The Gaze of Autonomy. Capitalism, Migration and Social Struggles[i]

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'To speak of the autonomy of migration', Papadopoulos, Stephenson and Tsianos write, 'is to understand migration as a social movement in the literal sense of the words, not as a mere response to economic and social malaise.' They go on: 'The autonomy of migration approach does not, of course, consider migration in isolation from social, cultural and economic structures. The opposite is true: migration is understood as a creative force within these structures' (2008: 202). To engage with the autonomy of migration thus requires a 'different sensibility', a different *gaze*, I would say. It means looking at migratory movements and conflicts in terms that prioritize the subjective practices, the desires, the expectations, and the behaviours of migrants themselves. This does not imply a romanticization of migration, since the *ambivalence* of these subjective practices and behaviours is always kept in mind. New dispositifs of domination and exploitation are forged within migration considered as a social movement, as well as new practices of liberty and equality. The autonomy of migration approach in this regard needs to be understood as a distinct perspective from which to view the 'politics of mobility' – one that emphasizes the subjective stakes within the struggles and clashes that materially constitute the field of such a politics. It shows, to employ the terms proposed by Vicki Squire in the introduction to this book, how the 'politics of control' itself is compelled to come to terms with a 'politics of migration' that structurally exceeds its (re)bordering practices. Indeed, it allows for an analysis of the production of irregularity not as a unilateral process of exclusion and domination managed by state and law, but as a tense and conflict-driven process, in which subjective movements and struggles of migration are an active and fundamental factor.

Mainstream accounts of migrant movements or struggles often employ the lens of citizenship and contend that migrants want to become citizens. The autonomy of migration approach does something different from this. It looks at the fact that migrants –documented and undocumented – *act* as citizens and insist that they *are already* citizens (Bojadžijev and Karakayali 2007: 205). This requires a conceptualisation of citizenship which is distinct from the one employed by mainstream studies, where the latter is centred upon a concern for the integration of migrants within an already existing legal and political framework. In contrast, we stress the importance of practices and claims of those who are not necessarily citizens in juridical terms for the development of an understanding of the transformation of the legal framework of citizenship itself. This opens up the possibility of conceptualizing the movements and struggles of irregular migrants as central to the construction and transformation of citizenship as an 'institution in flux' (Balibar 2001; Isin 2002 and 2009; Mezzadra 2004). Nevertheless, from my point of view (and this is where I differ from the position adopted by Papadopoulos, Stephenson and Tsianos), the autonomy of migration approach has to be further developed in relation to our understanding of the role played by mobility in the history and the contemporary reality of capitalism. Far from reducing 'mobile subjectivities to a productionist subjectivity of capitalism' (Papadopoulos; Stephenson;

Tsianos 2008: 207), this reading highlights the tensions and conflicts that play themselves out on the very embodied experience of migrants and locates the autonomy of migration approach within the broader context of an analysis of the production of subjectivity under capitalism. It is precisely from the perspective of the production of subjectivity under capitalism that this essay analyzes different questions at stake in contemporary debates on migration – from the so called 'new economics of migration' to the concepts of integration, citizenship and democracy – in order to outline the autonomy of migration approach. The main argument developed in this essay is that irregularity is an ambiguous condition that forms a key political stake in contemporary social struggles around capital and migration.

A couple of preliminary remarks are required in order to clarify the scope and the general argument of the essay. First of all, it is necessary to underscore that this essay presents an argument that has been developed within research and political experiences based in what we might cautiously and in a provisional way call 'European'. Although I will discuss materials coming from other political and social contexts (from the US to China), I do not contend that my autonomy of migration approach can be applied as such on a 'global' scale. While Europe is, of course, a social construct that artificially unifies diverse locales (just to mention three countries: Italy, Germany and the UK present very different migration histories and landscapes), it is clear that such a construction privileges the 'Western' and that even taking into consideration central and eastern European specificities would require a significant refining and adjustment of the theoretical frame that will be developed in the following pages. Needless to say, this would be even more the case if additional histories of migration and capitalist development were to be fully considered. While I do think that there is a need to develop an analytic framework capable to grasp the specificity of contemporary *global* migrations, this essay has a specific 'location'. Nevertheless I tried to keep in mind the limitations and pitfalls arising from the fact that critical debates on migration 'have almost invariably been fought out in the context of migration to Europe or its ex-settler colonies' (Chalcraft 2007: 27). Like John Chalcraft convincingly argues, we need to take into account other histories and experiences of migration – especially of what might be termed South-South migration. This is helpful not only in itself, but also in order to problematize the way in which we analyze migration in Europe and the 'West'; in order that we methodol, gcally train and decenter our critical gaze.

Chalcraft's intervention is particularly important, since the debates that he refers to concern first of all the polarity between an economic consideration of migration under the headline of 'exploitation' and a more positive view, mainly proposed by cultural studies theorists, which highlights the destabilizing effect of migrant agency and hybridity on 'foundationalist metanarratives' and 'simple binaries of Self and Other' (Chalcroft, 2007: 27). This leads to a second preliminary remark. While the autonomy of migration approach could be easily (mis)understood as a contribution to the second position outlined by Chalcraft, it actually aims to contribute to a deeper critical understanding of the reality of exploitation. It may employ many insights coming from cultural studies, but it underscores at the same time the importance and the ambiguity of the condition and practices which such studies attempt to grasp. While Chalcraft writes about Syrian labour migrants in Lebanon, many of his insights are also valid from a European perspective. Indeed, we might say that he makes a claim that is valid worldwide, when he says that: 'hybridity, bordercrossing and agency [can] articulate

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with and even drive forward polarization, hierarchy, alienation and commodification' (Chalcraft 2007: 46). Nevertheless, what distinguishes the autonomy of migration approach from an 'economicistic' perspective on migration is its emphasis on the subjectivity of living labour as a constitutive and antagonistic element of the capital relation. This follows the autonomist Marxist tradition, and holds onto an element of subjectivity which is easily lost in more traditional and 'objectivist' readings of Marx. Moreover, exploitation has always been and is today more than ever a *social* process, which cannot be viewed as limited to the point of production. Rather, exploitation criss-crosses the whole fabric of production and reproduction. From this point of view, the exploitation of migrants must be traced through the entirety of the migratory process and migratory experience, and it is always confronted with migrants' agency as its condition of possibility and as the material basis of its potential contestation. As I stressed above, it is this agency, the production of migrants' subjectivity as a contested and contradictory field, which lies at the core of the autonomy of migration approach that I outline in this essay.

Beyond the polarity sketched by Chalcraft, the field of 'citizenship studies' have in recent years made very important contributions to our understanding of the stakes of the 'politics of mobility' . In what follows I engage with the work of Étienne Balibar and Engin Isin in addressing these contributions, as well as with the work on (radical) democracy developed by such scholars as Jacques Rancière and Bonnie Honig. While an emphasis on the 'activist' dimension of citizenship and democracy is a crucial theoretical move that allows us to grasp the political challenge of migration, what is problematic about such accounts of citizenship is their failure to sufficiently link the analysis of citizenship and democracy with a critical understanding of contemporary capitalism. Not only do we require a detailed analysis of the ways in which 'neo-liberalism' has disarticulated or disaggregated social citizenship, but so also do we need to carefully examine the contested field of subjectivity that corresponds to it. This demands a focus on the heterogeneous subjective positions, figures and conditions that make up the composition of contemporary living labour. Migration, as I will try to show, plays a key role in this composition and should be investigated from this point of view (Hardt and Negri 2009: 134). Such an emphasis has important consequences for any critical analysis of irregular migration. Although critical citizenship studies have contributed in a crucial way to challenging the clear cut distinction between citizens and non-citizens, and have brought to the fore the agency of strangers, outsiders, aliens (Isin 2002), the very discourse of citizenship is historically and theoretically based upon the distinction between an inside and an outside. It is not easy to escape this distinction while remaining within the discourse of citizenship itself. It is not an accident that most studies on movements and struggles of migration from the point of view of citizenship focus on *sans-papiers* or irregular migrants; on subjects who are constructed as excluded from citizenship. These studies are necessary and important. However, an exclusive focus on the struggles of irregular migrants risks producing a binary that obscures the fact 'regular' migrants also live and struggle in conditions that are produced by the same regime of control that produces both a system of stratified and often racialized citizenship and 'irregularity'. The uprisings in the French *banlieues* in 2005 come to mind as important here. By combining a critical account of citizenship with a critical analysis of contemporary capitalism, it is possible to highlight the continuity of this process and to shed a different light on 'irregular migration' itself. This is

the focus of this essay, which takes as its departure an emphasis on the relation between capitalism and migration.

Migration, Capitalism, and The Taming of Mobility

Migration and capitalism: a complex theme, no doubt. The set of problematics to be tackled under this heading, in historical as much as theoretical perspective, is enough to send heads spinning. Let us thus begin by defining the limits of what this text deals with. The general context within which I would like to situate my reflections is that outlined by research on the mobility of labour in historical capitalism (see Moulier Boutang, 1998; Steinfeld, 2001; Mezzadra, 2006: Chapter 2; Van der Linden, 2008). These works have shown capitalism to be marked by a structural tension between the ensemble of subjective practices in which the mobility of labour expresses itself (which should undoubtedly be understood as punctual responses to the continuous overturning of traditional social structures brought about by capitalistic development), and the attempt by capital to impose a 'despotic' control over them by means of the fundamental mediation of the state. Struggles over mobility criss-cross the whole history of capitalism, from the moment when the first enclosure in England mobilized the local rural population as well as from the moment when the first slave ship crossed the Atlantic. One could even say that the friction between a 'politics of migration' and a 'politics of control' lives at the very heart of capitalism's history. The result of these tensions and struggles is a complex dispositif, which is based both on the *valorisation* and *containment* of labour mobility, as well as of the specific form of subjectivity –the heterogeneous desires, habits, forms of life – that correspond to practices of mobility (cf. Read 2003, esp. Ch. 1). It is the *excess* of mobility with respect to this complex dispositif that forms the main stake in migratory politics and struggles. On the one hand, capital attempts to reduce the excess of mobility to its value code through the mediation of the State and other political and administrative apparatuses, which means to *exploit* it. Struggles of migration are often characterized, on the other hand, by the transformation of this moment of excess in a material basis of resistance and organization. To quote once again John Chalcraft's essay on Syrian labour migrants in Lebanon, 'the very fact that the system requires agency means that, in a context of fracture and instability, this agency might be re-articulated to counter systemic accumulation' (Chalcraft 2007, p. 47).

From this perspective, migration constitutes an essential field of research that allows us to critically understand capitalism. There is no capitalism without migration, one could say, with the regime that attempts to control or tame the mobility of labour playing a strategic role in the constitution of capitalism and class relations. Always reshaped under the pressure of labour movements and struggles, migration regimes provide an angle by which complex forms of the subjection of labour to capital are reconstructed. This is no less specific for being paradigmatic, in the sense that the control of mobility affects the partiality of migrant labour in specific ways, while at the same time affecting the totality of labour relations. A critical analysis of contemporary migration regimes therefore allows a critical perspective on contemporary transformations of *class composition*, defined along Italian autonomist Marxist lines (see Mezzadra 2009). From this perspective it is the movements and struggles of irregular migrants, as well as the politics of control which targets them, which is particularly important in light of contemporary processes associated with the flexibilization of the labour market and the 'precaritization' of labour. Needless to say, there have always been migrants

living in 'irregular' conditions in modern times. But as a legal concept as well as a specific target of control policies and public discourse, the 'illegal immigrant' comes to the fore in Europe only with the radical change in migratory policies after the oil crisis of 1973 and with the crisis of Fordism (Wihtol de Wenden 1988; Suárez-Navaz 2007, p. 23).

The recruitment ban in West Germany in November 1973, along with similar moves across other Northern European countries, signified the end of the 'guest worker' programs and models that had shaped Western European migration policies and landscapes after the war. While family reunification and asylum became the main routes for permanent legal entrance to the European space, migration continued independently of the new legal regime. This autonomous dynamic of migration has to be understood within the framework of the radical (often autonomous) migrant worker struggles that characterized the last years of the 'guest worker' system, expressed most strikingly in the dramatic strike of late summer 1973 at the Ford plant in Cologne (Bojadžijev, 2008: 157-160). Both these struggles and the autonomous migrations post-1973 demonstrate the limits of the so called 'buffer theory' standing behind the guest worker programs, according to which migrant workers could be at any time repatriated in case of economic crisis (thus externalizing unemployment). At the same time, the first attempts to flexibilize the labour market along with the persistence of a large informal economic sector especially (but not only) in Southern European countries consolidated the economic conditions for 'irregular' migration since the early 1980s. This facilitated the supply of cheap, flexible and compliant labour, in line with European migration policies throughout the 1990s. Under quite different conditions, similar trends can be observed since the mid 1970s also in North America and in newly industrializing and in the oil producing countries. A highly mobile 'irregular' labour force has grown in the past few decades, often with tacit acceptance by states in order to foster transnational capital accumulation (Rosewarne 2001). Under these conditions, Anne McNevin suggests that 'irregular migrants are incorporated into the political community as economic participants but [are] denied the status of insiders. They are immanent outsiders' (2006: 141). To this it should be noted that practices and techniques of securitization emerged within this context long before September 11. Irregular migrants have been represented in popular and administrative discourses as intruders and therefore as a major threat to the sovereignty and security of the state, thus leading to a further restriction of their spaces and freedom of mobility. Although we will not explore this dimension in detail here, it is critical to our understanding of the contemporary politics of mobility in general and the condition of irregular migrants in particular (see the essay by Didier Bigo in this volume).

It is in relation to this political constellation that many of us, working in different continents and often independently from one another, have tried in the last years to develop a theory of the *autonomy of migration* (Moulier Boutang 1998; Mezzadra 2006; Mitropoulos 2007; Papadopoulos, Stephenson and Tsianos 2008; Bojadžijev and Karakayali 2008). This approach draws attention to the irreducibility of contemporary migratory movements to the 'laws' of supply and demand that are supposed to govern the international division of labour and state policies that attempt to regulate such movements. It also draws attention to the excess of practices and subjective demands that express themselves over and above the

'objective causes' that determine them, while stressing – as Ranabir Samaddar puts it in his seminal research on transborder migration from Bangladesh to West Bengal – that often enough 'the decision of the immigrant to escape from the clutches of social relations and of entrenched power hierarchies in his/her home village, town or country … is his/her resistance' (Samaddar 1999, p. 150). In what follows I further develop and deepen this thesis, focusing in particular on the ways in which the autonomy of migration approach offers important insights to the understanding of irregular migration. Specifically, its emphasis on the tension between labour migration and control allows us to conceive the condition of irregularity as part of a *continuum* of subjective positions that is constitutive of the entire spectrum of migration. The radical *precarity* of irregular migrants is in this regard the extreme representation of a set of features that are continuously produced and reproduced by a specific migration regime, the functioning of which conditions the life of regular and irregular migrants as well as of refugees. At the same time I will focus on some of the most important theoretico-political consequences that derive from the autonomy of migration approach. Specifically, I emphasize the crisis of representation of migration movements in terms of governable 'flows', which is particularly evident at present regardless of whether 'one considers the requirements of entrepreneurs' or one 'looks at the subjective motivations of migrants' (Raimondi and Ricciardi 2004, esp. p. 11). This crisis sets today a radical challenge to any politics of migration centred on the concept of *integration*. Regardless of the general critical remarks on this concept that will be developed below, the autonomy of migration approach draws attention to the blurring of any clear cut border between inside and outside that is logically presupposed by the concept of integration.

A New Economics of Migration

The autonomy of migration thesis is already implicitly acknowledged in part in the international mainstream of migration research. For example, Stephen Castles and Mark J. Miller's 'classic' text *The Age of Migration*, suggests:

…international migrations may also possess a relative autonomy and be impervious to governmental policies. […] Official policies often fail to achieve their objectives, and may even bring about the opposite of what is intended. People as well as governments shape international migration. Decisions made by individuals, families, and communities – often with imperfect information and constrained options – play a vital role in determining migration and settlement' (Castles and Miller 2003, p. 278).

Neoclassical theoretical models (economic and demographic) that inscribe migration in relation to the combined action of the 'objective' factors of *push* and *pull* have come under heavy criticism over recent years. A multidisciplinary approach has become increasingly popular. While the theory of 'migratory systems' draws attention to the historical density of populational movements, anthropologists draw attention to new transnational social spaces being formed through describing the behaviours and social practices by which the autonomy of migration expresses itself materially (cf. Brettell and Hollifield, 2000; Portes and DeWind, 2008). The approach dubbed the 'new economics of migration' (Massey *et al.* 1993; Portes 1997), which has quickly imposed itself as a new orthodoxy in international academic debates, has underlined the fundamental contribution of family and 'community' networks

in determining each phase of the migratory process. In particular, it has given a new impulse to research on the 'ethnic' forms of enterprise that take place in diasporic and transnational migratory spaces; forms of enterprise whereby family and community networks themselves provide the 'social capital' on which the financial capital of large transnational corporations relies (e.g. see Jordan and Düvell 2003: 74). Transnational networks and social capital are thus strategic concepts that allow us to partially grasp the autonomous dynamics of migration.

I believe that any critical discussion of this 'new orthodoxy' must start from the fact that, yet again, we are dealing with a theory of *social integration* in the full sense of the term. What is problematic in this theory is not that much the idea of 'integration' as such, but rather the kind of gaze toward migration that is produced once the concept of integration is assumed as key conceptual tool in the investigation. To paraphrase the great Algerian migration scholar Abdelmalek Sayad (1999), this often leads to the construction of a kind of mirror in which migrants are always seen through the lens of the so-called (national) 'receiving society'; of its 'code' and its 'problems'. Behind the concept of integration thus lies the spectre of methodological nationalism; of the 'native's point of view' on migrants that has been so effectively criticized by Nicholas De Genova (2005) in the US context. The very tension between a 'politics of migration' and a 'politics of control' is erased in the mirror of integration, in a similar way as it is in the 'new economics of migration'. Indeed, the 'new orthodoxy' follows a classic modality of North American public discourse by referencing migration as confirmation of the upward social mobility of the capitalist system and, along the lines of 'ethnic succession', of US-American citizenship itself. The processes of exclusion, stigmatisation and discrimination tend to figure in this framework as mere collateral effects of a capitalism (and citizenship) whose integrative code is not questioned, but is rather considered as continuously reconstructed and reinforced by migration itself. We shall return to this point below, but first let us highlight the way in which the tensions between a 'politics of migration' and a 'politics of control' are erased by the 'new orthodoxy'. In United States as well as further afield, social and political struggles around migration have determined a profound renewal of unions in recent years (e.g. see Ness, 2005). Such struggles picked up speed again after 9/11, and find dramatic expression in the mobilizations of 2006 (Coutin 2007; De Genova 2009; see also De Genova in this volume). From the point of view of the 'new orthodoxy', however, such struggles are at most regarded as dependent variables in a model of access to an essentially *commercial* citizenship (Honig 2001, p. 81). The image of North American citizenship that is proposed is unilaterally expansive, taking into account neither the constitutive role played in its history by the dialectics of inclusion/exclusion (especially through the position of the 'illegal aliens'), nor that of internal hierarchisation along ethnic and 'racial' lines that has produced veritable cases of *alien citizens* (cf. Ngai 2003: 5-9; Lowe, 1996). In this regard, the integrative frame associated with a US-inspired 'new orthodoxy' erases the tensions that run through the heart of the contemporary politics of mobility.

The autonomy of migration thesis has to be redefined and calibrated against this background. In particular, it needs to reaffirm the constituent nexus between the social movement of migrants with the elements of autonomy and 'excess' that run through their subjective profiles and the *exploitation* of living labour, on the one hand, while foregrounding

the struggles undertaken by migrants themselves, on the other (cf. Bojadžijev, Karakayali and Tsianos, 2004). These struggles, in any case, must be kept in mind not only because of the way in which they appear along the entire arc of migratory experience, but also because they serve as an essential referent in developing a new theory of 'racism'. Such a theory of racism must account for the way that such struggles are central to social relations shaped by mechanisms of racialization, thus allowing us to see migrant presence not in terms of 'victimhood' but in terms of subjectivity and the expression of innovative practices of resistance and struggle. The metamorphosis of racism in this regard needs to be critically investigated also as a reaction to such practices (cf. Bojadžijev 2002 and 2008).

It is nonetheless evident that migration does not take place in a void. We cannot comprehend contemporary migration without considering it in the context of the radical and catastrophic transformations determined by the Structural Adjustment Programmes foisted by the FMI upon numerous African countries in the 1980s, the influx of foreign direct investment from the 1960s onwards, the creation of 'export production zones' and the disruption of traditional agriculture (e.g. see Sassen, 1988). The autonomy of migration thesis outlined here retains a safe distance from any aestheticising apology of nomadism, and stresses the tense relations between the autonomous, 'stubborn' practices of migrants and the conditions within and against which they take shape (Benz and Schwenken, 2005). At the same time, it also does not limit itself to merely integrating the 'macro analysis' of the 'structural' processes with a 'microanalysis' of the subjective dimensions of migration (cf. Herrera Carassou, 2006). While it highlights how all the 'structural' phenomena outlined above serve as responses to the social insurgencies and demands of citizenship that mark the period of so-called decolonisation, it sets out to make manifest the wealth of subjective behaviours that migration expresses within *this* field of experience, which is also a *battlefield*. Drawing on James Rosenau's work in international relations, Nikos Papastergiardis (2000) has used the concept of *turbulence* to grasp the multiplicity of paths and patterns that characterize contemporary global migrations, while underscoring the unpredictability of the changes associated with these movements. From the point of view of the autonomy of migration approach, these elements of turbulence can be interpreted as intensifying the tensions between migratory movements and the equilibriums (the orderly functioning and reproduction) of the 'labour market' and citizenship. Such an approach argues that migration is structurally in *excess* of these equilibriums. It is around this excess that the redefinition of dispositifs of exploitation and domination – the effects of which radiate to the entirety of contemporary living labour and to the whole of citizenship - is continuously at stake.

Managing Migration, Producing Irregularity

Migration regimes touch upon key features of sovereignty historically as well as contemporaneously, since they entail the control of borders, the distinction between citizens and aliens, and the crucial decision about who to admit into the national territory. When we speak of a global regime of migration management in the making (cf. Düvell 2004), we do not refer to the emergence of an integrated political government of migration. We rather refer to a contradictory and fragmentary formation of a body of knowledge within disparate epistemic and political communities. Administrative techniques of control, technical 'standards' and 'capacity building' programs circulate at the global level, deeply influencing

the formulation of national migration policies (see the essays by Didier Bigo, Kim Rygiel and William Walters in this volume). We need therefore to frame our critical analysis of an emerging global migration regime within the powerful transformations that have re-configured international politics and the very concept of sovereignty in the last two decades. The constitutive relation (which is at the same time a tension) of national sovereignty and capitalism has been challenged and displaced by processes of globalization and the financialization of capital (Fumagalli and Mezzadra, 2010). While sovereignty 'remains a systemic property', Saskia Sassen writes, 'its institutional insertion and its capacity to legitimate and absorb all legitimating power, to be the source of the law, have become unstable' (Sassen, 2006: 415). New configurations of power are in the making, where logics of sovereignty are intertwined with logics of neo-liberal governmentality; with a governance that presents itself as a smooth process of persuasion without coercion according to neutral patterns of risk calculation and management (see the essays by Didier Bigo and Kim Rygiel in this volume). It is important for the purposes of this essay to keep in mind that 'neo-liberal political reason' is compelled to consider the subjects targeted by its governance strategies as 'autonomous actors', both at the national and at the 'international' levels (e.g. see Hindess 2005).

The subjects of sovereignty are themselves increasingly shifting and heterogeneous. The global migration regime in the making gives a clear example of this: it is a structurally *hybrid* and *mixed* regime of the exercise of sovereignty (Hardt and Negri, 2000: Chapter 3.5). The definition and functioning of this regime of sovereignty entails the participation of nation states to an ever less exclusive extent, although states continue to persist alongside 'post-national' formations such as the European Union, and new global actors such as the International Organisation for Migration and 'humanitarian' NGOs in the context of globalisation (Transit Migration 2007; Georgi, 2007; Andrijasevic and Walters, 2010). This is particularly important to keep in mind when we look at a strategic site of contemporary migration regimes – that is, at the *border* (see Mezzadra and Neilson 2008). As one of the keenest critical analysts of the 'politics of control' has stressed in his recent work, the mere fact of increasing cross-border police actions 'disturbs the categories of traditional understanding that depend on the radical separation between the inside and the outside' (Bigo 2005). In several 'borderscapes' worldwide we can trace the increasing instability of this radical distinction, both through an analysis of the 'politics of control' as well as through an analysis of the 'politics of migration' (Rajaram and Grundy-Warr, 2007).

In recent years, several critical scholars have analyzed the border, as well as the detention camp for migrants, as a site of 'exceptionalism' to which the reinstatement of a monolithic conception of sovereignty corresponds. Such an approach has shed light on the violence and the rule by force that permeate the policing of the border. However, its 'apocalyptic tone' (Hardt and Negri 2009: 3-8; Balibar, 2010) risks obscuring the fact that such violence and force is articulated within more complex and refined assemblages of power and territory. Such an approach also risks wiping out the movements and struggles through which migrants challenge the border on an everyday basis, making the latter 'the site of both the law … and its negative critique' (Lowe, 1996: 35). I think it is much more productive to carefully follow both these movements and struggles and the daily processes of flexibilization of borders through which new technologies of control and domination

operate. That these are no less ferocious and lethal - 'necropolitical', one could say with Achille Mbembe (2003) - than violences such as those in the Mediterranean sea, where according to independent assessment 14.957 migrants have died in the attempt to reach Europe since 1988.[ii]

Irregular migrants – subjects that are at the same time produced as insiders and outsiders ('immanent outsiders' in the terms proposed by McNevin) – inhabit the elusive borderzone between inclusion and exclusion, between inside and outside. Such subjects play a constitutive role in the struggles and tensions which criss-cross border regimes. Irregularity in this regard is one of their strategic stakes. Notwithstanding the fact that the most immediate effects of a politics of control is the fortification of borders and the refinement of detention/expulsion dispositifs, it is thus clear that contemporary regimes of migration management are not geared towards the *exclusion* of migrants. Rather, such regimes function to value, to measure in economic terms, and hence to *exploit* the elements of excess (of *autonomy*) that are characteristic of contemporary migratory movements (see also the essay by Nicholas De Genova, this volume). The goal, in other words, is not that of hermetically sealing off the borders of 'rich countries', but that of stabilising a system of dams, of ultimately producing 'an active process of inclusion of migrant labour through its illegalisation' (De Genova 2002, p. 439). This entails a process of *differential inclusion* (Mezzadra and Neilson 2010), in which irregularity emerges both as a produced condition and as a political stake in the politics of mobility.

The process of illegalisation or irregularisation can be defined in its link to exploitation of migrant labour. This is evident in Claude-Valentin Marie's statement in a 2000 OECD report, which suggests that migrant labour employed in a 'clandestine' manner within the informal economy is in many aspects emblematic of the present phase of globalisation (Marie 2000). Let us try to identify some of these aspects, which are less visible in the OECD report. The 'clandestine' or irregular migrant, we can say, is the subjective figure in which the 'flexibility' of labour, appearing first of all as the worker's social behaviour, expressed in terms of mobility, clashes with the operations of the harshest dispositifs of control and harnessing. This is most certainly not to identify in the 'clandestine' or irregular migrant a potential new 'avant garde' in the totality of class composition. Rather, it is to use this specific subjective position as a lens through which to read the contemporary composition of living labour. This class composition, in its complex ensemble, is precisely defined in its tendentially *global* dimension by a diverse alchemy of 'flexibility' (mobility) and control, along with an increasingly diversified model of stratification. The very category of labour market, with its characteristic segmentations (Piore 1979), once it is analyzed from the point of view of migration (and particularly of contemporary irregular migration), shows here its utterly problematic nature.

Independently of a Marxist critique, institutional economics and the new US-American economic sociology have pointed out that the expression labour *market* is only of metaphorical value. The basic conditions of the existence of a 'market', the independence of exchanging actors and the tendency toward equilibrium, are deemed to be lacking in relation to labour 'markets' (e.g. see Althauser and Kalleberg, 1981). As far as contemporary migration is concerned, Harald Bauder has drawn on critical insights from Pierre Bourdieu

in order to show how the labour situation of 'international migrants relates to processes of social, cultural, and institutional distinction' (Bauder 2006: 8). Indeed, it is by policing their borders and through their citizenship policies that nation-states engage at the everyday level (and under the conditions determined by an emerging global regime of migration management) in a process of continuous political and legal constitution of 'domestic labour markets'. Migration management thus plays a strategic role here, where the logic of the market breaks down. As Bauder concludes, 'citizenship is a legal mechanism to assign workers to a hierarchy of status categories' (2006: 26). The position of irregular migrants is part and parcel of this legal mechanism: irregularity is simultaneously one of its products and a key condition of its functioning. Under such conditions, an analysis of labour migration requires a return to a Marxian category whose importance has been emphasized by Louis Althusser in his late writings (e.g. see Althusser, 2006), although in a rather different way from the one employed here. From the sociology of labour market we are invited to move toward a consideration of the *encounter* between labour power and capital in which relations of domination and exploitation are what is immediately at stake in the management of mobility.

These relations, with their constitutive violence, constantly reshuffle the cards and trouble theoretical models even within the most heterodox traditions of Marxist critical thought. I will limit myself here to mention a crucial point that has been particularly important for autonomist Marxist debates and that has to do with two concepts forged by Marx especially in the *Grundrisse* (Negri 1991): the formal and real subsumption of living labour under capital, to which the extraction of absolute and relative surplus value corresponds. While real subsumption refers to a situation in which capital itself directly organizes the mode of labour and cooperation, intensifying the productivity of labour, formal subsumption points to a situation in which the intervention of capital in the organization of labour is limited, and the only way to increase surplus value lies in the extension of the working day. For some time there was a tendency, present in Marx himself, to interpret the relation between the two modes of subsumption in linear and progressive terms, as a process of historical transition from formal to real subsumption (see Chakrabarty, 2000: Chapter 2). A careful analysis of migrant labour challenges this way of reading the history and present of capitalism, showing the coexistence of formal and real subsumption, of 'immaterial' and forced labour. This brings to the fore the structural nexus between the 'new economy' and new forms of 'so-called primitive accumulation', along with the new enclosures that this structural nexus entails (cf. Mezzadra 2007 and 2008; Hardt and Negri 2009: 229, 245).

Families, Households, and Communities

The struggles, tensions and violences that criss-cross border and migration regimes re-inscribe themselves in the whole migratory process (well beyond the border), and shape the subjective experience of migrants. With that in mind, it is necessary to take a step back and return to the 'new orthodoxy' precisely on one of the points where it seems to grant the most space to the 'autonomy of migration': in the consideration of the fundamental contribution that family and community networks make both to the dynamics of migration and to the integration of migrants in 'receiving societies'. Alejandro Portes, criticising the abstract image of the rational individual as the protagonist of migratory movements that was for a

long time presupposed by the neoclassical approach, writes: 'reducing everything to the individual plane would unduly constrain the enterprise by preventing the utilization of more complex units of analysis – families, households, and communities, as the basis for explanation and prediction' (Portes, 1997: 817). It only in this way that social experience enters the analytical field from the perspective of the 'new orthodoxy'. Yet there is here a clear-cut parallel between the critique developed by the 'new economics of migration' against neoclassical economics and the communitarian critique of the representation of the individual in classical liberal political theory. This parallel is confirmed in Michael Walzer's account of migration, according to which the main contribution of the 'migratory waves' into the United States consists in the fact that the migrants' gift to the society that receives them are their communitarian remedies, serving as an affective supplement to the social bond that capitalistic development continuously puts into question (e.g. see Walzer 1992). I believe this parallel should caution us against an acritical use of the reference to family and community networks. As Bonnie Honig has brilliantly argued, Walzer's 'progressive' inspiration can easily be obliterated in a series of discourses that place the stress on the importance that (some) migrants have in re-establishing the effectiveness of social roles and gender codes that have been problematised in the West most notably by feminist movements in the last decades (Honig, 2001: 82-86). This point is neither abstract nor lacking in perspicuity. An expanding market sector, that of the new transnational wedding agencies, has been born around a male demand for patriarchal re-normalisation of gender roles in the familial unit, offering 'meek and loving' women for whom all that counts is 'the family and the husband's desire' (cf. Honig 2001, p. 89). It goes without saying that the xenophilia invested by exoticism and the fantasies of a 'new masculinity' can easily turn into xenophobia when it is found out that these 'meek and loving' women are in fact only interested in the *green card*, taking advantage of the first opportunity to pack up and leave…

The lines of flight followed by these women, which can be approximated to those of many sex workers entering Schengen Europe (see Andrijasevic 2003), would seem to offer us a privileged perspective from which to think the subjectivity of migrants. It is obviously not a matter of recuperating neoclassical economics in thinking the migrant from the abstraction of the rational individual. There is a lot to be learnt here from feminist research into migration, precisely because they come from within a theoretical field engaged in a radical critique of the rational individual (e.g. see Ehrenreich and Hochschild, 2003; Phizacklea, 2003; Decimo, 2005; Parreñas, 2009). What is described as a growing feminisation of migration (e.g. Castles and Miller 2003: 9) is in any case an important space for investigation. It is obvious that we are faced here with processes that are profoundly *ambivalent*. In a striking analysis of the condition of Philippine domestic workers in Rome and Los Angeles, Rhacel Salazar Parreñas (2001) considers how flight from patriarchal relations in the country of origin interrelates with the substitution of affective and care labour previously carried out by Western, 'emancipated' women. She shows convincingly how many contemporary female migration tend to reproduce the conditions of class and gender subordination .Additional research into female migrations within the 'global South', particularly the movements of the labour force that have sustained the productivity of export production zones, would most likely yield a deeper and more precise insight (e.g. see Oisha 2002 on intra-regional female migration in Asia). For example, one only needs to think of the momentous female internal migration in contemporary China powerfully described by Pun Ngai (2005). As a result of her

ethnographic research, Pun contends that the dynamics of female migration are producing a deeply contradictory 'silent 'social revolution' in Chinese society that challenges the existing rural-urban divide, reconfigures the state-society relationships, restructures the patriarchal family, and remakes class and gender relations (Pun, 2005: 55). It is important to recall that in China a quite complicated migration regime emerged around the *houkou* system of household registration, which has been an important device in the filtering, restriction and return of labour mobilities around a whole set of internal borders that circumscribe the country's coastal cities and special economic zones (see Chan, 2008; Fan, 2008). This leads to processes of irregularisation independent of the fact that we are confronted with internal migration. Such processes are analyzed by Pun Ngai in a way that can be nicely described in terms of what Vicki Squire in this collection describes as the tension between 'politics of migration' and 'politics of control'.

What is effectively demonstrated by research such as Pun's is that migration in general is an expression of processes of disintegration, as well as continuous recomposition and recasting, of traditional systems of belonging. This renders analytically and politically untenable the image of the migrant as it so often appears in the international literature: as a 'traditional' subject, completely *embedded* in family and community networks, and against whom the Western individual is posed (whether in search of comfort or as expression of resentment). Migrants can rather be defined as 'subjects in transition', once we make clear that the concept of transition is used here *without* implying any predetermined 'telos'.[iii] Needless to say, it is a nonsense to speak of a singular migrant subjectivity, since such a concept can only be declined in plural. There are, of course, a myriad of ways to be 'migrants', which are shaped and divided by lines of class, gender, and 'race'. Nevertheless, once we look at the experience of mobility in contemporary capitalism from the point of view suggested by the autonomy of migration approach and from a perspective that highlights the tensions between politics of migration and politics of control, what is evident is that an emphasis on the ambivalence of irregularity can provide an angle from which to view the production of subjectivity, with all the tensions, violences and struggles that characterize it, as a strategic *stake* in the politics of mobility. This in turn allows us to critically analyze contemporary capitalism in some of its most innovative features. This requires that we grasp a situation in which the traditional distinction between economy, politics and culture seemed to have been decisively blurred. It also means that is no longer possible to speak about the exploitation of labour and the valorisation of capital without posing at once the problem of understanding the transformations of citizenship and 'identities'. Moreover, it means that it is no longer possible to speak of working class without simultaneously accounting for the ensemble of processes of disintegration at the level of belonging. It is in these processes that we find the indelible imprint of the subjectivity of living labour, which configures the working class irreversibly as *multitude*.

Challenging The Limits of Our Political Imagination

Before we conclude, it is important to draw attention to a further problem concerning the political definition of the migrant condition. Once we have established the paradigmatic character of the migratory condition and made apparent its elements of autonomy – its moments of excess that run through contemporary migrations considered as *social movements*

– we are left with a question. In what way can we and should we politically understand migrant struggles? What perspective do they inscribe themselves in, here and now? To gather some initial, partial responses, but also to draw attention to the limits of our political imagination, I would like to refer to two books which I rank among the most important contributions to theoretico-political debates in recent years: Jacques Rancière's *Dis-agreement*, and Bonnie Honig's *Democracy and the Foreigner*, mentioned above. Rancière's argument has been charted in its general outline by various authors, so I will give only a simple account here. He claims that politics exists only as the subjectification of a part with 'no part', which reactivates 'the contingency of equality, neither arithmetical nor geometric, of any speaking beings whatsoever', and in so doing upsets the 'ac/count of the parts' (the distributive architecture) upon which rests what Rancière calls *police* (Rancière 1998: 28).[iv] It is difficult to resist the temptation to read the reference to the 'part of those who have no part' through the lens of the *sans-papiers* struggles of 1996, one year after the publication of *La Mésentente*. Rancière himself authorises this reading in highlighting how 'migrants' was a relatively new subject in France, for the simple reason that twenty years earlier they would have been called 'migrant workers' and would thus have a clear part ascribed to them in the distributive mechanism of a determined (Fordist) regime of 'police' (Rancière 1998: 137). Indeed, Rancière anticipated this point in an article published in 1993 in the daily newspaper *Libération* on the so-called French 'Pasqua laws', which facilitated identity controls over migrants and restricted their possibility of getting a regular right of residence in France (Rancière 2009: 38-45). In this context migrants are the most obvious candidates to occupy the role of the 'part of those who have no part', from whose subjectification alone *political action* – and hence the reinvention of the universal – derives.

Bonnie Honig essentially repeats Rancière's line of reasoning, though within a distinct analytical framework. Through a very convincing critique of the homology between the 'xenophilic' image of the foreigner as the subject with something to give and the 'xenophobic' image of the foreigner as someone who is interested in 'taking' something from the society where he or she settles, Honig inverts the terms of reasoning and proposes that we think 'of 'taking' as the very thing that immigrants have to give us' (Honig, 2001: 99). In other words, the *practices* in which, according to Honig, migrants' citizenship expresses itself (even under conditions of radical exclusion from juridically codified citizenship) are seen as putting into question the foundation of democracy itself at the structural level. This re-opens the movement of democracy beyond its institutional configuration, moving towards its deepening and requalification in terms that are both intensive and extensive (thus moving beyond the borders of the nation state).[v] The image of 'political community' that takes shape here is one which could be said to challenge the limits of our political imagination.

The political community, writes Rancière, is 'a community of interruptions, fractures, irregular and local, through which egalitarian logic comes and divides the police community from itself' (Rancière 1998, p. 137). In relation to migration, this approach fits nicely with the research itinerary of Étienne Balibar, which starting from a passionate political and theoretical involvement in the struggles of the *sans-papiers* has led him to propose the fascinating figure of an 'insurgent citizenship' and the 'hybrid' and border-crossing political actor (Balibar, 2010). It also fits with the political and theoretical practices that we have developed as part of the autonomy of migration approach, once again particularly as far as

the concept of citizenship is concerned. We have in a way tried to distinguish a *movement* of citizenship from its juridical and institutional frame, looking at movements and struggles of migration from the angle of the practices of citizenship that on the level of the everyday migrants' experience make possible what Engin F. Isin (2008) calls 'acts of citizenship'. These 'acts' are described as 'inevitably involv[ing] a break from habitus' (Isin, 2008: 18). The autonomy of migration approach is particularly interested in moments in which migrants directly exercise their rights through citizenship practices that demonstrate the central role that they play within the labour market and the whole fabric of social cooperation. In particular, it is interested in the moments when irregular migrants exercise their rights as 'illegal citizens' or as 'unauthorized yet recognized' citizens who mobilise politically around their status as workers (Rigo 2007; Sassen 2006: 294-296; see also Enrica Rigo's essay in this volume). As Judith Butler has written reflecting upon the huge migrants' movement in 2005 and 2006 in the US, 'irregular' migrants taking to the street exercise rights they do not have under the law (such as the right to assemble peacefully and the right of free speech) are acts of citizenship that rest of the insertion of migrants within the socio-economic fabric. Butler claims: 'they are exercising these rights, which does not mean that they will 'get' them. The demand is the incipient moment of the rights claim, its exercise, but not for that reason its efficacity' (Butler in Bulter and Spivak, 2007: 64).

Conclusion

As I suggested at the beginning of this essay, what characterizes the autonomy of migration approach is precisely its emphasis on the fact that migrants *act* as citizens, independent of their position with regard to the legal status of citizenship. This leaves us with the problem of 'efficacity', in Butler's terms, which remains unresolved within the 'radical democracy' approach under which the work of both Rancière and Honig can be subsumed. This problem is particularly evident in so far as it is the condition, the movements, and the struggles of *irregular* migrants that are of strategic importance at the contemporary juncture. The emphasis put by Engin Isin (2009) on the *activist* dimension of citizenship (on the right to *claim* rights) enacted for instance by the French *sans-papiers* movement of 1996 is in my opinion an important contribution to the theoretical discussion of citizenship and migration (see also McNevin, 2006). However, it does not touch upon the substance of the problem outlined by Butler. There is a tendency to conceive of politics in contemporary critical and radical debates exclusively in terms of *rupture*, or in terms of the *event*. To put in it in the terms of Rancière, the focus tends to remain on the 'singularity of a political moment' that 'interrupts the temporality of consensus' (Rancière 2009, pp. 7-9). While such a focus is both important and fascinating, I want to stress the importance of another temporality of struggles, which is different both from the one that is inherent to the event and of course from the one that is inherent to consensus. What I have in mind here is the temporality of the material practices that create the conditions of possibility of insurgence through clashes and solidarities, such as the practices in France both before and after 1996, which made the exercise of the right to stay by irregular migrants possible independent of the legal recognition of this right. Looking at these practices, the boundary between irregular and regular migrants is often blurred, and a space opens up in which also the possibility of building up heterogeneous coalitions and common grounds for an encounter between migrants and other subjects in struggle appears under a different and more promising light.

While irregularity emerges as a profoundly ambivalent condition from the point of view of the politics of mobility under contemporary capitalism, the autonomy of migration approach suggests that irregularity is not simply a stake in relation to tensions between a politics of control and a politics of migration. So also is it a stake that concerns our very understanding, imagining and re-invention of political community - that is, of the *common* conditions of social cooperation and production. The proponents of the autonomy of migration approach do not in any way contend that migrants (irregular or regular) can be thought of as a kind of 'avant-garde', or as 'revolutionary subjects'. Rather, such an approach locates the analysis of irregularity within a wider analytical framework that examines the transformations of contemporary capitalism from the point of view of living labour and its *subjectivity*. This essay has analyzed the transformations of key political concepts such as citizenship and sovereignty within this framework, and has developed an analysis of migration regimes and the movements alongside the analysis of struggles of migration. Needless to say, to further develop the autonomy of migration approach can only be the result of a collective and long term research and political project, working through the heterogeneity and radical diversity of the composition of contemporary living labour (Mezzadra 2007). Within this research and political project irregularity is, and is likely to remain, a key strategic stake.

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[i] A first version of this text was presented at the international conference "Indeterminate! Kommunismus", which was held in Frankfurt a.M, November 7-9 2003. The text was then published in a revised Italian version in 2004 (Capitalismo, migrazioni, lotte sociali. Appunti per una teoria dell'autonomia delle migrazioni, in Id. (ed), I confini della libertà. Per un'analisi politica delle migrazioni contemporanee, Roma, DeriveApprodi, 2004) and was then translated into several languages. The version that is published in this book is not only revised and updated: it is practically a new text, which takes into account critiques and discussions of the last five days both in academic and activist contexts. I would like to acknowledge the researchers and activists of the "Frassanito network" for having built in these years the kind of intellectual and political space in which my own work on migration has developed. Vicki Squire has helped me a lot in better focusing the main arguments of the essay, as have the two anonymous reviewers of the text. I also want to acknowledge the contribution of the members of the research group on migration I am coordinating at the University of Bologna (Maura Brighenti, Anna Curcio, Gaia Giuliani, Giorgio Grappi, Gigi Roggero) as well as my friends and colleagues Maurizio Ricciardi and Ranabir Samaddarfor the long and productive discussions we had on the text.

[ii] See http://fortresseurope.blogspot.com, accessed March 7th 2010.

[iii] This lies in contrast to the classical sociology of migration of the Chicago school, for instance, which posited 'integration' as necessary end of the transition process.

[iv] Rancière here follows Foucault's late studies on the tradition of *Polizeiwissenschaften*.

[v] The reference to Rancière is explicit in Honig's work, in a conception of politics where it is the demands of those who do not belong in the 'ac/count' of the regime of 'police' that promote the appearance of 'new rights, powers, and visions' (*Honig,* 1001: 101).