MIGRATION MOVEMENTS, TERRITORIAL BORDERS AND PLACES OF EXCLUSION: TOWARDS A NEW GEOPOLITICS OF POPULATION IN EUROPE

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INTRODUCTION

The definition and management of European frontiers has historically been a complex exercise in geopolitical terms. Certainly, the main scenario over the last decade has been one in which the Euro-Mediterranean frontier has been subjected to pressure from repeated so-called "migration emergencies". This cross-border geopolitical situation hinges in particular on the role of those countries situated in locations that are geographically most favourable for crossing borders. It is difficult to assess the extent to which the recurrent migration crises may be attributed to exogenous factors such as failed states, military and civil conflicts, economic collapse or environmental disasters, or endogenous ones such as border control, management of migration flows, integration policies or stagnant economies in the host countries. The increase in migration flows over recent years is certainly quite exceptional when compared to the average rate of arrivals during the previous decade, but one cannot help but question whether it is so exceptional as to justify the sequence of unilateral actions to reinforce national border controls carried out by several European countries in recent months. In other words, the question is whether the present geopolitical impasse on the Mediterranean borders of Europe is simply a migration crisis in the narrowest sense or whether it is a result of a "crisis of policy".

The principal objective pursued by European politics over the last decade has basically been to confine undesired migration movements to the fringes of Europe as far as possible, directly in countries outside Europe, or else in the Member States situated along what has now become a common border. This has been carried out both by the stipulation of a dense network of cooperation agreements with countries outside Europe and by the reinforcement of the rules of the so-called "Dublin System", in place since 1997, which places the burden of providing shelter to asylum seekers on the country of first arrival. This type of model was unsustainable from both the judicial and the geopolitical points of view, and signs of the crisis it has caused have been obvious for several years now. The dramatic humanitarian situation that has been created as much on the borders with countries outside the Schengen Agreement as on the internal borders between EU states, as well as in the many migrant centres of various different kinds, clearly expresses the sense of the inadequacy of the European political response to the present crisis.

THE BUILDING OF EUROPE BETWEEN NEW GEOPOLITICAL AREAS AND GRADUATED FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT

The arduous evolution of the European Union as a key transnational geopolitical figure is taking place in parallel with a complex redefinition of the policies of Member States with regard to their frontiers, along their new and shared external borders. Many commentators believe that this development is exemplified above all by their policies on the control of external borders; others see the creation of the Schengen area, with the establishment of shared external borders, as the foundation of a different type of European citizenship, constructed on a new definition of belonging and of difference. At any rate, the creation of Schengen as an area of freedom, security and justice would appear to replicate at a continental level the same geopolitical dynamics produced by the creation and transformation of national spaces: a new transnational political and socio-economic unit is being created, which is at the same time marking out a boundary line that defines the rights of belonging.

In modern geopolitical theory, borders are habitually described as lines of separation between different sovereign political entities. They are seen as force fields where contrasting geopolitical factors interact with each other in search of a final equilibrium constructed around a territorial demarcation of different spheres of influence (Agnew, 1999). In this context, the new geopolitical unit that is the Nation State, being an expression of a particularistic perspective, has attributed a special and exclusive significance to the "territorialisation of identity and the conferring of identity on territories" (Encel, Thual, 2004), and has contributed to the reshaping of countries' concepts of frontiers and borders from a modern perspective. In the modern geopolitical imagination, the border appears as a line or barrier that identifies and protects national sovereignty from the outside, functioning as an institutional system attributed with prevalently politico-military functions.

On the basis of this model, the business of controlling borders is managed exclusively by national authorities and is generally the responsibility of the security forces. It is no coincidence that the areas in the immediate vicinity of the borders, more technically defined as frontiers[15], have often taken shape as places with strong military defences, fully equipped with strategic infrastructure aimed at protecting the integrity and independence of the national territory (Kolossov, 2005). Alongside this strictly military function, a further dimension in border control has been developing since

15. For many experts in the field of Political Geography, the concepts of "boundary", as a line of separation, and "frontier", as a space for politico-spatial encounter and the superimposition of political powers, have well-established different meanings. However, in this article the two terms will be treated as synonymous, as tends to be the case in most present-day debate. Alongside the concepts of boundary and frontier as a means for the spatialisation of political power, the idea of "border" has also emerged as a tool for the social segmentation and stratification that has led to the practice of bordering. That is, a process of production and reproduction of borders regardless of their geographical situation, for the spatial creation of segregation, exclusion and restriction of mobility.

the end of the 19th Century, linked to the need to keep movements that are perceived as undesirable, in that they threaten public order or the national economy, at a distance from national territory.

Schengen has certainly been a very significant development in the recent history of the re-allocation of European borders, a stage that could be seen as having a certain continuity in the line of events that have been crucial in the territorial stabilization of Europe[16]. However, as has been opportunely pointed out (Walters, 2002), the implicit geopolitics of Schengen do not correlate with wars and conflicts between the great powers, fighting to ensure their own hegemony in Europe. Behind the creation of this European space as an area of liberty, security and justice, there is a process moving towards rendering internal borders increasingly less significant and consequently towards regional integration. At the same time, however, the de-securitization of political and socio-economic borders within Europe has in some ways created a parallel reinforcement of the border police (Campesi, 2015), who are called upon to control the movement of the so-called “irregular” transnational players.

In other words, the liberalization of borders does not automatically produce a spatiality that is free from hegemonies, powers and controls. On the contrary, Schengen is the embodiment of a complex hierarchical politico-economic spatiality constructed around a network of communications and circulation, that develops different rights to movement and graduated degrees of possibility for crossing borders through the European region. So this tension between the impetus towards the liberalization of borders, deriving from the geo-economic imperatives of global capitalism, and the apparent counterthrust towards the closing and protection of borders, deriving from the geopolitics of global insecurity, is producing a new regime for management of mobility in which freedom and security, rather than opposing each other, actually support each other (Chalfin, 2012).

Recent international events however, above all in terms of migration, have badly shaken the vision of a unified European area and the protection of its borders, bringing the European Union to an impasse, stuck half way between the responsibilities of its respective Member States and those of the European institutions themselves. A complex tangle has ensued that has produced serious consequences for national and pan-European security concerning two fundamental aspects: the management of Europe’s external borders – illegal trafficking, irregular migration flows and terrorism – and reception procedures for those seeking international protection.

Two contrasting and opposing visions and needs have thus arisen: the safeguard of the European area and the protection of national interests. On the one hand, European integration has led to the elimination of internal barriers within the European Union, transcending political, social and economic borders. Freedom of movement is fundamental to the vision of a Europe without barriers and the construction of a European community and identity. On the other hand, from an intergovernmental perspective, territorial security necessarily prevails on the freedom

16. Westphalia 1648, Vienna 1815, Berlin 1878, Versailles 1918, Potsdam 1945, Berlin 1989.

of movement; States have the right and the duty to exercise their territorial sovereignty though control of their borders and management of migration flows and it is this control that has recently led to the creation of both tangible and intangible barriers.

So what should have been guaranteed through the Schengen-Frontex combination, that is, the joint arrangement consisting of freedom of movement within a territory and control of its external borders, has not functioned as in the case of the classic Nation-States. More specifically, the Schengen Agreement focuses particularly on a pact of mutual trust and solidarity between Member States that has led to the abolition of barriers and controls along its internal borders; for all intents and purposes external borders have been "moved" to coincide almost entirely with those of the whole Schengen area. This implies that every single country, particularly those situated along the area's external frontier, assumes responsibility for the control of the Schengen borders in the interests of the other Member States to ensure the highest levels of internal security. This fundamental commitment implies the ability – and the trust of the other countries – to control borders (airport borders, land borders and maritime borders) and to cooperate with all relative State and supranational actors.

The explicit and implicit implications of the Schengen Agreement comprise a variety of positive elements, but also and above all many weaknesses. By allowing the free movement of people within its Member States, Schengen has radically changed the political geography of mobility and individual State migration policies have acquired a previously unheard of supranational dimension (Giordano, 2015). The security and management of Schengen borders in airports is relatively straightforward, as for example in Austria; land and maritime borders under significant migratory pressure are, however, much harder to control, as is the case with Poland and Italy respectively (Giordano 2016b). At the same time, checks at internal national borders have gradually been abolished, providing foreign immigrants with the same advantages as EU citizens, whether they be regular or illegal (Morehouse, Blomfield, 2011).

Essentially, the Schengen Agreement has given rise to a contradiction in terms that lies at the heart of Europe: on the one hand the Agreement claimed to establish a supranational border for the first time in the history of Europe; on the other, it handed the onus of managing that border to a limited number of States, those bordering with extra-EU countries who also had to assume responsibility for the identification and repatriation of irregular migrants from Third Countries.

What is more, the setting up of Frontex, a European agency that was to be increasingly endowed with supranational functions, led to the emergence of what is to all intents and purposes an explicit challenge to one of the cornerstones of national sovereignty: control of the external borders, traditionally the domain of the Nation State, which would now be managed in partnership with agents from other nations. This dovetailing of political functions in a way that is not yet sufficiently consistent - in the absence of a genuine European policy on immigration and in the presence of other causes of geopolitical, environmental and financial origins (Giordano, 2014),

not forgetting the heavy influence of national egoisms - has contributed to the failure of the European Union Asylum policy and the creation of genuine personal and social exclusion zones.

WALLS, BARRIERS AND EXCLUSION ZONES

Truth be told, EU States have always considered immigration an exclusively national responsibility and have therefore failed to put the provisions of the Schengen Agreement into practice in the application of the Convention. This same legislation did not stop at the straightforward abolition of borders, instead it stipulated a set of compensatory measures to stop the freedom of movement from transforming itself into an open invitation for illegal trafficking of goods or people. In fact, in this case article 17 of the Schengen Agreement speaks clearly: “with regard to the movement of persons, the Parties shall endeavour to abolish checks at common borders and transfer them to their external borders. To that end they shall endeavour first to harmonise, where necessary, the laws, regulations and administrative provisions concerning the prohibitions and restrictions on which the checks are based and to take complementary measures to safeguard internal security and prevent illegal immigration by nationals of States that are not members of the European Communities”. Although some level of uniformity exists today in certain areas of the Schengen acquis, there is still a lack of consistency in the protection of external borders that represents a weakness in the system, as well as threatening the security of its internal borders. This has produced an increase in mistrust between Member States and therefore the reinstatement of controls within the area.

Even more worrying than the escalation of border controls within the Schengen area is the construction of walls, barriers and fences along borders between EU countries, an authentic step back in time that was not thought possible after the decades of free movement that have brought so many benefits to European States. The Eighties ended with a Europe proud to have dismantled the Berlin Wall, yet this barrier was an exit border designed to stop Eastern Germans from emigrating to the West; the government of East Germany forced citizens to remain within its own territory, restricting their freedom of movement. Today’s walls are entry borders, that is, they are intended to stop unwanted people from entering the country, such as those born in unfortunately poor countries or persecuted in various ways by their governments.

This is particularly true in Eastern Europe where more and more anti-immigration barriers are being erected. For the first time since before the Second World War, an area once known as “the time bomb of Europe” is again marked by militarised borders. Hungary has recently finished building a wall along the border with Serbia, while both Bulgaria and Greece have erected analogous barriers along their respective borders with Turkey and Macedonia has done the same along the border with Greece. The one objective that all these States share is to stop illegal immigrants from entering their own national territories. In reality, it also involves decisions made in order to combat the growing electoral success of anti-immigration parties such as Gold-

en Dawn in Greece and, on the other side of the Channel, Nigel Farage's Ukip, whose main platform in support of Brexit was, in fact, the aversion to immigrants, although this time from the European Union.

Macedonia, one of the first stages on the so-called "Balkan route", has also begun to erect a barrier along its border with Greece to block entry to all migrants except those from Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan, three war-torn countries whose citizens have a better chance of being offered refugee status once they have entered Europe. At the moment, the barrier consists of a metal fence topped with barbed wire. This situation has ended up causing a humanitarian crisis in Greece, especially in the small village of Idomeni in the municipality of Paionia in Greek Macedonia, which unwillingly found itself to be another key geographic location for migrations, like Lampedusa. Idomeni is a border village just a few metres from the barrier, with a long history of migration and a population of about one hundred and fifty inhabitants - most of whom are elderly since the young people have emigrated. It became a focus for world news partly because its inhabitants responded to the crisis by offering help and support, even though the population had shot up from one hundred and fifty to over ten thousand. This small village was, in effect, transformed into a large refugee camp, offering shelter to more and more people every day as they sought to cross the border to the north. By March 2016, however, the situation had become unsustainable, with the refugee camp housing ten times more migrants than its actual capacity allowed. In May 2016, the Greek police began dismantling the Idomeni refugee camp. The refugees, who were living in the camp in very precarious conditions according to humanitarian organisations, were moved to reception camps in the north of the country.

At this point, we need to ask ourselves what motivates States to build barriers, returning to times of closure and opposition that have historically led to tragedy. As transit countries that do not represent the final destination of those migrating, governments often claim they are not able to sustain the cost of reception procedures. In each of these countries however, it is evident that the pressure exercised by anti-immigration movements represented in parliaments have become the thorn in the side of governments who are thus forced to respond. Clearly, statistics tell us that walls help prevent migrants trying to cross borders at specific points, sometimes reducing their number drastically. However, rather than stopping migration waves, they simply deviate them towards other less controlled or harder to control borders. Recent research shows that the construction or strengthening of walls will not change or interrupt the flows. What counts are the reasons that lie behind the decision to depart: new wars, revolts, famine and the worsening of unfavourable climactic conditions determine the scale of migration (Giordano, 2013).

What emerges from most studies and research and that weighs more heavily than any other consideration, is the European Union's basic evasion of the issue. Let it be clear: this is due to the existence of many different and in some cases contrasting national policies, as well as the national resistance of European States guided by governments afraid of antagonising their electorates. It is also clear that no single European electorate sharing the same objectives exists and that Nation States respond

to the requests of their own populations, thus creating walls, trenches and barriers between their territories.

But the issue of areas of personal and social exclusion within European territory is no less complicated. These refer to the various forms of containment and control of asylum seekers and migrants in general: reception centres, centres for asylum seekers, centres for identification and deportation, "hotspot" centres etc. In reality these are by and large case studies of administrative detention. The history of the administrative detention of foreigners differs widely from country to country and this has had a profound effect on how the judicial and social sciences have regarded the institution. In the United States and Britain, its roots extend far back in time and this has clearly fostered a tendency to consider administrative detention as an instrument of ordinary administration that does not need to be hedged around with specific guarantees (Wilsher, 2012). In these countries, the term "detention" is used in the official lexicon without any qualms, while the management of the migrant centres has been largely inspired by the model of common law prisons. It is only recently that administrative detention of foreigners has begun to attract the attention of human rights activists and social scientists, who see in them a further sign of the expansion of powers of penal control in the era of mass incarceration (Bosworth, Turnbull, 2014).

In continental Europe, the history of the administrative detention of immigrants is much more recent, however. Right from the start, the judicial and social sciences have denounced the legal scandal that this represents, forcing governments to emphasize the humanitarian nature of the migrant centres that were being opened (Fisher, Clémence, 2010). It is not by chance that the official lexis in countries such as France, Italy and Spain avoids the mention of the word "detention", preferring euphemisms such as "retention", "reception" and "internment". In response, the political and academic debate often refers to the creation of new "immigration lagers", to emphasize the contrast between the principles of the rule of law and the administrative detention of foreigners. This interpretation has also been legitimized at a theoretical level, where people have not been slow to compare the migrant centres with concentration camps. Many consider the "camps" of our own times to be places in which the principles of the rule of law have been suspended and where the exception becomes the rule.

All this fits in another criticality: the Common Asylum Policy in the EU. Facts demonstrate that over the last decade the rules set by the Dublin Regulation for a Common Asylum Policy in the EU exist on a purely formal level as the basis for an informal and tacit compromise between Mediterranean and Northern European States. Despite restrictions established by Dublin, the Mediterranean European States are substantially alone in having taken on the costly onus of receiving and guaranteeing initial assistance to asylum seekers, while maintaining a lax approach to those who refuse to register themselves because they wish to formally apply for asylum in Northern Europe.

This game of *do ut des* holds few advantages for either side and only persists because it is unanimously considered the lesser evil in comparison to the only possible alternative: a real common asylum policy. In brief, the EU states have preferred

to adopt an inefficient, badly performing system, rather than concede their respective national competences in this field. This evidently defective system puts the existence of a common good such as the freedom of movement at serious risk. Guaranteed by the Schengen Agreement, this system was feasible as long as the number of new arrivals to Europe remained at least manageable if not low. It began to show dangerous shortcomings after 2011, under the gusts of the perfect storm sparked by the Arab Spring (Giordano, 2011) and the break out of war in Syria that has upset the entire geopolitical equilibrium of the Southern shores of the Mediterranean, unleashing the most serious refugee crisis in Europe since the post war period of the Second World War (Tsourdi, De Bruycker, 2015).

The geopolitical situation has however considerably worsened over recent years. The south-eastern shore of the Mediterranean leaves us few reasons to be cheerful. While Tunisia guides its own democratic experiment among fears and shocks, Libya is in a state of total disintegration. Egypt is resigned to the repressions of Al Sisi, while Syria has sunk into another year of civil war. Post-coup Turkey seems to be in decisive disagreement with the United States and the EU, while Lebanon flounders under the weight of all its refugees. The Mediterranean is burning and there is no partner on the horizon to bring down the temperature.

This has also led to difficulties in setting up cooperation frameworks with neighbouring countries outside the EU, who should become increasingly involved in what has been defined the external dimension of migration policies or the "extra-territorialisation of control", from the Agreement with Turkey to the more recent Italian proposal known as the Migration Compact.

CONCLUSION

A phenomenon such as migration - a structural problem rather than an emergency, which we will be dealing with for many years to come - which has assumed global proportions, clearly requires a multi-disciplinary approach. Of all the different possible disciplines, the geographical-political, and in particular geopolitical approach - considering the migration issue within the context of a specific geographical area - opens up new perspectives for dealing with this worrying phenomenon in a rational way. The Mediterranean, with its forty-six thousand kilometres of coast and 450 million people living on its shores, may – in fact, should – be considered a very important area in geopolitical terms for the whole of Europe, and one in which the migration phenomenon of our times needs to be reconsidered, so that a suitable arrangement may be found.

Those making political decisions should have at heart the shared geopolitical interests of the countries that they govern, which, whether they like it or not, constitute a shared space rather than particularistic spaces. The various bilateral agreements aimed at containing the migration problem are not succeeding in their intentions, despite the goodwill that inspires them, because they express a basic ambiguity; an ambiguity that consists in the fact that the European drafters of agree-

ments do not have a clear European geopolitical awareness. The creation of this new European borderscape called upon to govern different mobility regimes is a perfect case study for investigating frontiers beyond the classic perspective of modern political and legal theory.

Instead, the border barriers that have been announced or constructed symbolize the political decisions of the EU Member States, willing to multiply and distribute borders throughout European territory in their attempt to limit or block the movements by means of frontiers, rather than considering opening up humanitarian corridors. Such decisions may be criticized not only from the humanitarian point of view, but also as being myopic and short-term from a geopolitical perspective. A more forward-looking vision might contemplate the comprehensive rethinking of the Dublin system, for example, and above all a different approach to the functioning and purpose of the migrant centres, which in one aspect represent places of exclusion for the person and places of humanitarian tragedy, and in another simply repeat the same old story to European citizens through the media, that the migration phenomenon is solely responsible for the socio-economic crisis in Europe.

People certainly have the right not only to refuge but also to mobility, and possibly also to the pursuit of their own hopes and expectations. And similarly, countries have a duty to control their own territory and to safeguard the well-being of their societies. In a world that is demographically shifting its centres and peripheries (Giordano, 2016a), and in a Europe that is surrounded by areas that are in crisis geopolitically, and where the European countries are largely languishing in economic stagnation and demographic slumps (Dumont, 2009), the challenge posed by these migrations presents both risks and opportunities at the same time. Only if the European countries face up to reality with a more united and continental vision on population issues, and one that is not limited to the short-term, will they be able to adopt the right measures to contain the flows within acceptable limits, to regulate them with humanity, to manage them without too much confusion, to make them more profitable for the host countries and the countries of origin, and finally, to protect their own territorial and social boundaries.

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