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COVID-19 Point Blank: Language, Migration, and the Pandemic as a Political Issue

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Abstract: The current pandemic is sustained in dichotomies and distancing, as most of us awkwardly have recently experienced. Moreover, COVID-19 has definitely put the spotlight on social inequalities that are underpinning our society and it has highlighted the escalation of the state surveillance capability and new forms of oppression too. The discrimination ingrained in our societies, built on a historically defined regime of racialized oppression and structural disadvantage of racialized citizens and migrants, was produced well before the coronavirus, but it is now casting a different shade, reinforcing forms of exclusions, highlighting the pandemic as a political issue. Hence, this paper addresses a range of political perspectives of the lived experiences in and through social space with examples of narratives in language which capture the everyday political experiences of the pandemic within Europe. The kind of language used and its profound effect on the growing discourse regarding COVID-19 is the main focus in this paper. I here explore the intertwining of language and politics during the pandemic and bring out the countervailing narratives that seem to be in constant tension. I then ask where this takes us, not only in terms of scholarship and expansion of knowledge, but also with a pragmatic edge to it, trying to figure out how is it possible for us to achieve some sort of cognitive shift in our approach in order to learn from this challenge and from this new perspective. Methodologically, as well as looking at existing data, references to attitudes in general are made. A theoretical discussion on migration and language, and the kind of intersection between them, is offered, from the point of view of critical theory, before pointing to the metaphors used, the implications they allow, and how all these fit together, in the form of a concluding discussion. Metaphor or not, the power of language in its ramifications of articulations about the pandemic and the idea of distance underlines COVID-19 as a deeply political issue.

Keywords: language; migration; pandemic; narratives; distance



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1. Introduction

In a 2019 book, entitled *The Unconstructable Earth*, the author, Frédéric Neyrat, explores the notion of ecology of separation as a kind of distancing humans need to take in recognition of the limitations of our knowledge and the boundaries we impose on (social) life. The author is calling for a notion of distancing to ease and scale down the negative effects of social imposition(s). Against the social organism of our current age, marked by unacknowledged traces of racism and inequalities, he proposes a certain psychology of distance as necessary to reconfigure the political agenda and the nature and texture of our social relations. His argument relates to the logic and policies through which otherness is controlled. He argues that by reducing all otherness to the 'principle of death' we are constructing a sort of humanity devoid of humans or as he calls it a 'Wilderness 2.0' (Neyrat 2006). He believes that a kind of distancing as a conception of politics based on forms of separation can actually facilitate communication with the other and re-imagine human relations. Intertwinement and entanglement are, of course, essential between humans, yet distancing may be the sort of separation necessary to bring in the political a safe operating space for humanity devoid of social dichotomies (Biermann and Kim 2020). Ironically,

COVID-19 has proven to be an experiment, to put it mildly, on the nature of our social relations and the social forms available for reacting to threats. The virus is experienced in everyday forms of distance and divisions within society which ultimately shape our attitudes toward social boundaries—who belongs and who does not, being an important social boundary. Hence, the main question here is how the language of distance shapes our responses to this pandemic and our appreciation of otherness.

The language used to describe the virus and the people who are considered as other is a common one (Ticktin 2017). Focusing on that common language we can see those perceived threats (i.e., virus or people) are managed and governed in similar ways. In particular, in this paper, I consider the notion of distance, either as a metaphor—taking a necessary distance to enable clarity of seeing—or distance in a literal sense—taking distance to protect yourself or distance as a form of exclusion. Metaphor or not, the current pandemic is predominately sustained in social dichotomies and distancing, as we have all recently experienced. I am addressing here some of these ambiguities, looking at the effect of language used in a range of political perspectives with examples of narratives in language which capture the experiences of the pandemic within Europe. The kind of language used and the profound effect of language and growing discourse regarding COVID-19 is the main focus in this paper. I here explore the intertwining of language and politics during the pandemic and bring out the countervailing narratives that seem to be in constant tension. It is argued that the power of language in its ramifications of articulations about the pandemic and the idea of distance underlines COVID-19 as a deeply political issue and helps to learn more about how we appreciate otherness, and how it is governed, controlled, or exterminated.

Methodologically, in this article, we refer to policies implemented by legislative acts and recent discourses published in media outlets on the relationship between the coronavirus pandemic and government responses. Our intention is to collate references to attitudes made and analyze the language used in order to identify and highlight key important aspects for future theoretical and empirical avenues which can shed light on the kind of intersection between language, migration and the idea of distance.

The aim of the paper is to discuss the language used, the metaphors and implications they allow, and how all these can fit together to help us think about alternative ways to read and construct the contemporary moment, so as to take responsibility and accountability for action needed in this moment. In the following sections, the paper's focus on language will explore various different political narratives, contextualize the insights which emerge in relation to the concept of distance, and subsequently discuss them as to the meanings they reflect vis-à-vis the themes of migration, trust, and solidarity.

2. A Social Contract with Trust Issues

In January, March, and again in November 2021, police took to the streets of cities across the Netherlands to prevent violent rioting, with businesses closing early, shops boarding up, and people become united behind the banner of protest drawing on the impacts of COVID 19 pandemic. This was an uncommon scene in the Dutch public domain by any recent standards. In this strange moment in time where there is the shutter of fear and risk reverberating through society in Europe, trust and a shattering social contract is a critical issue. We have seen many different policy approaches in European societies. Variations in political rhetorical storylines were invoked publicly during the COVID-19 pandemic, made available in political speeches and the media. The political rhetoric by which the European states rhetorically led their nations during this time routinely identified interventions on upholding national unity, stoking national fervor, pressing for community cooperation, and assuring responsive governance (Montiel et al. 2021, p. 10). Conversely, we have seen many different audiences as well with regards the recent health crisis. More specifically, we have seen the kind of audience that could take an acquiescent trust position and would go along with government coronavirus acts despite, or, perhaps because of, the uncertainties and the complexities (Hobsbawm 2020). We have seen some sections

of the public that seem to be of a more active involvement, a case of more deliberative trust as they tend to weigh everything up with what do the 'numbers' mean (Bulman 2020; Kucharski 2020). We have also seen massive protests against the expansion of powers the governments are attempting to impose upon people during this crisis (Aljazeera 2021). For example, when the Dutch government first became involved with aiming to manage the pandemic, their trust levels were riding quite high with relatively high levels of trust and support from the public (NPO1 2020). One of the policies, especially, which was most popular, and one which the government seemed early on to have adopted and readily communicated to the public, was the so-called policy of 'enhanced transparency' (NRC Handelsblad 2020), that is, one which is actually being seen to level with the public about the uncertainties and the risks. Yet, one year in, tough measures have tested the public's patience and the capacity to trust the government. People accused the government of a shift in focus of the policy away from the mitigation strategy, towards a more suppression strategy (Engbersen et al. 2020; Miltenburg and Schaper 2020). For instance, people believe that lockdown rules have indeed been lacking consistency and logical rational (Kraak 2020; Helm 2020). The comparison with other countries which seem to be doing better was another reason for the diminution of trust in government (Engbersen et al. 2020). There was a mixture of elements to account for a drastic decline in the form of trust when it started out from a relatively high figure (Miltenburg and Schaper 2020).

In terms of language and signification, the sort of language used is very important in policy and in relation to the fragile social contract during such times. There are norms that need to be practiced (handwashing, social distancing, wearing masks, etc.) which require some sort of shared consensus in order to fight the pandemic. Thus, the language of social contract holds relevance to societies who are coping with coronavirus, as government rely heavily on it to exert trust from the public. Durkheim, writing in the 19th century, was concerned about health, and he looked at the relationship between social connectedness and health outcomes, trying to understand social change.¹ In a curious turn of events, it is social distance instead of connectedness that is required by governments today to successfully affect health outcomes. On this same message, early in the crisis studies noted and remarked on the differences in trust in social contract between different countries, assigned largely in relation to how compliant people were as an outcome of the regime per se (Calnan et al. 2020; Tannistha 2020). There was, then, a widely circulating narrative about whether, in times of crisis and uncertainty, we could say that democratic regimes do not work as effectively in terms of creating trust among the public as restrictions evolve, whereas authoritative regimes do work in terms of sustaining compliance (Devine et al. 2021; Aassve et al. 2021; Smith et al. 2021). That being a rushed way to approach the issue, there was, however, during the first year of coronavirus, a differential ranking in risk and collective trust in relation to the political regime, social control, and surveillance (Tannistha 2020).

Relying on language and strategy of representation worked in other dimensions as well. Representation about the lockdown, for instance, orchestrated a forceful manner to announce measures within a window period of, sometimes, a few hours, without much prior notice, tied to a shutdown of the economy combined with governments portraying themselves as efficient, dynamic, potent, and capable of removing all kinds of roadblocks, just through the sheer force of power of democratic regime (De Ondernemer 2021) This rhetoric, interestingly, worked for many European states, especially at the beginning of the crisis in terms of gaining public trust, even though the policies themselves have been very rushed and foolhardy (Bouckaert et al. 2020). Narratives indicated that democratic states appear to have higher confidence in institutions and overall trust and concluded from this that the COVID-19 curve is going to be flattened because of higher confidence (Kavanagh and Singh 2020; Tannistha 2020). This, combined with narratives from other countries, like Italy for example, where the health services seemed to be being overrun by the eventual lockdown (Codagnone et al. 2021), appear to be strong support for the measures taken, because there was believed to be good evidence that this was a necessary policy.

Initially, rhetoric towards the public held that it is important to acknowledge to the people that they are learning from policy development (Toshkov et al. 2021). The more transparency and openness there was about it, the more trust will ensue and be enhanced. It later became apparent that there were other matters related to policy, which made trust not quite as straightforward as it initially appeared to be. There was a plethora of interrelated analytical dimensions that came about, revealing extraordinary differences in public trust and factors which may affect it (Calnan et al. 2020). One such dimension is related to intentional trust, that is, whether people trust that the government is working in their interests. Then, there is competence trust, that is whether the government is doing a good job in terms of caring for the people. Another dimension is the government's trust in the public readiness to adhere to the policies, a notion of mutual trust, embedded in an idealized notion of a cohesive society with an emphasis on egalitarian policies and an implicit emphasis on voluntary social distancing.

Issues of relying upon inherent trust between government and people relate also to narratives about the vaccine, and the relative readiness of people to trust in the efficacy of vaccines in different countries (i.e., vaccine resisters or people critical of vaccinations who hesitate to take part). Narratives on trust in political competence to conquer the virus often relate to trust in the health systems and the question is to what extent, if at all, people trust the information provided by the government (Boswell 2018) on how the society can deal with the coronavirus to control the spread of the virus. The public finds it difficult to know which part of government policy is science led and which of the so-called 'corona acts', namely the governments' legislative Epidemic Protection Acts, appear to have a solid amount of science behind them or not. To this day, there is a widespread narrative on the impact of the coronavirus and the science behind the epidemic as the 'armchair epidemiology' among the public is reflecting all the ambivalence and the 'numbers' confusion fed by governments (Weinman 2020). Added to this comes the narrative about decline in trust in the medical profession (i.e., medical expertise challenged through consumerism, commodification, and deep professionalization) and the shifts in focus away from the blind trust associated with patients' views, to a more critical, conditional trust, associated with other scientific experts' views questioning the validity of their own scientific expertise regarding coronavirus (Dobson 2020). At the beginning of the pandemic, European governments tied themselves to science and during the policy development weekly media briefings the ministers were always flanked by medical scientists. Later, and given the deep hit in the economy, the link with science, in terms of the influence in the measures taken, became looser, and essentially the governments moved more into pure political decision making. Since that moment onwards, the language was not, anymore, so much about the daily death rates and the impact on social trust, as it was about the effects on the economy and the economic consequences, as the most eminent danger for society.²

Looking at the legal framework in terms of the governments' fast responses to coronavirus and how European governments navigated these contradictory tensions of trust under threat of panic and economic downturn, we see narratives raising concern about acts legislated under the radar, which border on restricting civil liberties (i.e. border closures, increase of immigration officers' powers, people suspected of being infected detained by police, people forcibly tested and compelled to quarantine, track and trace apps, ban on social gatherings, protests, etc.) (IPOL 2020) with no end date to these restrictions in view, so far. Further, these provisions have been passed under the emergency to respond to the crisis and there is often a discrepancy between the publicly communicated government's guidance and the letter of the law (Mangold et al. 2021). One big concern is that there is room for racialized implementation around the policy responses to coronavirus in European societies (i.e., there is disproportionate implementation of regulations levied against migrants and racialized people as the crisis exposed them more to health risks, to which they would not otherwise have been exposed (Noel 2020) and gave powers to the police to criminalize individuals and target racialized communities on lockdown regulations with

projects that cause them harm ([Amnesty International 2020](#)). The following section will be looking closely into these aspects in relation to the language used.

3. Language and Metaphors on Migration during the Pandemic

Let us switch focus on migration and language and the kind of intersection between them. Language and metaphors are central to how migration is represented during the pandemic. Metaphors are indicative of the cognitive frames in use and the undetectable ways of logic and emotion to appreciate the social world, acting as both expression and legitimation ([Anderson 2017](#)).

In terms of language and signification, the COVID-19 environment licensed forms of micro bordering and surveillance. COVID-19 has definitely put the spotlight on social inequalities that are underpinning our society and it has highlighted the escalation of the state surveillance capability as well as new forms of oppression ([Honig 2021](#)). As the cracking down on surveillance became tighter in the name of necessity, safety, and protection, we moved to a moment where hate and blame is being licensed and suspicion, stigma, and ostracism is faced by those who are believed to contravene community norms ([Stierl 2020](#)). Attention of media depictions inevitably foregrounds questions of race, racism, and migration with narratives in public discourse assuming and recognizing a polemical relation between migration and the nation also in relation to coronavirus ([Hauswedell 2020](#); [Pianigiani and Bubola 2020](#)).

The discrimination ingrained in our societies, built on historically defined regime of racialized oppression and structural disadvantage of racialized citizens and migrants, was produced well before the coronavirus, but it is now casting a different shade, highlighting the pandemic as a political issue. COVID-19 does not seem to constitute a big break from the experiences of migrant life. In some ways, COVID-19 seems to be a continuation of the grim conditions of total control and exclusion. COVID-19 conditions are even more toxic, pressing, and tightly controlled for migrants ([Global Migration Data Portal 2021](#)). By analogy, the 'endless' waiting we are experiencing today for the conditions to change to an accepted normality, more than being a novelty among the migrant poor, constitutes a perpetuation of the precarity and uncertainty in their life pattern. Within the context of migration, many undocumented migrants are familiar with dealing with the fact that the rest of their lives will be on hold in camps, along borders ([Kristof 2020](#)). In a recent study on waiting and migration ([Jacobsen et al. 2020](#)), the authors look at this kind of suspension of life, exploring issues of uncertainty, immobility, the stretching of borders, and control. Indeed, they aptly point out that the condition of a future which is not clear nor certain is, exactly, what the condition of being an undocumented migrant has created. Migrants in the context of European societies experienced social distancing, in the form of stigmatization, racism, and exclusion, long before the arrival of the coronavirus. In an ironic twist of events, now that social distancing became a luxury commodity for the privileged ones, migrants do not have much opportunity to take social distance, as they have to continue working and being exposed to make a living ([Gardner 2021](#)). This, of course, is indicative of the acute conditions of inequality, which, now, in reverse terms, makes distance and the practice of self-isolation a condition of access rather than the lack of it. Abstaining from social distancing may translate to forms of stigmatization, segregation, and racism ([Vlamiš 2021](#)). The lockdown for the migrants has not worked in terms of stopping the spread of the virus, primarily due to the high-density living arrangements that migrant poor have, making practicing social distancing during lockdown conditions almost impossible.³ 'Going back to normal', then, as we often hear, is not what we should aspire to ([Samuel 2021](#)). The 'normal situation' we had before was not normal for many undocumented migrants in camps, for asylum seekers, for migrant workers, and other vulnerable people.

They are the people who are par excellence kept in distance. Fear is what compels people to keep distance. Yet, the human capacity to work in collaboration with each other has brought us to a place where we are able to make the choice to control our fears to the benefit of humanity and justice ([Neyrat 2019](#)). This premise begs the question, how

is it that the persistent narrative on migration remains a pervasive element of fear in our contemporary societies, one we are not able to abolish? In the course of the collective European history of colonial domination fearlessness is glorified, while now it is curbed in the context of migration. Contemporary history on migration and the language used is full of ambivalences. There are many ambivalences at play in the current context as well. We now fear contamination from a virus which is attacking the respiratory system causing breathing difficulties. This recalls Fanon's famous writings (Fanon 2021) in the context of colonialism (paraphrasing): 'We revolt simply because, for many reasons, we can no longer breathe'. The link between struggle and the vital activity of breathing, far from being a metaphor, literally relates to concrete processes of oppression throughout the history of domination in colonial culture involving the human body, when at the core of the process of marginalizing people is the attempt to suffocate them. From the context of colonial oppression, to migration, to the refugee crisis, to the Black Lives Matter movement, language uses the body in danger to narrate the people who are being subjected to violence by systems that abuse their power and do not protect them.⁴ The vulnerability of certain bodies of population and exposure to insecurity marks COVID-19 virus as a political issue. Conversely, central to this intersection of biopolitics and migration is the inherently political and contentious language which legitimizes aggressive policies which now act as a form of barrier in the war against the virus. The pandemic is reinforcing forms of exclusions which go hand in hand with the sharpening of borders inside and outside of society. The word border operates by differentiating between individuals.⁵ We have seen the kind of rationalized militaristic language of borders (Fejerskov and Lang 2020) working in parallel with a Blitz spirit reanimated in Europe in relation to the virus (Sandle 2020), deepening practices of inequality for specific bodies and categories of population, i.e., bodies that are considered to be dissimilar or unfamiliar to the presumed homogenous majority. In this regime of inequality, the pandemic exists in the contradictory narratives between the disease, which travels freely across countries,⁶ and the closure of borders, particularly to non-citizens, marking and intensifying, in this way, who is considered an insider and who an outsider. In absolute contradiction, we compare the narrative of saving fellow nationals blocked abroad that resurged in many states in Europe the first year in the pandemic. In February 2020, for example, during the first year of the pandemic, the Dutch government commissioned civilian aircrafts to bring nationals back inside the borders before securing the borders to prevent risk of the spread of infection or contamination while maintaining a focus on the national population, the privileged individuals, who cannot produce risk for the nation. The externalization of the disease, which is coming from somewhere else out there, not within (Ticktin 2017), fed on rationalizations that the migrant people are the potential carriers, based on preexisting stigma around which groups of people are dirty and undesirable, and therefore threat to the wider community. The policing of borders is not intended to limit all migration, but rather its objective is to restrict certain types of migrant bodies who are then very often framed in metaphors about danger and contamination. The current health emergency offered the opportunity for governments to exclude those people who are not desired, but to reinforce borders within the society too. This question is explored in the next section along with what actions do people take in solidarity over and above policy measures.

4. Language of Care and Solidarity

Overall, the health crisis has been approached with the language of danger. Emergencies like the current crisis can be occasions to retrench solidarity or may equally lead to heighten it (Honig 2020).

In the course of catastrophic events such as these, a good question to be asked is which language should be used to describe a crisis that relates so tragically to people's lives, not only in terms of the impacts on the individuals and communities, but also in terms of the ways they will imagine themselves as part of the future to come.

The nature of responses to the recent events strikes a chord with what gets left out. There was a moment throughout the spread of the pandemic when the shocking death toll lost its immediate shock value and became a kind of background noise and got absorbed into the statistics that were reported on the financial impact of Covid-19.⁷ In the midst of the big spike in numbers of infections in Europe, there was a period when we witnessed an intense debate about who had to be treated or not, who will be saved, and who will be sacrificed (i.e., how will it be done with the mentally ill persons, or the elderly, and so on) and political decisions had to be taken around ([The Real News Network 2020](#); [Fink 2020](#)). These political decisions constitute a kind of border within society, especially because the answer to the ethical issues that arise is not neutral. It is always a matter of the social hierarchies behind it. As we do not look at people in a neutral way, our language is not neutral either. Our regime of language is always affected by race, class, ethnicity, citizen status, etc., and all these play a role in the claims and the choices made. We see how governments include and exclude people in different ways with the fortification of border targeting and affecting people differently. On the one hand, states bring back their own citizens without testing them to check if they are infected or not by the virus, and on the other hand, the current health emergency is used by states to police the presence of migrants or non-citizens inside the ([Goodman et al. 2020](#); [The Economist 2020](#)).

Under these conditions, language matters more than any other moment to change the moral landscape of the present circumstance. Against this kind of jingoistic rhetoric thrown around by governments and media during the COVID-19 pandemic as the rhetorical storylines invoked in publicly available discourses force and incite the reassertion of national fervor ([Davies 2020](#); [First Draft 2020](#), August 14), the virus has illustrated a symbolic warning that illnesses happen to all people and not only to immigrants and marginalized groups. While migrants, especially those considered to be racially, ethnically, or religiously distinct, have been historically regarded as the risky people for the wellbeing of the nation states' populations of Europe ([Mehta 2019](#)) during the pandemic, suddenly, everyone becomes a risky individual to others. We now fear one another. The practice of social distancing takes the 'social' out of social distancing, as Bonnie [Honig \(2021\)](#) put it, and leaves only distance. Instead, social distancing should be meant as social responsibility and should be based on forms of solidarity. Amidst collective fear and mutual risk, a sense of togetherness and solidarity has been induced. We have seen a new language of solidarity emerging, outside the modality of 'internal borders' ([Balibar 2002](#))⁸ read as the persistent dichotomy between citizens and migrants within society. Our language enters a different kind of logic, as if the two positions, us and them, are no longer in place. On the one hand, the huge challenge of this moment remains that social inequalities are deepened. On the other hand, there are other angles that are brought to the surface. It seems as if the crisis has gone two ways, one is the distancing, the control, and dehumanization, and the other is that people use the resources they already have at their disposal to produce a sort of solidarity which is serving society and is keeping it going. The tension and oscillation between these two diametrical different positions and ethical complexities, between care and hostility, have been visible recently in many sectors of society, with the epitome of which being the health sector. In hospitals, there is a quite large proportion of carers from ethnic minority backgrounds who are putting themselves on the frontline to save lives ([Gunaratnam 2020](#)). This present circumstance makes the case for rethinking what it is meant by the premise of 'who is doing the care'.⁹ It is compelling to note what happens when the language use employed in migration, usually the language of fear and angst, is replaced with the language of care and solidarity ([Safuta and Noack 2020](#); [Dempster and Smith 2020](#)). It may be possible that in a post COVID-19 society there will be a new kind of conversation which will bring in the language of care and solidarity in relation to migration. This is a different altogether vocabulary, not used much in relation to migration until recently. This newfound vocabulary may create a different cast of mind that could shape action and our relations to one another, as well as a different sense of the 'social' in relation to otherness. The rhetoric of the convivial life is always difficult and problematic. Be this as it

may, the political philosopher Adriana Cavarero (2021) offers a timely intervention into the current thinking about solidarity and forms of public human interaction. She engages with questions of language, vocality, and democracy to propose a view of a plurality of bodies coming together based on a pluralistic, heterogeneous, but urgent ethics of nonviolence and solidarity. This argument of hers may just inform new emerging patterns of ethics and behavior outside the borders and diversity board.

5. Discussion

In this article, I tried to show how migration is represented in language in the context of the coronavirus pandemic and its relevance to the engagement with themes such as trust, distance, and solidarity, to highlight the virus as a deeply political issue. COVID-19 has transformed the vernacular about otherness and has added other institutionalized dimensions to the rhetoric on the forms of power of exclusion according to the status conferred onto people (Honig 2020). Questions of sociality, solidarity, border, and distance take on a different quality during the pandemic. The way in which otherness is ranked and hierarchies are constructed echoes past alignments of power that mutate into the new reality. It has become clear that the COVID-19 pandemic and the consequent measures restricting social and economic life and mobility have triggered many risks and anxieties for people, especially vulnerable individuals such as migrants (Jacobsen et al. 2020). While inequalities and injustices are being furthered and more rapidly entrenched, metaphors in language exhibit forces that are pulling away each other in a way that certainly cannot be easily resolved. We are experiencing the presence of this tension. This is a critical moment, a transformative time, and a unique opportunity to make a choice of decision and imagine how we can organize humanity in a different way as we try to live with each other and together through this crisis (Cavarero 2021).

On a final note, it is recognized that the limitations of using media and political rhetoric texts may well have had a simplifying effect in terms of the analysis. A further stage of this research, involving an exploration of full empirical study rather than merely the narratives in rhetoric, may well reveal a whole different set of findings regarding the construction via language of social representations of migration around the pandemic crisis.

Overall, with this paper we aspire to contribute to a theoretical discussion on where this learning and new perspective might take us, not only in terms of scholarship and expansion of knowledge, but also with a future perspective to it, trying to conceive how to achieve a cognitive shift in our approach about otherness as a positive response to this challenge. It is a political position to imagine a different future.

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Notes

- ¹ Durheim's renowned classic book on the forces of modernization/urbanization to erode social capital in his treatise on the lack of social connectedness which can lead to discontent and disenchantment and finally to health harm.
- ² Alarm levels heightened, there were retreats to historical archives searching for solutions with narratives about the Spanish Flu of 1918 and the survived descendants' beliefs of how the pandemic had travelled across generations. Studies appearing on the economic consequences of the held back economic growth following a pandemic, and how information get transmitted generationally along with the rupture of social trust and affect generations to come (Aassve et al. 2021).
- ³ In fact, there were cases where the lockdown increased the spread of virus, because people are living together, in such dense settlements (<https://www.bbc.com/news/business-53780303>, accessed on 15 January 2022).
- ⁴ George Floyd killed on May 2020; Migrants drawing in the sea; marginalised people from minority ethnic groups silenced by political systems that are unwilling to protect them; all these are brutal narratives about people who cannot breathe (<https://www.politico.eu/article/under-water-or-under-a-knee-we-cant-breathe-human-rights-watch/>, accessed on 15 January 2022).
- ⁵ In a book entitled *'Illegal' Traveller*, published several years before the pandemic and the 2014 refugee crisis, the author, Shahram Khosravi, defined the production of illegality in a constitutive relation to the idea of border (Khosravi 2010). He is looking at how the borders are constructed to be felt with emotions which are tangible, powerful and distressing. In paraphrasing his

thought about the embodiment of feelings of border, I look at how the border is articulated in language, since the pandemic began. Language articulate borders in the dichotomy between ‘cosmopolitans’, privileged people who are allowed to be mobile, and the ‘illegalised’, who are seen as committing the unethical act of transgressing borders.

- 6 The borders are political obstacles not respected by the virus (cf. WHO (2021) A virus that respects no borders: protecting refugees and migrants during COVID-19, March 25, <https://www.who.int/news-room/feature-stories/detail/a-virus-that-respects-no-borders-protecting-refugees-and-migrants-during-covid-19>, accessed on 15 January 2022).
- 7 At that moment, the death toll became a fact of life, or worse still, the people who were the victims started to get blamed for their own misfortune. (<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2021/oct/22/england-covid-ethics-personal-responsibility>, accessed 15 January 2022). Similar kind of hostile or indifferent discourses around what was happening we had seen during the refugee crisis in the reactions of European states then almost a decade earlier (<https://scroll.in/article/957657/coronavirus-migrant-worker-who-walked-two-days-to-get-home-now-faces-stigmauncertain-future>, accessed on 15 January 2022).
- 8 Solidarity cannot be confined in ‘internal borders’, Etienne Balibar’s (2002) reanimated concept, designed to differentiate between individuals in terms of racial and social class, those who belong, and those who do not belong in an idea of artificial community.
- 9 In the book entitled *The Need to Help*, the author Liisa H. Malkki (2015) shifts the focus from the provision of care to those who do the care, to explore the motivation of carers beyond an understanding of solidarity entangled in the duality between the powerful and the powerless. The problem often with solidarity is that it may reproduce and reinforce the rhetoric of vulnerability in caring about someone. Caring and, as a consequence, exposing a person to a vulnerable position, often works to award and retain the position of the savior to those who do the caring (Malkki 2015). Malkki is pondering on a kind of solidarity which does not take the form of an imposed obligation built in power relations.

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