course, we do not refer to the emergence of an integrated global political government of migration. We rather refer to a contradictory and fragmentary formation of a body of knowledge within disparate epistemic and political communities. Administrative techniques of control, technical ‘standards’, and ‘capacity-building’ programmes circulate at the global level, deeply influencing the formulation of national migration policies. Such a truly global actor as the International Organization for Migration (IOM) is, for instance, a crucial channel of circulation in this regard.⁽³⁾

If we look at the basic characteristics of this emerging global regime (what is usually called ‘migration management’), we see some of the most important elements that have been stressed by governance and governmentality scholars as part and parcel of the transition toward a new ‘governmental reason’: the blurring of boundaries between the private and public sectors, an emphasis on new tools and techniques to steer and guide without ‘commanding’, the role of ‘epistemic communities’, and the prevalence of the language of ‘risk calculation’ and ‘risk management’. Briefly put: what is emerging under the label of ‘migration management’ (and has to be analysed in a way that is aware of ‘local’ differences) is a flexible migration regime that corresponds to the capitalist need of a ‘just in time’ and ‘to the point’ migration. This model, which is not a ‘national’ model, is increasingly shaping national migration policies in several areas of the world, producing a multiscale and heterogeneous space of its implementation. And given the need to govern subjects in motion, it is particularly manifest at the border, and this makes it meaningful to speak of a ‘border and migration regime’. I would add in a tentative way that the relation between migration regime and border regime has been turned upside down in recent years: while in the past (I am thinking, for instance, of the heyday of European Fordism, which was also the time of ‘guest workers’ programmes in West Germany and elsewhere) the specific form of subordinate integration of migrants that was pursued shaped the regime of border control, nowadays it is the border regime itself that shapes the ways in which migration is managed within the polis.

The centrality of the border and the changing notion of sovereignty

INT: You make a similar point about the centrality of migration as a point of analytical departure in your essay “Border as method”, written with Brett Neilson (Mezzadra and Neilson, 2008). At the heart of your concerns are questions of sovereignty and rights in a context in which the spaces of EU action and border management are

⁽³⁾The IOM was founded in 1951 as an intergovernmental commission to manage refugees and migration in Europe in the early years of the cold war. The organisation took its current name in 1989, becoming a global actor in the promotion of migration management discourses, models, and logistics. See the IOM website: <http://www.iom.int>

producing extremely complex and diverse networks and spaces of action. Lawyers are very clear about the relationship between state, territory, and sovereignty. Geographers are perhaps more willing to consider that new forms of spatial organization may be reshaping in important ways the relationship between the state and territory, on the one hand, and sovereignty, on the other.

In this context we would like to ask you what kind(s) of sovereignty you think might be emerging in these new conditions?

SM: Well, what I am trying to understand, especially in the work with Brett, is precisely whether it is still necessary to make use of the concept of sovereignty in order to make sense of the changing shape and shifting assemblages of power emerging in the current transition. You know, of course, that both theories of governance and theories of governmentality take sovereignty as their main polemical target. This is particularly true in the case of Foucault, who presents governmentality as emerging precisely out of a crisis of sovereignty. There is a tendency to read Foucault's analysis of power in terms of a linear transition from sovereignty to discipline to biopolitical governmentality. I am perfectly aware that this interpretation is supported by some Foucauldian passages. Nevertheless, I do not think that this reading of Foucault is the most productive nowadays. I rather tend to agree with some postcolonial readers of Foucault (I think, for instance, of Ann Laura Stoler), who emphasise the need to critically analyse the moments of articulation and intertwining between the different power regimes distinguished by Foucault. Also, this reading can refer to Foucauldian passages, but this is not the most important thing: the point is rather that this reading is much more productive from the point of view of the critical analysis of the present.

Still, you have in the contemporary discussion such authors as Giorgio Agamben who are proposing a kind of apocalyptic concept of sovereignty based on a reading of the Schmittian theory of sovereignty as decision on the state of exception. I am very sceptical of this theory for several reasons. I will mention only two of them: on the one hand, the idea that exception has become permanent tends to make the concept of exception quite useless. An exception needs a norm in order to be defined. I am particularly interested in understanding the new 'norm' that is emerging in the current global transition. On the other hand, I find the concept of 'bare life' (the counterpart of sovereignty for Agamben) quite problematic: it can be, of course, descriptively useful in order to grasp specific processes of domination, but once it is transformed into the cornerstone of a political theory, it seems to me that it reinforces the idea that a full legal plenitude should characterise standard subjectivity in the terms imagined by theories of human rights. Since I have some problems with (mainstream, liberal, democratic, radical, anarchist) theories of human rights, I have some unease also with this kind of theoretical flipside of them. This is particularly the case when it comes to critical migration, refugees, and border studies, where there is a kind of polarisation between human rights and Agambenian perspectives. Needless to say, Agamben has provided important tools for highlighting and denouncing the violence permeating contemporary migration and border regimes. But at the same time, to put it in Foucauldian terms, the use of these categories leads very often to obscuring the productive nature of power as well as the rich fabric of resistances and moments of subjectivation that criss-cross the very working of those regimes at the level of everyday life.

Among the two poles of theories of governance and governmentality, on the one hand, and Schmittian theories of sovereignty, on the other, what Brett and I are trying to do is to work toward a different concept of sovereignty. We are very close from this point of view to the works of Michael Hardt and Toni Negri and of Saskia Sassen, who

have insisted on the fact that sovereignty remains an important “systemic property but its institutional insertion and its capacity to legitimate and absorb all legitimating power, to be the source of the law, have become unstable” (Sassen *Territory, Authority, Rights*, 2006, page 415). The concept we are trying to elaborate from the point of view of our analysis of border and migration regimes in different parts of the world is the concept of ‘sovereign machine of governmentality’. Simply put, we stress both the effectiveness and the limits of governance and governmentality, pointing to sovereignty as a kind of necessary supplement of them. I will try to make it clear with a (maybe too easy) example: I was referring above to the ‘dream’ of a ‘just in time’ and ‘to the point’ migration as a capitalist dream permeating the rationality of migration management. This dream is actually shaping migration policies and border regimes worldwide, but we know very well that its realisation is impossible. Sovereignty intervenes in the gap between dream and reality, converting the dream into a nightmare for a multitude of men and women.

INT: In responding to the ‘nightmare’ many migrants experience in their efforts to travel to Europe, Étienne Balibar has suggested that a Europe without borders and an open notion of European citizenship might be productive goals for political action. You and he have engaged in several debates around these issues. In your current work on transit migration how do you understand the role of border management? Who should (or can) regulate the movement of people into Europe, and under what conditions, rationales, and norms?

SM: Allow me to reply by first acknowledging my intellectual debt toward Étienne. And I do not think this is only a personal debt. A whole generation of critical scholars owes a lot to him, to the way in which he was able to take stock of 1989 without renouncing a theoretically radical stance and to the way in which he has been able to reframe the discussion on citizenship, borders, racism, and migration in the last two decades. Just to mention a single fact: when he asked at the end of the 1990s what we owe to the *sans papiers*, well, this was really a breakthrough for many of us.

There are, of course, differences among us, and they clearly emerged in the debates you mention. As Étienne himself has stated, he is much more Arendtian than I tend to be. Let’s put it simply for now: I stress much more than he does the limits of the very discourse of citizenship. But from the point of view of the European space, which Étienne invited us some years ago to consider as a ‘borderland’, I feel very close to him. In my own work on the ‘autonomy of migration’ I have written extensively on citizenship, on the need to reverse our gaze and to focus on movements, practices, and struggles of migration in order to understand the conflicts and tensions that are inscribed into the very institutional framework of citizenship. This argument has very important ‘spatial’ aspects: movements and struggles of migration have been continually decentring the European space itself, constantly reshuffling its geographic coordinates, and challenging any Eurocentric reading of the project of European citizenship itself. I share with Étienne the emphasis on the need to disentangle European citizenship (a ‘second degree’ citizenship, as you know) from national belonging, in order to open up a space for the development of its potentialities, or ‘virtualities’, as the European discussion used to say.

But as regards the present, we have to acknowledge that the project of European citizenship (considered by many scholars in the 1990s as a kind of new model of postnational citizenship) has failed, that the virtualities remain virtualities. Étienne himself has stated it very clearly some months ago in the wake of the Greek crisis. In this situation I do not think that it really makes sense to focus on new projects of democratic border management and regulation of the movement of people into

Europe (of 'democratization of the border', as Étienne would have it). Frankly speaking, I have always hesitated to do that, and I rather prefer to focus on what I call 'border struggles'. But I repeat, nowadays, in the middle of a crisis that is challenging the very existence of the monetary integration in Europe, it seems to me more important to concentrate our discussion on the ways in which social movements and struggles, as well as political action and intellectual intervention can open up new European spaces. Something promising in this regard is, for instance, happening within the movements that have challenged neoliberal reforms of the university in many European countries in the last months.

Needless to say, I am convinced that the topic of migration has to be crucial to all these attempts. If you look at the 'migratory crisis' in Italy in the wake of the uprisings in North Africa and the war in Libya, you can see once again very clearly that the European Union is not currently able to take any positive initiative. While hundreds of migrants were dying once again in the Mediterranean in the attempt to reach the shores of Lampedusa, the panic of the Italian government in front of 20 000 people who were actually able to arrive (mainly from Tunisia) was echoed by the French and the German governments. They were interested only in sealing the borders of their countries, defending the most restrictive interpretation of the Schengen rules, and even challenging the very existence of the Schengen free-circulation system. Interestingly enough, in its recent communication on migration after the uprisings in the Maghreb, the European Commission [COM(2011) 248 final] endorses the claims for tightening the Schengen control devices and the policing of the Mediterranean. But it also emphatically remembers the dramatic need for Europe to address 'the demographic decline in its working age population' and 'skill shortages' in strategic economic sectors via 'targeted immigration of third country nationals'. With nationalism and populism, on the one hand, and a widespread awareness to foster new massive and selective programmes of migrants' recruitment, the differential filtering of migration that we have been describing in the last decade risks becoming more and more combined with violent and even racist patterns of subordination of migrants in European societies under these conditions.

Are new postcolonial geographies and geopolitics emerging?

INT: We are struck by the ways in which new institutions and practices have emerged to manage the African routes to which you refer. These appear to draw on the experience and expertise deriving from colonial administrative histories as well as postcolonial migration flows. For example, under the initial proposals of the EU's Global Approach to Migration the UK has been given primary responsibility for the management and coordination of East-African routes, Spain is responsible for managing the Northwest-African route, and Italy for migration practices between the EU and Libya. Even the term and notion of 'detention camp' both within and outside EU territory, used to signal and critique the price of migrant detention, resonates strongly with the colonial development and use of 'camps'.

Does this possible equivalence of contemporary EU regional and social policy with earlier forms of colonial strategy have meaning for us today? Does the colonial analogy offer something important to our analyses or is it more a rhetorical strategy? For example, can we see the reinforcement of border management in neighbouring states that are former colonies of EU member states as a way of solidifying the borders of those states that were drawn often by the colonial powers themselves? In a sense then, while border externalization may or may not be seen in the light of a colonial/postcolonial policy, the practice of border externalization may perhaps be having the

effect (intended or not) of reinforcing a sort of modernist path of nation-states development reproducing a metropole-colony hierarchy.

SM: There are colonial continuities in the way in which the European migration regime is implemented in Africa (and elsewhere). This is for me a matter of fact. For me the point is how to interpret them. Consider that I am writing while listening to the Al Jazeera reports on the uprisings across the Maghreb and the Mashrek, particularly in Egypt and Libya these days. Will these uprisings have some effect on the implementation of the European border and migration regime in such a crucial geographic area? This is a very important question we'll have to keep in mind in the next months. It would be too easy for me to make jokes about the fact that in the relation between Libya and Italy Libya seemed to be the more powerful party until the uprisings and the war (to the point that Qaddafi is said to have taught Berlusconi the *bunga bunga* stuff that is the main topic of public discussion in Italy and also abroad these weeks). The jokes are just jokes (while the fact remains): the real point is to understand whether the 'agency', the spaces of action of former colonial subjects (from governments to social movements to migrants), is as limited as it was in the colonial period. If we recognise a more significant agency on the side of former colonial subjects, well, this is something we should consider in our attempts to come to grips with the meaning of the colonial continuities.

I repeat: the existence of these continuities is a matter of fact. Nevertheless, I remain sceptical about interpretations of the 'externalisation' of the European migration regime centred upon the concept of 'neocolonialism'. As you may know, I try to develop a postcolonial gaze on the very continuities that you were stressing. This depends, of course, on the way in which I understand the postcolonial itself. Although I think most postcolonial theorists share the idea that the very fabric of the present is traversed and criss-crossed by colonial continuities (or at least by bits and pieces of the colonial 'archive'), I want to stress two further points: the first is that precisely as part and parcel of the legacy of anticolonial struggles, the agency of the former colonised subjects is inscribed into the very assemblages of power within which colonial continuities emerge; the second is that colonial elements can definitely play a crucial role within those assemblages of power, but they do not configure a consistent and stable 'system'. This seems to me to be the case today both in Iraq and in the Maghreb.

INT: On that note, and by way of concluding, could you share some of your thoughts on the current uprisings and upheaval across North Africa and the Middle East in light of the borders and migration question and in light of what we have been discussing? We have seen how the numbers of migrant crossings have risen across the Mediterranean since the revolts began in Tunisia, and how Qaddafi early on implicitly threatened loosening border control of migrants in light of Western support for the opposition. Given these developments what transformations and/or continuities might emerge with regards to the EU's border regime? How can we think through the connections and distinctions between migration and the popular revolts afoot?

SM: Once again, one could start by saying that Qaddafi has taught the Italian government something: the way in which the 'migratory crisis' of these weeks in Lampedusa was managed in its early phase was pretty much similar to what you say about Qaddafi. The Italian government threatened to give migrants a temporary Schengen visa with which they could travel across Europe in order to press the European institutions to intervene within a 'burden sharing' logic. But as I was already saying, the inability of the European Union to develop a 'positive' political initiative with regard to thousands of people trying to cross the Mediterranean is more important to

me than the wicked acrobatics of the Italian government. You can imagine the density of war ships in the Mediterranean these past weeks with the war on Libya: not one of these ships has been mobilised to rescue the hundreds of migrants who are drowning in the sea! And everybody is celebrating in Europe the newly acquired freedom and democracy in countries like Tunisia.

There are people on the left who say migrants should not come to Europe right now: they should remain in their countries (once again the main reference at least in Italy is Tunisia) and engage in building up a new democratic regime, in consolidating 'freedom'. Two questions seem to me important here. Do these people imagine the kind of migratory pressure that had been accumulated through the transformation of such a government as the one of Ben Ali into an armed avant-garde of the European border and migration regime? Thousands of people were just waiting for a chance to migrate, to join families and friends in Europe, and this was for them the most concrete meaning of 'freedom'. But there is an even more general question to be asked: Is it possible nowadays to imagine freedom in a way that does not include freedom of movement as one of its key elements? During the uprisings in Egypt and Tunisia, as well as in other places across the Maghreb and the Mashrek, mainstream media were excited about the rise of a new 'Arabic youth', grown up with the Internet and social media. And now this youth should learn that though the Internet is a borderless space, their physical mobility has precise limits. I really cannot understand how it is possible for the huge majority of politicians and public opinion in Europe to imagine a stable Euro-Mediterranean area based upon such a dramatic divide in the chances of mobility between the populations inhabiting the two shores of the same sea. It is in this regard that the inability of the European Union I was referring to above becomes really scary.

But there is something more to be added. Not only 'freedom', but also 'democracy' is celebrated in the European public discourse as an achievement of the uprisings in a country like Tunisia. And at the same time everybody (not only conservative governments, but also centre-left oppositions) agrees on the fact that it is very urgent to renegotiate repatriation and migration control agreements with the new 'democratic' Tunisian government. Don't you feel there is a slight contradiction here? Everybody in Europe would like to see again the Tunisian navy patrolling the shore of the country; army and police playing the role of a dike against the migration of nationals as well as people coming from further South, with European funding, and capacity building and logistical assistance. Do you really think a democratic government can perform such roles? I take 'democracy' in its most elementary meaning, to be a political regime in which government depends on the vote of its citizens. Can you imagine the Italian government sending the army and police to patrol borders with Austria or France in order to stop Italian citizens who want to leave the country? No, you can't. There were in the past such regimes (for instance, the German Democratic Republic in the age of the Berlin Wall), and there are a lot of them nowadays (for instance North Korea). But they are not 'democratic' regimes.

What does this mean? Well, I suppose it means that independently of what everybody says, there is in Europe a strong *desire* not to have in North Africa 'democratic' regimes, but rather at least 'moderately' authoritarian ones. Only such regimes can guarantee the continuity of the European migration and border regime in the Mediterranean area. It is not easy to confess this desire, but this is often the case with desires, particularly when they are associated with embarrassing spectres—such as the idea that democracy does not really work with Arabs. Needless to say, this has a lot to do with the question of colonial continuities we were discussing before. Building bridges with the insurgent youth in the Maghreb is for me the most important task to be performed if 'we, the citizens of Europe' (to recall the title of Étienne Balibar's book)

really want to contribute to reinventing the Euro-Mediterranean area as a space of freedom and equality.

INT: Sandro, we want to thank you for your willingness to engage with us on these matters and on questions of such importance for scholars of the contemporary transformations of society and space. We hope the journal readers will be interested to follow up on your writings from the select bibliography below, and we look forward to further conversations and engagements in the future.

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