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PANDEMIC GEOPOLITICS: DISCUSSING GLOBALIZATION, BORDERS, AND SECURITY IN TIMES OF COVID-19[1]

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Abstract

The coronavirus pandemic has had a major impact on the political, social, and economic context in countries across the world. As it is known, the strategy adopted by the national governments of many of the countries to curb the spread of COVID-19 largely consisted in imposing severe restrictions on both international and intranational mobility. This paper analyses a) the spatial implications of this resurgence of borders against the background of the long-lasting borderless world discourse on globalization, and b) the use of a war-like metaphor to frame (and make sense of) the current situation. As an uneven and asymmetric process, globalization has affected the way borders are conceived, discursively constructed, and managed. The last two decades have seen a technological shift in the way borders —and cross-border mobility— are controlled, with much emphasis placed on the securitization discourse on borders as bulwarks against the negative effects of globalization, such as international terrorism, illegal immigration, and infectious diseases. In the current pandemic, it is argued, this has led to a proliferation of borders and bordering practices at different scales, either strengthening pre-existing borders or creating new ones altogether.

Keywords

COVID-19, borders, globalization, security.

Resumen

La pandemia de coronavirus ha tenido un gran impacto en el contexto político, social y económico de países de todo el mundo. Como es sabido, la estrategia adoptada por los gobiernos nacionales de muchos de los países para frenar la propagación del COVID-19 consistió en gran medida en imponer severas restricciones a la movilidad tanto internacional como intranacional. En este artículo se analizan a) las implicaciones espaciales de este resurgimiento de las fronteras en el contexto del prolongado discurso mundial sobre la globalización, y b) el uso de una metáfora bélica para enmarcar (y dar sentido) a la situación actual. Como proceso desigual y asimétrico, la globalización ha afectado a la forma de concebir, construir discursivamente y gestionar las fronteras. En las dos últimas décadas se ha producido un cambio tecnológico en la forma de controlar las fronteras —y la movilidad transfronteriza— y se ha hecho mucho hincapié en el discurso de la segurización de las fronteras como baluartes contra los efectos negativos de la globalización, como el terrorismo internacional, la inmigración ilegal y las enfermedades infecciosas. En la actual pandemia, se argumenta, esto ha llevado a una proliferación de fronteras y prácticas fronterizas a diferentes escalas, reforzando las fronteras preexistentes o creando otras nuevas.

Palabras clave

COVID-19, fronteras, globalización, seguridad.

Introduction

"Disease knows no borders", explains a fact sheet published in 2017 by the United States federal agency Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)[2]. Over the last two decades, the CDC —together with other national and international health organisations— has repeatedly warned the global public that a pandemic flu was "not a matter of *if*, but of *when*". As we now know, even though the current pandemic outbreak is not due to an influenza virus but to a new strain of coronavirus, their predictions were proved correct. From the city of Wuhan —the capital of Hubei Province, China, where the novel coronavirus was first identified in December 2019— the outbreak quickly began spreading globally. At the time of writing, the infection has passed the threshold of sixty-million cases worldwide over 218 countries and territories, many of which are now facing a second wave, while vaccine research is progressing at an accelerated pace in what has taken the form of a geopolitical competition between superpowers.

To be sure, there is little new about the diffusion of diseases throughout the world: human history is filled with examples of pandemics having spread across the globe, especially through international commerce. What appears new in the current situation is, instead, the context in which the COVID-19 pandemic is taking place: to put it in the words of the already-mentioned CDC 2017 fact sheet, "[i]n today's interconnected world, a disease threat anywhere is a disease threat everywhere". In our contemporary global village, viruses —like information— spread fast. Much like international terrorism and environmental change, thus, pandemics have taken the dimension of a global phenomenon and represent the "dark side of globalization" (Heine and Thaku, 2011, p. 4).

Referring to the emergence of international terrorism, Newman (2006) observed that "[i]t is a battle of globalization versus globalization, as those forces which have made borders more permeable and easier to cross are now manipulated by new forces which threaten the physical safety of innocent citizens" (p. 182). The same case can be made when discussing the COVID-19 pandemic, as studies show that more globalized countries have been affected "faster and with a larger impact" by the contagion (Zimmerman *et al.*, 2020, p. 1493). It has been convincingly argued that the events of September 11, 2001, have drastically changed our perception of globality. In Bauman's words, the attacks marked the "symbolic end to the Era of Space" and the simultaneous advent of the "planetary frontier-land" (Bauman, 2018): space —and control thereof—

2. CDC Global Health Fact Sheet 2017. Retrieved from https://www.cdc.gov/globalhealth/resources/factsheets/pdf/CDC_ Global-Health_Fact_Sheet.pdf

was once deeply intertwined with the concept of security[3]. The planetary frontier-land is, instead, characterized by a sense of "mutually assured vulnerability" (Bauman, 2018).

Much like national borders, the coronavirus pandemic —as a global phenomenon— has transcended the traditional boundaries between scientific fields of study as well, drawing interest from a wide range of disciplines and approaches. Social sciences have played a major role in the debate, as demonstrates the ever-growing number of journals dedicating special issues and calling for contributions on the political, economic, and social effects of the pandemic. Among other topics, much attention has been devoted to the impact COVID-19 might have on globalization, with scholars assessing the pandemic's potential de-globalizing aftereffects (Iwuoha & Jude-Iwuoha, 2020; Mas-Coma, Jones & Marty, 2020; Sforza & Steininger, 2020; Steger & James, 2020; Sułkowski, 2020). While the shifting nature of the object of study, as well as the speed at which the situation is evolving, call for a certain amount of prudence when confronting this subject matter, this paper aims at contributing to the ongoing debate by discussing the effects the COVID-19 pandemic had on both international and national —or intranational— borders in our globalizing world.

As it is known, the strategy adopted by the national governments of many of the countries affected by the contagion largely consisted in imposing severe restrictions on both international and intranational mobility. With the closure of national borders, international flights have been drastically reduced and only passengers returning home were allowed on board. Simultaneously, subnational administrative divisions —such as regions and cities— have been organized, hierarchized, and managed according to their infection rates and their level of risk: subsequently, borders that were once deemed scarcely relevant have now become significantly more important in our everyday geographical perception. Hence, as we familiarized with the idea of social distancing, terms such as "red zone" have quickly made their way into our daily lexicon. More or less effectively, mobile phones and GPS technology have been employed for keeping track of potential exposure to the infection. By April 2020, half of the world population — around 3.9 billion people around the globe— was on lockdown[4]. All these measures are

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3. Or, as observed by Ritaine (2009, p.16), «Dans l'ère de l'espace, le territoire et son éventuelle fortification étaient garants de la sécurité collective, et leur contrôle constituait une prérogative régalienne majeure, définissant le pouvoir politique : celui des anciens empires (muraille de Chine, mur d'Hadrien), celui des villes et seigneuries du Moyen Age (fortifications), celui des Etats modernes (lignes Maginot et ligne Siegfried), celui des blocs militaires transnationaux (mur de l'Atlantique, mur de Berlin). L'*intra-muros* définissait une appartenance politique et une sûreté collective. Cette ère de l'espace, depuis longtemps minée par la globalisation, s'est définitivement close avec les attentats du 11 septembre 2001 […] ».
4. Euronews – "Coronavirus: Half of humanity now on lockdown as 90 countries call for confinement" (02/04/2020). Retrieved from: https://www.euronews.com/2020/04/02/coronavirus-in-europe-spain-s-death-toll-hits-10-000-after-record-950-new-deaths-in-24-hou

strictly connected with the concept of *space* and control thereof, giving birth to a series of bordering practices that stretch from national borders to the individuals themselves.

Our main argument is twofold and can be summed up —in a somewhat paradoxical fashion— as follows: on the one hand, the fast-paced diffusion of the contagion has once again exposed the permeability and vulnerability of international borders to infectious diseases in our globalized, frontier-land world; on the other hand, attempts at containing the spread of the contagion have largely relied on a proliferation of bordering practices at different scales, either strengthening pre-existing borders or creating new ones. These policies, it is argued, can be framed within the more general securitization discourse on borders, which has gained in strength in many Western countries after the 9/11 attacks.

Therefore, in the first two sections of our paper we explore the relationship between borders and globalization by discussing —and, ultimately, contrasting— the borderless world discourse in the light of research carried out by scholars in the field of border studies. Globalization, it is argued, is often associated with the idea of a borderless world. This definition, however, fails to grasp the inherent unevenness of globalizing trends and the relevance borders still hold to this day. Then, we analyse the (geo) political discourse on security underpinning the symbolic relevance of borders. This discourse, which has been in many cases articulated around a warlike language, serves as both a rhetorical device to make sense of this relatively new and unknown threat, and as a means to gather political support for national governments. Lastly, we propose some elements of discussion of the spatial implications of the global pandemic, with a specific focus on the impact it had on borders and bordering practices alike in our globalizing world.

Globalization today: what remains of the borderless world discourse?

Like many terms that have enjoyed widespread popular success, globalization has spurred a broad range of (sometimes contrasting and sometimes overlapping) conceptual definitions. An accurate account of the evolution of this complex and contested concept throughout the last decades would exceed the scope of this paper; even so, for the sake of clarity, we shall briefly discuss two definitions of what the term 'globalization' indicates. On the one hand, globalization stands for "a multidimensional set of social

processes that create, multiply, stretch, and intensify worldwide social interdependencies and exchanges while at the same time fostering in people a growing awareness of deepening connections between the local and the distant" (Steger, 2003, p.13). It is, in our opinion, a satisfying definition as it conveys the complexity and multiplicity of the economic, political, social, and cultural processes underlying the mechanisms of today's global economy. On the other hand, globalization can be seen as a word that "evokes images of a world in which goods, services, capital, and information flow across seamless national borders" (Ceglowski, 1998, p. 17). This definition may lack the analytical quality of the first one, but —by highlighting the widespread belief of globalization as a process ultimately leading to a borderless world— it tells us a great deal about the powerful geopolitical imagination associated with this buzzword.

In the years following the end of Cold War, the borderless world discourse was, indeed, quite in vogue. With the demise of the Soviet Union, which served as the West's ideological Other —as well as with the disappearance of what was maybe the most tangible sign of Cold War-era bipolarity, that is, the Berlin Wall— the road towards the "end of history", along with that of other "endisms" as well, was seemingly clear, so much so that some commentators went as far as to claiming that the world was, in fact, becoming "flat", that "the global competitive playing field was being levelled" (Friedman, 2006, p. 9). Advocates and critics of globalization alike concur in that technological advancements, especially (but not exclusively) in the field of transportation and communications —combined with the capitalistic shift from Fordism towards flexible accumulation— have progressively reduced (if not annihilated) the relative distance between once faraway places, shrinking the world to the size of a "global village" or a "spaceship earth" (Harvey, 1989, p. 240). Globalization has, indeed, led to unprecedented opportunities of growth and global coordination in some places; it has, however, also brought along "all sorts of inequalities and asymmetries of wealth and power" (Sparke, 2013, p. XV) in others.

As such, globalization can hardly be considered an evenly-unfolding process: a map of our globalizing world would not be 'flat' —if anything, it would look 'spiky' (Florida, 2005, p. 48). Hence, highlighting the inherent unevenness and plurality of the processes underpinning globalization, Steger and James (2020) have introduced a new conceptual framework for globalization articulated around four principal "formations" of this phenomenon, and namely: a) *embodied globalization*, which refers to the physical mobility of bodies; b) *object-related globalization*, which includes goods, commodities, and currency, as well as industrial waste, green emissions, and viruses; c) *institutional-*

ly-related globalization, which refers to the global mobility of agents of states, INGOs, and so on; d) *disembodied globalization*, which mainly includes intangible things such as ideas, images, data, etc. (p. 194). Each of these formations operates simultaneously, although "their dynamics and limits can be enduring, emergent, residual, and dominant at different times and places" (p. 194). In other words, in a given historical context, some of these formations might prevail whereas others might lag behind: such is the case of the now-dominant prevalence of disembodied forms of globalization over the others, further accelerated by the global pandemic (which is, itself, the outcome of an object-related global flow).

These formations, thus, interact with each other: an object-related global by-product (that is, the new strain of coronavirus) has significantly affected the intensity of a disembodied form of globalization: the restrictions on physical mobility adopted by many national governments have led to a massive use of social media and telecommunications applications to fill the void created by social distancing measures. Due to the unevenness, asymmetricity, and multiplicity of the processes underlying globalization, as well as because of their contingent nature and the complex interplay between them, these phenomena produce —and reproduce— different effects at different scales and in different places.

Locating borders and security in a borderless world

Against the background of the borderless world discourse, at the same time when a general consensus around the belief that —with the end of Cold War— "the importance of states […] and international borders would be greatly diminished" (Diener and Hagen, 2009, p. 1197) was catching on in the public and academic debates, the field of border studies underwent a process of rejuvenation (Diener and Hagen, 2009, p. 1199; Newman, 2006, p. 172, Newman and Paasi, 1998, p. 190)[5]. Beginning from the 1990s, the traditional approach to the study of borders and boundaries —whose roots lay mostly in the fields of IR and political and physical geography— has increasingly opened up to contributions from a variety of other fields of study and approaches (Newman and Paasi, 1998, p. 191). Escaping the "territorial trap" which bonded statehood to territory and understood borders as mere 'lines in the sand' that

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5. As observed by Newman (2006), however, many scholars agree that the study of borders was reinvigorated "precisely because of the borderless world discourse" (p. 172).

demarcated the space of state sovereignty (Agnew, 1994, p. 59), border studies agenda has progressively moved toward an understanding of the multidimensional, contextual and contested nature of borders and boundaries (Newman and Paasi, 1998, p. 198). In other words, borders have not withered away in our contemporary world —they have changed. Hence, Balibar's (2002) well-known thesis that borders have become "*invisible* borders, situated everywhere and nowhere" (p. 78) aptly (albeit perhaps incompletely) sums up the understanding of contemporary borders as *decentred* and, at times, *outsourced*. In other words, the location of borders has increasingly shifted away from the geographical site of the *limes* and often "the act of bordering happens far away from the border itself" (Johnson and Jones, 2016, p. 2): in this sense, airports represent a good case in point of bordering practices taking place far from the geographical location of the border (Agnew, 2008, p. 184).

This, however, does not mean that national borders have become altogether irrelevant, nor that they are doomed to wither away any time soon. If anything, as it will be discussed, the current pandemic has further exacerbated a rather lively debate —both within academic circles and in national political arenas— on the issues of borders and security. While the impact globalization had on borders and boundaries can hardly be denied, ours can still be defined, indeed, as "a world of compartments and borders which may be more fluid and elastic, easier to cross, than in the past, but they are out there all the same, impacting upon the minutiae of our daily life practices, identities and affiliations" (Newman, 2006, p. 183). In other words, the "space of flows" and the "space of places" have long coexisted (and will likely continue to exist). Thus, instead of a process of deterritorialization of state authority, we are now witnessing a process of reterritorialization in which state borders have become "more complex and differentiated" than before (Popescu, 2012, pp. 27-28), with different formations of globalization operating simultaneously, although with different intensity (Steger & James, 2020, pp. 194-195). What appears to be most relevant to the ends of our discussion, however, is —despite (and, likely, *against*) the borderless world discourse we have discussed earlier in this text— how borders are still associated with the concept of security. Research on the effects of globalization on borders and bordering practices has sparked a wide range of security-based approaches to the topic, as will be discussed in the next section.

The securitization discourse on borders: evidence from the COVID-19 pandemic

In November 2015, one of the first measures taken by then-President François Hollande in the hours following the terrorist attacks in Paris was the suspension of the Schengen agreements and the subsequent reestablishment of national border control under provisions of the *état d'urgence*. Even though it had not been fully implemented —only "random controls at the most sensitive border points" were introduced (Lequesne, 2016, p. 310)— this decision is quite revealing of the symbolic meaning associated with borders (and control thereof), especially in times of crisis. The September 11 2001 attacks against the World Trade Center in New York played a major role in the way borders are commonly conceived nowadays, as they "shifted perception of fencing from the exclusionary and anachronistic imagery of the Berlin Wall to that of a modern and essential way to secure the future of civilisation and freedom" (Jones, 2011, p. 215).

Discussing the consequences of September 11 on border control in the United States, Amoore (2006) developed to concept of "biometric borders", that is, borders that

> […] extend the governing of mobility into domains that regulate multiple aspects of daily life. Subject to biopower, the crossing of a physical territorial border is only one border crossing in a limitless series of journeys that traverse and inscribe the boundaries of safe/dangerous, civil/uncivil, legitimate traveller/illegal migrant. (p. 338)

As such, in our global frontier, borders and boundaries define at one time a "space of security" and a "space of insecurity" (Ritaine, 2009, p. 29); in other words, they work as performative devices that separate the known (and, thus, safe) from the (inherently dangerous) unknown, simultaneously communicating and reproducing *security* and *risk*. Confronted with the speed at which the contagion progressed in the first months of 2020, most national governments have introduced restrictions to both international and intranational mobility in an effort to geographically contain the spread of an extraterritorial threat – the virus. It has been argued that the symbolic relevance of such measures may exceed their practical effects as "a microbial threat […] is inherently transnational in scope" (Enemark, 2009, p. 204), but, perhaps, their effectiveness lies precisely —al-

though not *exclusively*— in their symbolic meaning, that is, in the way produce a sense of "illusory comfort" (Popescu, 2012, p. 28) or, as Bauman (2002) highlighted, "in the frontier-lands, *fences* and stockades mark intentions rather than realities" (p. 83).

In this context, security —and, conversely, fear— has become a valuable political currency in the post-9/11 world, as shows the unprecedented electoral success of right-wing populist parties in recent years: from Matteo Salvini's "closed-ports" policy to former US President Donald J. Trump's project of a wall at the border with Mexico, there are numerous examples of the place security occupies nowadays in the public debate of countries on both sides of the ocean, even *before* the beginning of the current pandemic. This ever-increasing demand for protection, as we have argued above, relates to the risks associated with the dark side of globalization. It has been argued that today's obsession with "issues of international reach, such as immigration, disease, and terrorism, rather than the concerns of previous decades with local everyday lives, bodies, and places" has led to the rise of a geopolitical meta-narrative of "globalized fear" which needs to be deconstructed (Pain, 2009, p. 467). A concrete example of this narrative may be seen in the recently renewed fascination with zombies in Western popular culture: as argued by Saunders (2012, p. 81), zombies have become convenient stand-ins for the risks associated with globalization and uncontrolled spaces —such as infectious diseases— against which borders and fences might prove (symbolically) effective.

As noted by Popescu (2012), "[i]n the post-9/11 world, border *securitization* discourses have gained a firm grip on many decision makers' minds" (p. 26). Such a perspective can be read in the light of the evolution of the prerogative of the state and the gradual shift from the "social state" to the "security state": in other words, "[h]aving rescinded or severely reduced its previous programmatic interference with market-produced insecurity, contemporary states must seek other, non-economic varieties of vulnerability and uncertainty on which to rest their legitimacy" (Bauman, 2004, p. 87). Hence, "[t]hey act as if they have chosen to move from social states to security states" (Bauman, 2004, p. 87)[6]. Unsurprisingly, thus, the rhetorical arsenal to which many political leaders (regardless of their ideological stance) resorted in the wake of the COVID-19 outbreak mirrors the warlike vocabulary that usually follows a terrorist attack or a war declaration: much like the "global war on terror" narrative pushed forward by George W. Bush administration in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks (Zalman and Clarke, 2009, p. 101), we now find ourselves in the midst of an ongoing "global

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6. For a thorough analysis on the evolution of the concept of "security" in relation to the state, see Bauman (2004), *Europe: An unfinished adventure*. Cambridge: Polity.

war against COVID-19" (Sabucedo *et al.*, 2020, p. 619). In the public imagination, hospitals and workplaces have become "frontlines", whereas media outlets often depict essential workers, such as healthcare professionals, as the nowadays' equivalent of war heroes. Former European Central Bank (ECB) President Mario Draghi went as far as to drawing a parallel between the current crisis and World War I[7]. In the current context, however, the threat does not derive from the potential invasion of a foreign army —or the attack by a paramilitary terrorist group— but from the action of an invisible and relatively-unknown microorganism: hence, as the threat is simultaneously *nowhere* and *everywhere* —since anyone could potentially be a carrier of the infection— the border itself appears blurred and decentred, repeatedly reproducing itself at different scales.

Upon closer inspection, however, this war metaphor can be interpreted as an attempt at rationalizing the unknown. In other words, confronted with the relatively unknown threat of a pandemic, the adoption of such discourses concurs in *making sense* of this menace by means of a language that sounds familiar to the general public. As such, this communicative strategy is revealing of how the COVID-19 outbreak has produced a discursive overlapping between what "from a technical standpoint […] is fundamentally an issue of human health" (Enemark, 2009, p. 200) and a threat to national security. Furthermore, evidence gathered in cross-country studies highlight the overall positive effects of the pandemic in terms of citizens' trust in their national political institutions (Baekgaard *et al.*, 2020; Bol *et al.*, 2020; Schraf, 2020), at least during the first months of lockdown[8]. To be sure, in many countries the risks associated with infectious diseases have made their way into national-security agendas and foreign policy strategies years before the COVID-19 outbreak (Enemark, 2009, pp. 191-192; Katz and Singer, 2007, p. 233). In the USA, for instance, the end of the Cold War brought along the acknowledgment (or the overlapping) of de-territorialized threats —such as infectious diseases— as a global concern and a matter of national security (Zylberman, 2013).

Discussing the causes behind the appearance of new diseases between 1970 and 2009, Zylberman (2013) highlighted the inherently spatial nature of viral evolution: viruses evolve by conquering "new territories", that is, new hosts. Human activity plays a key-role in this process: intensive agriculture and industrial animal farming lay the

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7. *Financial Times*, "Draghi: we face a war against coronavirus and must mobilise accordingly". Retrieved from https://www.ft.com/content/c6d2de3a-6ec5-11ea-89df-41bea055720b

8. As noted by Sabucedo et al. (2020), however, in spite of the positive connotations of some images this metaphor evokes (such as heroism and resistance) "[…] using this metaphor is problematic because even though it evokes some images with positive connotations, like resistance and heroism, it also dredges up others which denote conflict, like confrontation, obedience and enemy. Likewise, it is unclear why other frameworks associated with care, empathy and solidarity are not being used in a healthcare emergency" (p. 619).

conditions through which zoonosis (that is, the transmission of an animal virus to a human host) happens; individuals, then, become the vectors through which the virus eventually spreads out. For these reasons, cross-border mobility represents the privileged area of intervention, as "borders appear as the primary policy instrument to contain the health risk and to ensure national security" (Radil *et al.*, 2020, p. 2). Accordingly, it has been argued that we are now witnessing a "revenge of borders" (Bandiera, 2020, p. 302) against the borderless world discourse: borders that have been long deemed as scarcely relevant and porous —such as the EU internal borders as part of the Schengen Agreements— have now been *reterritorialized*. It is also, perhaps, the revenge —albeit maybe temporary— of *place* against *time* as, within months from the beginning of the pandemic, the world had suddenly expanded from the size of a "global village" to a much bigger place in our collective geographical imagination.

However, although the renewed importance of national borders stands as perhaps one of the clearest effects of the pandemic, the COVID-19 outbreak has equally brought along the resurgence or the creation of borders at different scales than that of the state. Throughout last year, the citizens of many countries have witnessed both a resurgence *and* a proliferation of borders at different scales. Depending on where we reside, we now experience and cross —or are prevented from doing so— multiple borders in our day-to-day life, with our households having themselves turned into a potential border. The access to certain places, for instance, is now subject to previous temperature screening. In many countries, the introduction of curfews impedes citizens to leave their houses after a certain time, often at night-time, while traditional places of socialization such as bars and restaurants are currently shut, except for deliveries or take-away.

Borders of subnational divisions that once held little relevance aside from their administrative purpose have now become "akin to a national border" (Radil *et al.*, 2020, p. 4). In late January, the epicentre of the outbreak, the city of Wuhan and the Hubei Province, was placed under lockdown by the Chinese government, resulting in the confinement of over sixty million people. Similar measures, albeit to a much lesser extent, have been taken in other countries as well in the attempt to manage and contrast the spread of the contagion: regions and other administrative divisions have been organized and hierarchized according to the evolution of the pandemic trend. This has given birth to what can be dubbed as a "pandemic cartography", in which political maps are combined with a chromatic scale that symbolizes the level of risk of each and every administrative

division, as well as the restrictions into force associated with such level. Hence, in countries such as France and Italy, nationwide lockdown measures gave way to the adoption of differentiated levels of risks on a regional basis.

As noted by some (Radil et al., 2020, p. 4), however, in the handling of the pandemic individuals themselves have become the ultimate border: on the one hand, social-distancing measures (as required by the laws) have introduced invisible —and yet absolutely perceivable— boundaries between people; on the other hand, the border manifested itself up unto the threshold of people's houses in case of suspected or confirmed infections. In a compelling autoetnographic account of her own personal experience through the first months of the pandemic —a time the author spent between Italy and Finland— Tedeschi (2020) has convincingly argued how this situation represents "a unique opportunity for everyone to become aware of the law, its materiality and spatiality, and the consequences that it can have for people's everyday lives (such as the power to restrict movements), even in normal times and in other contexts", highlighting, for instance, the impact the health crisis had on the already precarious personal conditions of migrants (p. 180). In parallel, this renewed visibility of the law went hand in hand with the rediscovery of the role of states in relation to markets. If the borderless world fantasy has untimely celebrated the imminent withering away of the state as a key-actor in global politics, last year has been characterised by an overall redefinition of state-market relationships in many of the countries affected by the disease, possibly leading to a situation of "complex intertwining of state, market and society at all levels of the world, from the global to the regional and the local, with no single party able to stay out of the crisis and with causality running in virtually all directions" (Chung *et al.* 2020, p. 113).

Conclusions

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a major impact on the economic, social, and political context in many countries across the world, while potentially affecting ongoing (de-) globalizing processes. The paradox, so to speak, resides in how the strategy to contain an inherently transnational threat largely relied on the control of international cross-border mobility. We started by discussing the borderless world discourse in the light of latest developments in the field of border studies. Globalization —in its multiple manifestations— has, indeed, had a major impact on the way borders are perceived,

discursively constructed, and —ultimately— enforced. After September 11, border control and bordering practices have largely turned to the implementation of digital technologies to manage the cross-border flows and curb potential threats coming from "outside". Borders, we have observed, have progressively shifted away from their traditional location and the activity of bordering often happens in other places, such as airports or train stations. As we have discussed, the need to contain the spread of the contagion has led many governments to implement restrictions on international and intranational cross-border mobility against what is, by all means, an extra-territorial threat. However, the pandemic outbreak has once again emphasised how, in Popescu's words, borders have increasingly become bodyscapes themselves (Popescu, 2012, p. 107). As noted by Amoore (2006)

> […] in effect, the biometric border is the portable border par excellence, carried by mobile bodies at the very same time as it is deployed to divide bodies at international boundaries, airports, railway stations, on subways or city streets, in the office or the neighbourhood. (p. 338)

Furthermore, much like other undesirable side effects of globalization, these securitization policies have often been treated as threats to national security and, subsequently, framed within the discursive construction of a war-like context: on the one hand, this discursive device served as a means to make sense of the current threat through the use of a familiar language; on the other hand, this military metaphor could be seen as an attempt to foster the general public's support to national governments, possibly —although not necessarily— enhancing a "rally-around-the-flag" effect that might ultimately reinforce the political status quo in such countries. It should be noted, however, that this resurgence and proliferation of bordering practices has come at a time when border security was already a relevant issue in the political debate of many countries, in Europe as well as in the United States, especially —but not exclusively— among far-right populist parties. Much of the popularity of such discourse was based on a critical assessment of the negative effects associated with globalizing processes in their different formations. The current pandemic outbreak has intensified this shift in the perception of borders, especially in relation to embodied forms of globalization.

It is doubtlessly too early to advance hypotheses regarding the political consequences after the end of the emergency. Nonetheless, recent history has shown that policies enacted in times of crisis have often outlived the political context in which they were

conceived. As we have discussed, security policies adopted to limit the spread of the contagion have led to a rapid proliferation of borders and bordering practices: it is unsure, however, whether these restrictions will be altogether dismissed after the end of the global pandemic or if they will spill over into other policy areas. Furthermore, the unevenness of ongoing globalizing processes suggests that the outcomes are likely to differ greatly across different countries and political systems. Whether this unprecedented situation will mark a watershed in globalizing trends —and, if so, in which places and in which direction— or whether things will go back to "business as usual" is yet to be established.

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