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# The Convulsive European Space of Mobilities

*Nicholas De Genova*

Department of Comparative Cultural Studies, University of Houston

*n.degenova@gmail.com*

## Abstract

Alarmist reactions to an ostensible “migrant” or “refugee crisis” in Europe have inadvertently lent an unprecedented prominence to the veritable and undeniable autonomy of (transnational, cross-border) migrant and refugee mobilities, replete with their heterogeneity of insistent, disobedient, and incorrigible practices of appropriating mobility and making claims to space. Between an asylum system predicated upon suspicion and a border regime ever increasingly dedicated to intensifying the purview of detention and deportation, on the one hand, and the increasing virulence of anti-immigrant racist populist movements, on the other, Europe—rather than a space of refuge or freedom—has become a space of rejection for most migrants and refugees. This dialectic of autonomous human mobilities and the forces arrayed to alternately govern, discipline, punish, and repel them render Europe a convulsive space, a space of convulsions.

## Keywords

mobility – borders – Europe – migration – refugee movements – crisis – autonomy of migration

There has been a proliferation of official discourses of “crisis” and “emergency” in Europe over the last several years. Notably, the confrontation between the sovereign powers of Europe and migrant and refugee movements across the borders of “Europe” is one very prominent centerpiece of this “crisis” talk, but the discursive formation of European “crisis” has not at all been restricted to only this framing. Indeed, the rhetoric of “migrant” or “refugee crisis” has been very deeply imbricated with the full panoply of analogous securitarian invocations of anti-terrorist “emergency” as well as the more ubiquitous and banalized language of economic “crisis” (Carastathis and Tsilimpounidi

2018; De Genova 2017b; Franck 2018; Jeandesboz and Pallister-Wilkins 2016; Lafazani 2018b; New Keywords Collective 2016). Uncritical research in migration studies has often recapitulated the dominant beleaguered sensibility of a Europe besieged and wracked by a putative “migrant crisis.” My interest here, however, is to highlight how the figurations of human mobility as disruptive intrusions into the space of Europe have exposed the complacent and routinized notion of “Europe” as the stable socio-spatial referent for an ongoing sociopolitical project, and have contributed to unsettling its hegemony. Between an asylum system predicated upon suspicion and a border regime ever increasingly dedicated to intensifying the purview of detention and deportation, on the one hand, and the increasing virulence of anti-immigrant racist populist movements, on the other, Europe—rather than a space of refuge or freedom—has become a space of rejection for most migrants and refugees. Nonetheless, alarmist reactions to an ostensible “migrant” or “refugee crisis” in Europe have lent an unprecedented prominence to the veritable and undeniable autonomy of (transnational, cross-border) migration and refugee movements, replete with their heterogeneity of insistent, disobedient, and incorrigible practices of appropriating mobility and making claims to space. This dialectic of autonomous human mobilities and the forces arrayed to alternately govern, discipline, punish, and repel them render Europe a convulsive space—a space of convulsions.

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Since 2015, alarmist reactions to a putative “migrant” or “refugee crisis” in Europe have offered fresh and compelling evidence of the primacy and autonomy of (transnational, cross-border, postcolonial) migrant and refugee mobilities, as well as the great variety of their urgent, defiant, and incorrigible practices of exercising an elemental freedom of movement, disregarding or subverting borders, and making audacious claims to space (De Genova 2016a, 2017b; De Genova, ed. 2017; New Keywords Collective 2016; cf. Bojadžijev and Mezzadra 2015; El-Shaarawi and Razsa 2019; Garelli and Tazzioli 2013a, 2016c; Kasperek 2016; Kasperek and Speer 2015; Lafazani 2018a; Mitchell and Sparke 2018; Razsa and Kurnik 2014; Scheel 2017, 2019; Tazzioli 2014). In Europe over these last few years, we have been made to witness the various deployments of military troops or riot police against migrants and refugees, the construction of razor-wire barricades, and assaults against migrant and refugee families with tear gas, stun grenades, rubber truncheons, and eventually live ammunition. Yet, these more brutal formations of bordering have been intermittently alternated with the outright facilitation or the de facto ferrying and escorting of these same migrant movements, either through maritime interdiction and “rescue”

(at times, even of vessels that have not signaled any distress) or the provision of bus caravans and trains to expedite transit onward. Hence, state tactics of bordering have been abundantly shown to be convulsive reaction formations, responding always to the primacy of the sheer autonomy of migration.

This was perhaps nowhere more dramatically manifest than in the self-mobilization on September 4, 2015 of refugees and migrants who had been encamped in Budapest's Keleti railway station. Hungarian riot police had begun to deny migrants access to trains by which they aspired to travel on to Austria and Germany and had attempted to forcibly evacuate some of them. Following various skirmishes with the riot police in the makeshift refugee camp in the train station, at least 1,000 migrants and refugees chanting "Freedom!" indignantly coalesced into an ad-hoc protest march (quickly designated the "March of Hope") and, following the determined leadership of a one-legged man, defiantly proceeded onto a six-lane highway leading out of the country. This action promptly culminated in the Hungarian state authorities' capitulation and compliance, albeit cynical and self-serving, with the urgency of the refugees' determination to freely move forward on their chosen itineraries. The march was provided a police escort and then buses that would transport the unruly refugees and migrants further along on their journeys toward the next border. Much like Italy, Malta, Greece, and Bulgaria previously, Hungary—now as a "frontline" defender of the borders of the EU—had come to actively resist the imperative that it do the proverbial "dirty work" of insulating the wealthiest EU member states from migrant and refugee mobilities seeking to ultimately resettle where they would have better prospects. Thus, the example of Hungary in 2015 is merely the most prominent and perhaps most dramatic instance of a recurrent vacillation between vicious violence and begrudging complicity on the part of state actors seeking to re-institute Europe's borders in the face of the veritable intractability of the politics of mobility enacted by migrant and refugee movements (Kallius and Rajaram 2016; Kasperek and Speer 2015).

Remarkably, not only did Europe confront the mass arrival of refugees fleeing conflict and violence that could be figured in a sanitized and self-serving way as happening in various faraway (ostensibly non-"European" and, by implication, "uncivilized") "elsewheres" (De Genova 2016b, 2017b). Instead, the European border regime itself amplified the persecution and violence to which these formations of human mobility were subjected, and literally converted (or re-converted) the newly arriving migrants and refugees into veritable refugees anew, compelled to flee and seek refuge from the racist violence that they were forced to endure *within* the European borderlands themselves (Stierl 2017; Topak 2014). Such human tribulations and calamities themselves have

been rendered apprehensible to varying extents within the hegemonic discursive narrative as irruptions of “humanitarian crisis” (Tazzioli et al. 2016). However, such “humanitarian crises” are not uncommonly produced as spectacles of misery and desperation that have the double effect of de-politicizing the issues as strictly moral concerns, while also deploying them for the further authorization of political manipulations and military-securitarian border interventions (Agiar 2006, 2011; Andersson 2017; Garelli and Tazzioli 2017, 2018; Heller and Pezzani 2017; İşleyen 2018; Moreno-Lax 2018; Pallister-Wilkins 2015; Pezzani 2015; Tazzioli 2014, 2015a, 2015b; Vaughan-Williams 2015; Walters 2011; Williams 2015, 2016). Simultaneously, such spectacles of “humanitarian crisis” are selectively (and cynically) deployed to obscure other parallel human disasters altogether. Hence, we have seen the duplicitous mobilization of humanitarian discourse to rationalize draconian measures intended to block so-called “migrant boats” braving the deadly European border regime in the Mediterranean Sea. Sanctimoniously decrying the “criminal” predations of “smugglers” and “traffickers” as pretexts for renewed and expanded tactics of militarized interdiction, there were even proposals to bomb the coasts of Libya from which many maritime border crossers depart, or even to deploy ground troops (Traynor 2015; cf. Garelli and Tazzioli 2018).

There have been desperate efforts to find ways to detain migrant and refugee movements beyond the presumptive borders of EU-rope, to keep them out and thereby “out of sight, out of mind.” In practice, this has involved a new round or re-externalization, outsourcing yet again the most draconian aspects of policing EU-rope’s borders to the putatively non-“European” regimes that comprise the “pre-frontiers” of “Europe.” Meanwhile, the atrocious character of migrant policing and detention in the various “partner” countries in the EU-ropean “neighborhood” is well established, and this is especially the case for Libya, where migrants and refugees are routinely criminalized and are often met with severe deprivation and outright cruelty, including extortion, forced labor approximating slavery, physical brutality, systematic sexual abuse, and torture (Amnesty International 2016; Global Detention Project 2015; Human Rights Watch 2009). As Maurice Stierl and Sandro Mezzadra incisively contend:

“What plays out off the coast of Libya are forms of mass abduction that are not merely tolerated but strategically organised and orchestrated by European governments and [Libya’s] coastguards. When boats depart from Libya, the precarious passengers on board know that it is a race against time. They have to rapidly put a considerable distance between them and the war-torn country in order to stand any chance of escaping

the so-called Libyan coastguards who – financed, trained, and equipped by Europe, and most notably by the Italian government – are likely to chase after them in high-speed vessels, keen to uphold the conditions of their lucrative deal. The Libyan authorities are participants in the ‘smuggling business’ in Libya and beneficiaries of migrant capture at sea, a circuit of exploitation that involves practices of detaining, smuggling and trafficking, abducting at sea, and, again, detaining.”

It was precisely this frightful prospect of detention in Libya that inspired migrants who had been rescued when their boat was in distress to hijack the ship on March 27, 2019 upon learning that it was returning them to Libya instead of delivering them to Lampedusa or Malta.

Yet various European Union authorities have repeatedly reiterated over the last few years their intent to continue seeking renewed strategies of EU border externalization by subcontracting such regimes to block migrant mobilities before they can reach “European” soil, including express calls for an expansion of the detention regime in Libya (European Council 2017), as well as authorizing the Libyan coast guard to literally interdict and abduct migrants back to Libya (Moreno-Lax 2018; Tazzioli and De Genova n.d.). Meanwhile, within the EU, Hungary implemented an indiscriminate policy that all asylum-seekers on its territory are subjected to mandatory detention in de facto prison camps near the barricaded razor-wire border with Serbia, where many more thousands of migrants and refugees long remained blocked and encamped. Widely denounced in 2015 for his flagrant anti-refugee hostility and outright anti-Muslim racism, Hungary’s authoritarian prime minister Viktor Orbán, referring specifically to the EU’s reaffirmed desire to coercively contain migrant and refugee mobilities in Libya, has smugly boasted of having been subsequently vindicated and proven to be the true visionary in EU-rope’s quest to “manage” the putative “crisis” (Lyman 2017).

Indeed, on the EU-ropean scale, the regime of so-called “hotspots” for sorting and ranking distinct migrant and refugee mobilities has served as a crude mechanism for the preemptive rejection and mass illegalization of the great majority of asylum-seekers (Antonakaki et al. 2016; Carastathis, Spathopoulou and Tsilimpounidi 2018; Garelli and Tazzioli 2016a, 2016b; Mitchell and Sparke 2018; Neocleous and Kastrinou 2016; Papoutsi et al. 2018; Sciarba 2016; Spathopoulou 2016, 2019; Tazzioli 2016).<sup>1</sup> Moreover, a larger sociopolitical process of

1 The implementation of the so-called “hotspot” strategy was devised by the EU in response to the escalating numbers of migrants and refugees in 2015, and implemented at several ports in Italy and the Greek islands, the most prominent of which are Lampedusa and Lesvos. “Hotspots” were proposed as emergency “reception centers” with the capacity to provide shelter for as many as 1,500 people at key ports of first arrival on EU territory, for the purpose

“hotspotization” (Spathopoulou 2019) has extended the borders of “Europe” and permeated a variegated spectrum of other spaces of containment and confinement, forced or self-organized migrant encampment, blockage and deceleration, and other forms of protracted dispersal and the entrapment of migrants and refugees within their own mobility without relief (Franck 2017; Tazzioli 2019a, 2019b; Tazzioli and Garelli 2018).

The “crisis” of border control and “migration management” may therefore be seen to be a crisis of sovereignty that has been repeatedly instigated, first and foremost, by diverse manifestations of the autonomous subjectivity of human mobility itself. The profound source of the intractable “crisis” of migration in Europe is the veritable *struggle* over the borders of Europe—migrants’ and refugees’ struggles to realize their heterogeneous migratory projects by exercising their elementary freedom of movement, thereby appropriating mobility, transgressing the border regime, and thus making spatial claims, as well as the struggle of European state powers to subdue and discipline the autonomy of migration (cf. Ataç et al. 2015; De Genova et al. 2018; El-Shaarawi and Razsa 2019; Garelli and Tazzioli 2013a; Kasperek and Speer 2015; Pezzani and Heller 2013; Rigo 2011; Scheel 2017; Soto Bermant 2017; Stierl 2019; Tazzioli 2015c). Consequently, the “crisis” of European borders has been eminently political, in manifold ways. Above all, for present purposes, we may recognize that Europe has become a convulsive space of mobilities, and that the struggle over human mobility has become a central and vital dynamic in rendering Europe into a space of convulsions.

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The convulsions of the European government of human mobility are not confined to the enforcement of the external borders of the space of the EU, however. If the EU-uropean asylum system, generally, and the hotspot mechanism in particular, operate effectively as a machine for the expedited legal production of migrant illegality (De Genova 2013, 2016b; Scheel 2017, 2019; Schuster 2011), the convulsive features of the EU-uropean immigration and asylum regime also encompass even those whose asylum petitions have been recognized. Certainly, there are sometimes quite drastic differences in the application of asylum policy from one European country to another, of which the refugees themselves are acutely aware and commonly rather well-informed. Nonetheless, the

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of speedy identification, registration and fingerprinting. In practice, the hotspots operate as detention camps dedicated to perfunctory and crass sorting between those deemed to be likely to have a credible asylum petition, who are then to be redistributed to other EU countries, and everyone else, who have commonly been served deportation orders as quickly as possible.

larger Common European Asylum System is designed to provide for the insulation of the most desirable (wealthier) destination countries through the Dublin Regulation. First enacted in 2003, the Dublin accords are meant to quickly determine the “competent” state for the assessment of an asylum claim, according to a fixed hierarchy of criteria. Although the premier consideration should be the existence of family ties in a particular member state, asylum-seekers are seldom actively encouraged to disclose such information. Consequently, the most commonly applied criterion ordinarily tends to be the last one: the assignment of responsibility to assess the asylum claim to the European state where the petitioner first set foot on the physical territory of the EU. In this way, the Dublin Regulation allows for European signatory states to deport refugees back to whichever signatory country was first to register them as asylum claimants. Of course, as Fiorenza Picozza argues, this framework “is based on a twofold falsehood: that there are equal standards of protection and welfare access in any signatory state; and that it is physically possible to illegally enter any of them, so that the distribution of the asylum ‘burden’ would be equal throughout Europe” (2017, 234). In practice, this means that the Dublin convention legitimizes the commonplace deportation of “asylum-seekers” from the wealthiest western and northern European countries back to the first country where they were registered, usually the poorer eastern or southern European border states where they first arrived on EU territory. Simultaneously, asylum operates as a mechanism of *capture*. Wherever an asylum claim is processed, once protection is obtained, refugees cannot work and reside elsewhere but that particular country, and in some cases, even a much more circumscribed and restricted local geography. Notably, the Dublin convention thus broadens the purview of the European deportation regime, allowing for European states not only to deport migrants back to their countries of origin, but also to a so-called “safe third country,” literally bouncing them back from one place to another, and coercively reversing migratory trajectories, turning them into transnational counter-flows of expulsion (Drotbohm and Hasselberg 2015; Khosravi 2016; Picozza 2017; cf. Mezzadra and Neilson 2003, 8; Nyers 2003/2010; Rigo 2005, 6). Here, it is crucial to recall that deportation itself is perhaps the premier (and most pure) contemporary form of “forced migration” (Gibney 2013, 118; cf. De Genova 2017a; Tazzioli 2017), and thus, through the coerced mobility of those who are subject to the Dublin Regulation, through the involuntary repatriation of refugees (Chimni 2004), as well as the more general expulsion of rejected asylum-seekers and other illegalized migrants, the European asylum regime itself once again actually becomes increasingly implicated in *producing* refugees.

The strategic calculations and perfectly predictable predilections among migrants and refugees, combined with the Dublin Regulation, tend to ensure

that Europe, far from a refuge, becomes a space of rejection and marginalization for most of them, and not infrequently involves the coercive dislocation that ensues from serial deportations. Hence, a proliferation of those who seek asylum somewhere other than the first place where they have been fingerprinted and registered, as well as many of those others whose petitions for asylum have been rejected, find themselves in a protracted and indefinite condition of semi- or post-legality, if not outright “illegality,” and thus continuously vulnerable to the recriminations of the law (Brekke and Brochmann 2015; Picozza 2017; cf. Schuster 2005, 2011). In terms of its real effects and what it actually produces, therefore, the European asylum system operates as a regime of migrant illegalization. Likewise, the hotspot system, as an “emergency” measure in response to the acceleration of migrant and refugee mobilities, was designed specifically to speed up and intensify this process of rejecting the maximum number of “asylum-seekers” as quickly as possible, rendering the majority of newly arrived migrants and refugees deportable, even if this has meant that they are in fact *not* deported but instead simply issued a deportation order and then conveniently left to their own devices. In other words, what on the surface may look like a strictly “exclusionary” regime in reality has operated systematically to ensure that non-European migrants and refugees continue to be “included,” albeit only to the extent that their inclusion within the social fabric of Europe is a form of racialized subordination through their precaritization or their outright illegalization. Yet, as with all forms of migrant and refugee illegalization, this subordinate inclusion is accompanied by a detention and deportation regime that subjects illegalized migrants to the ever-uncertain prospect of expulsion, further rendering Europe into a space of convulsions.



If the convulsions of the European government of human mobility are not confined to the enforcement of the external borders of the space of the EU but rather come to transform the “interior” of “Europe” into a space of expulsion, neither are they reserved exclusively for “non-European” non-citizen migrants and refugees. The racialized and criminalized abjection of the “undesirable” mobility of Roma (especially those who are ostensibly EU “citizens”) reveals a constitutive contradiction within the larger project of the EU (Bigo, Carrera, and Guild 2013; Riedner et al. 2016; van Baar 2011, 2014, 2015; cf. Bigo and Guild 2005). Repeatedly and persistently, “the Roma” paradoxically emerge as a (racialized) “problem” precisely *because* of their EU citizenship and the consequent requirement for EU member states to circumvent or subvert EU law in order to render Roma migrants “irregular” and deportable (Çağlar and Mehling 2013, 173; Hepworth 2012). This is a remarkable instance of the contradictions



that arise for mobile putative “citizens” who, despite their EU passports, come to be effectively irregularized and thus “migrantized” (Riedner et al. 2016; cf. De Genova and Roy 2020; Garelli and Tazzioli 2016c; Tazzioli 2014). This is particularly the case among Roma migrants who tend to find no opportunities for employment except in the informalized economy (often as day-laborers), and whose impoverished (and not uncommonly homeless) condition as the sometimes over-employed working poor must nonetheless be supplemented by begging, resulting in their being rendered deportable and subjected to racially targeted policing (Yildiz and Humphris 2016; cf. Hepworth 2012, 2014, 2015).

The contemporary Roma condition in EU-rope is still more complex, however, if we consider Roma mobilities within the space of the EU not merely as “migration” but also (not implausibly) as veritable refugee movements, in the sense that migration is often a form of escape or desertion from one or another socio-political regime of subordination and persecution that “migrants” repudiate as intolerable and from which they flee (Mezzadra 2001, 2004). Given the abundant evidence to support the proposition that Roma are indeed routinely subjected to systematic racist persecution and discrimination in their countries of origin, their ostensible (EU) citizenship consequently becomes riddled with the vexations of an officially impermissible and unspeakable seeming oxymoron—that in Europe, “citizens” are “refugees” as a result of the fact that EU member states are culpable of abuses against the supposed “civil” or “human rights” of their own citizens and that, as EU-ropean citizens, members of these persecuted minoritized communities might consequently be compelled to seek asylum within other EU countries. Furthermore, not unlike many other “asylum-seekers” who are compelled to migrate to Europe as illegalized migrants (the great majority of whom are eventually rejected as “illegitimate” refugees), we may discern in the condition of most Roma who cross borders within Europe a still more extreme perversion of the “human rights” pretensions of the EU-ropean asylum regime: theirs is precisely the predicament of refugees who are systematically disqualified from any consideration for recognition as such, and are preemptively rendered ineligible for any asylum process—presumptively disqualified from such eligibility for the status of refugees by the mere fact of their EU citizenship—and reduced in practice to the status of virtually irregular and deportable “migrants” whose putative “rights” to mobility as citizens is disqualified because of their marginalization and poverty (van Baar 2015, 2017, 2018; van Baar et al. 2019; Yildiz and De Genova 2019; for a fuller discussion, see De Genova 2019). If anything, the case of the European Roma merely verifies again that the convulsive and reactionary politics of “European” space and identity can only be adequately understood as a racial formation of postcolonial whiteness, but one whose coloniality has moreover originated within the space that comes to be designated as “Europe,”

and indeed has been constitutive of Europe itself (Balibar 1991, 1992, 1993, 1999, 2004; Bhabra 2009; De Genova 2016b, 2017b; Hansen 2002; cf. Danewid 2017; van Houtum 2010).

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These questions regarding migration and asylum “in” Europe and the putative borders “of” Europe, therefore, should not be reduced to the narrow concerns of any insular and parochial field of inquiry that we might call “European studies.” This postcolonial dialectics reveals a struggle between the autonomous dynamics of human mobility on a global scale and the formations of European state power and sovereignty, which must unrelentingly react to the migrants’ and refugees’ exercise of an elementary freedom of movement through diverse tactics and techniques of bordering. Yet, even as we retain a critical perspective on the dominant spectacle of “migrant/ refugee crisis,” it remains necessary nonetheless to take seriously the dire lived circumstances of millions of people who have mobilized themselves in response to the manifold and multiplying disasters of our global (postcolonial) sociopolitical regime. Interlaced with such hegemonic formations of “crisis,” inevitably, are countless real crises for the preservation and social reproduction of human life. How might the primacy, autonomy, and subjectivity of human mobility on a global (transnational, intercontinental, cross-border) scale instructively problematize our very sense of what is at stake intellectually and politically in the work of postcolonial cultural critique? In short, how might we formulate social analysis in a manner that starts from the fact of human mobility, and thus can posit the freedom of movement as a foundational presupposition?

One key area of concern is the largely unexamined methodological sedentarism that commonly plagues the study of migration and refugee movements. In Liisa Malkki’s well-known formulation, the sedentarist bias assumes that “the homeland or country of origin is not only the normal but the ideal habitat for any person, the place where one fits in, lives in peace, and has an unproblematic culture and identity.... To go home is to go where one belongs” (1995, 509). From this sedentarist point of view, migrants and refugees are always presumptively people “out of place.” Malkki goes on to note the remarkable consonance between this sedentarist assumption and the underlying conceits of anti-immigrant nativism and xenophobic hostility and violence. Thus, the problem of sedentarism must be situated in relation to the civic (if not identitarian) nativism that operates as a largely naturalized feature of the hegemonic politics of immigration, and which is itself an inherent reflex of methodological nationalism (De Genova 2005, 56–94, 2010a, 2016c). Glenda Garelli and Martina Tazzioli incisively caution against transposing the habits

of methodological nationalism into an analogous (comparably uncritical) methodological Europeanism (2013b, 300). Furthermore, it is important not to collapse the concept of ‘Europe’ into the European Union in an uncritical reflex of methodological *EU*-ropeanism.

Here, it is productive to consider mobility, in the broadest sense of the word, as a veritably ontological facet of the human condition, or indeed, of human *being* as such (De Genova 2010a). Perhaps paradoxically, our existential freedom of movement has been actively suppressed or restricted, distorted or perverted, by the active interference and deliberate interventions of our own political organization and subjection by territorially-defined state powers and their border regimes. Here, indeed, from the critical standpoint of the heterogeneous figurations of human mobility on a global scale, we may recognize anew the more or less violent regimentation and subordination of our relation as a species to the space of the planet (for related and fuller discussions, see De Genova 2010a; De Genova, in Abram et al. 2017). This bordering of the space of the planet, of course, is not at all a transhistorical or ontological condition of human life; instead, it has a very delimited and rather shallow historical specificity. Hence, in the condition of countless migrant and refugee denizens whose mobility is branded as “unauthorized” and “illegal”—and thus also in the contemporary proliferation of border “crises”—we may discern anew our very species-life in the incessant convulsions of a world historic epochal crisis.

If we take the freedom of movement as an elementary predicate for understanding human life itself, it becomes possible to take mobility as a premise through which to problematize our historically specific socio-political arrangements—above all, the ubiquity, hegemony, and effective universality of the territorially defined (“national”) state form, as well as the supra-state institutional and juridical formation of the European Union. In this regard, we must recognize that the methodological sedentarism that constructs human mobility to be problematic is itself a basic premise of methodological nationalism—or indeed, of methodological Europeanism—for which there is a naturalized correspondence between ostensibly discrete populations, bounded territory, and nationhood (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2003). The supra-state and putatively “post-national” pretensions of the EU are really not substantively different. Thus, while sedentarist constructions of “home” and “belonging” may refer to various spatial scales, the decisive conjuncture of sedentarism and methodological nationalism ensures that the “national”—or indeed, the “European”—is ideologically fixed in place as the ultimate and supreme spatial scale to which everyone is assigned a proper place. Of course, such nationalist/statist reflexes are not merely errors of thought. What allows the conceits of nationalism and statism to operate in so methodical a

manner is that they correspond to “real abstractions”—“purely social in character, arising in the spatio-temporal sphere of human interrelations” (Sohn-Rethel 1978, 20).

Methodological nationalism is a dilemma that is inextricable from the continuous requirement that our fetishized social “realities” be re-fetishized, that their objectivity be re-objectified, and therefore, that the force and vitality of human subjective powers be persistently subordinated, indeed subjected, as the externalized, “objective” truth of “society” and the power of the state (“national,” “European,” or otherwise) (De Genova 2013, cf. 2010a, 2010b). The dilemma of methodological nationalism has never been a merely conceptual problem, never simply a matter of not thinking critically enough. It is indeed a manifestation of our veritable *participation*—whether as scholars or, indeed, as citizens or denizens, whether consciously or unwittingly—in the very same sociopolitical processes and struggles through which the “national” configuration of the social field (or, “society”) is reified and actualized as the territorial expression of modern state power (Agnew 1994; Schinkel 2009).

Nativism, as I have argued elsewhere (De Genova 2005, 56–94, 2010a, 2016), rather than any particular rejection of the “alien” or the “foreign” as such, is best understood as the promotion of the priority or prerogative of the “native,” on no other grounds than *being* “native” (cf. Michaels 1995, 13–14). For nativism, natal affinity signifies natural entitlement. “I am from here,” so the logic goes, “therefore this place belongs to me and everyone else like me.” Thus, nativism is the specific modality by which every nationalism is supplied with its “national identity,” which is to say, nativism is the defining identity politics of each and every nationalism. Nativism is a unifying and animating force within nationalism itself, and the identity politics of nativism can never be fully excised. No nationalism is ever truly recuperable from its nativism. More precisely, nativism equips the nation-state with a “national identity” in the image of which to produce its People. What is today commonly called populism invariably recapitulates some version of the nativism that secures the nation with an essentialized identity (De Genova 2018). Methodological nationalism remains so intransigent precisely because most of us have been socio-politically produced as the “natives” of one or another state’s nationalist project, inculcated all our lives with a consequential sense of identity and belonging that is inextricable from our juridical inscription as citizens. And again, the European project is no different. Indeed, in its unrelenting promulgation of a “European” identity, EU-rope has launched headlong into the enterprise of restabilizing a politics of “European” identity that reveals itself to be a racial project of postcolonial whiteness (De Genova 2016b; cf. Bhambra 2009, 2016; Hansen 2002).

A scholarship that posits its critique from the inherently bordered, effectively nationalist standpoint of the state inescapably recapitulates the very nativism that supplies every nationalism with its identity, and invariably reanimates the methodological sedentarism that confronts cross-border mobility as a “problem.” The alternative that I am proposing here is to adopt the standpoint of human mobility on a global scale as a foundational premise. As autonomous subjects, with their own aspirations, needs, and desires, which necessarily exceed and overflow any regime of immigration and citizenship, migrants’ mobility projects enact an elementary freedom of movement to which borders are intrinsically a response, however brutal. But despite the sheer cruelty as well as the systemic and (infra-)structural violence (Heller and Pezzani 2017) of bordering, on a global scale, human beings continue to prevail in their mobility projects, unceasingly and tirelessly establishing migration as a central and constitutive fact of our global postcolonial present—not merely a “symptom” of the protracted and convulsive crises of a world order wracked by war and genocidal violence, but also a viral fermenting agent that instigates “crises” of sovereignty for state powers. In radical contradiction with the securitized and militarized border regimes of the EU and the European nation-states, but always also intricately articulated through the multiple and necessarily semi-permeable force fields of these border regimes, the autonomy of migration and refugee movements repeatedly presents itself as an obstreperous subjective force—and indeed, a pronouncedly postcolonial reprise—enacting various configurations of human life in its active (productive) relation to the space of the planet, and thereby reasserting the primacy of human life as a mobile constituent power in itself.

This means that we must problematize borders but cannot allow ourselves to be fixated on borders. The differential spaces that are produced at the intersection of migrant subjectivities and historicities with specific locations challenge scholars of migration to fundamentally reconceptualize the emergent formations of social and political life, on a global scale. Migratory “destinations” increasingly become spaces of migrant “transit,” rather than permanent settlement (Osseiran 2017), and so-called “arrival cities” (Saunders 2011) remain deeply transitory spaces (Trimikliniotis et al. 2015). This is particularly pertinent within the European Union, where an initial form of “regularization” (for instance, in Spain or Italy; see Calavita 2005), or a provisional “legality” (as for registered asylum-seekers subject to the Dublin regulation), can often afford relative ease of “legal” (or semi-“legal”) cross-border mobility to new destinations (Picozza 2017). Thus, while accelerated transnational migration has arisen as an effect of European integration, it also operates as a remarkable motor for further integration. In spite of the diverse historical particularities and local

peculiarities of each instance of migrant productions of space, from one European country to the next, there is a larger process that encompasses the space of Europe as a whole, and indeed exceeds the conventionally understood borders of “Europe” as such (De Genova, ed. 2017; cf. Bialasiewicz 2012; Casas-Cortes, Cobarrubias and Pickles 2011, 2013).

While many migrants and refugees have a clear preference regarding their ultimate destination—due to links to family or friends, shared language, or other historical affiliations—for many, “Europe” as such is the primary (if preliminary) destination. Particularly among many “irregular” or “illegal” migrants, Europe has become—at least initially—an undifferentiated destination, within which more specific calculations and tactics may be adapted only later, once they have secured a provisional foothold in any given European country (Osseiran 2017; Spathopoulou 2019). Thus, paradoxically, migration may be seen to materially and practically advance and enhance Europeanization, even as the politics of “national” (and “European”) identity become problematic and contested in unprecedented ways across the European context (De Genova 2016b, 2017b). Thus, migrants and refugees develop unforeseen linkages between apparently disparate European destinations such as the migrant metropolises of Rome, Athens, or Istanbul (in the ostensible borderlands) and the migrant metropolises further afield, such as London, Paris, Hamburg, or Stockholm, for instance (Osseiran 2017; Picozza 2017, 2019; Stierl 2017). Elsewhere, migrants and refugees, as well as rejected asylum-seekers and other deportees, gather in self-organized camps as staging grounds for the renewal of their border-crossing projects. Moreover, informal migrant farmworker camps, such as in rural areas of southern Italy, become deeply interconnected not only with cities across Italy but also with the disparate places of origin of migrants, from Romania to Burkina Faso (Gambino 2017). Similarly, refugee camps, such as Choucha at the Tunisia-Libya border, created in 2011 in the aftermath of the civil war in Libya, eventually become semi-permanent spatial nodes in the extended geography of migration, particularly for rejected refugees whose abandonment and preemptive or *de facto* illegalization eventually re-distribute them to Tunis and various far-flung European destinations (Garelli and Tazzioli 2016c, 2017). There are also the remarkable examples of migrant self-organization that, in their very names, invoke a counter-intuitive geography of global connections realized through the spatial practices of migrants, such as the Collective of Tunisians from Lampedusa in Paris (Sossi 2013; Tazzioli 2014) or Lampedusa in Hamburg (Meret and Rasmussen 2014; Oliveri 2016). From these varied standpoints, we begin to appreciate how the extended and uneven urbanized social fabric of all of “Europe” itself emerges as one single migrant metropolis (De Genova 2015).

These transnational European spatial conjunctures, therefore, genuinely challenge us to comprehend our global social, political, historical present in fresh ways. These apparently European sites are not mere “destinations” for migrants, not simply sites of migrant “reception” and “integration,” and in no simple sense “assimilation” machines. These transnational migrant spatial formations are very much generated within the territorial boundaries and jurisdictions of Europe and its constituent nation-states, and in relation to the very palpable enforcement of EU-uropean and nation-state space through immigration law and border policing. Nevertheless, they radically destabilize and contradict the spatial premises and conceits of nationalism and Europeanism. Thus, the *differential spaces* produced at the intersection of specific locales and migrant autonomies and historicities invite us to fundamentally reconceptualize the emergent formations of social and political life, both for “Europe” as such and on a global scale.

Subjected as it is to persistent efforts to manage mobility through immigration law, the elemental human freedom of migrants and refugees is ever increasingly confronted with the juridical illegalization of various forms of mobility, and the border enforcement regimes that make migrant labor exceptionally disposable by systematically rendering migrant life more or less deportable. Indeed, it is in these transnational conjunctural spaces that we may best discern the active processes of *inclusion through exclusion* (De Genova 2010a) that are central to producing new social orders of class, race, and citizenship inequalities and hierarchies. Borders have imploded deep into the everyday life of Europe and are creating new social divisions, conflicts, and convulsions. As a site for the veritable production of new formations of racialized difference and subordination, the convulsive space of Europe is an historically specific conjuncture of unresolved postcolonial tensions and conflicts, reconfigured as a special kind of setting where the global relation of labor and capital acquires its substance and density as a tentative and tenuous configuration of the politics of class, race, and citizenship.

Yet, the Europe of migrants and refugees has proliferated and flourished all the same. Indeed, as in the resounding proclamation of the unprecedented migrant mobilizations that swept the United States in 2006 with a profoundly defiant claim: *Aquí estamos y no nos vamos, y si nos sacan, nos regresamos!* [*Here we are, and we're not leaving! And if you throw us out, we'll come right back!*] (De Genova 2010b; cf. McNevin 2007; Nyers 2008; Walters 2008), “Europe” too is confronted with repeated assertions of this migrant and refugee *politics of presence*, which I have characterized as a politics of incorrigibility. Notably, beginning in October 2009, a wave of strikes by several thousand undocumented migrant workers demanding legal residence in France,

articulated the themes of migrant presence and labor in remarkably similar terms; their principal slogan was: “*On bosse ici, on vit ici, on reste ici!* [We work here, we live here, we’re staying here!]” (Barron et al. 2011). Similarly, in 2013, there emerged the Lampedusa in Hamburg collective, whose signature slogan has been: *We Are Here to Stay* (<http://www.lampedusa-in-hamburg.org/>; cf. Meret and Rasmussen 2014; Oliveri 2016), as well as the “We Are Here” collective in Amsterdam (Amaya-Castro 2015). These articulations of border struggles that erupt from deep within the ostensible “interior” of Europe are evidently claims of *presence*—enunciating the simple but insistent affirmation, “We are here” — but above all, they operate as claims to space. Precisely in the face of the threat of deportation, forcible expulsion from the space of the state, they proclaim: “We are here, and we will not be ‘removed!’” And in this simple but defiant gesture, the very “here” that migrants invoke is always already a new and radically transformed one.

In this very important sense, we are reminded that the convulsive character of Europe as a space of mobilities is not only so because of the tactics of bordering and the deportation regimes operating across Europe, but also because of the incorrigible subjective force and autonomy of migration, which may indeed be understood to exert a constitutive primacy in the larger dialectic between human mobility and the reaction formations that seek to govern and manage it. The convulsive space of Europe must be apprehensible, therefore, as a space of mobilities *produced* at least in part by the autonomy and subjectivity of migrants as a platform for optimizing their own capacities and advancing their own projects—a *differential* space, in short, fundamentally elusive for any regime of citizenship and perhaps ultimately irretrievable for any nationalism or other statist project. This European space of convulsions therefore may offer us a critical lens through which to appreciate and better apprehend how the autonomy and subjectivity of human mobility supply a vital motive force for the ongoing reconstitution of our global postcolonial society.

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