Bordering Democracies, Democratising Borders

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Over the past 30 years, border scholars have written extensively on what borders are, where they are located, and how they operate, not just to critically understand their changing role, but also to criticise and denounce their violence and discrimination. Yet borders continue to proliferate, in particular as a response to alleged crises affecting Europe. If borders have always constituted markers of social and cultural identity, the more recent process of European re-bordering, I argue, constitutes a challenge for the democratic system as a whole. Implemented by left-wing and right-wing parties alike, this process seems indeed to have been taken away from public discourse and treated as a technical necessity to solve the crises. Far from being neutral or non-political, however, it has disclosed new forms of racial discrimination, political and economic power, and colonial violence. In order to substantiate my argument, I will 1) provide a brief examination of the recent changes in the concept and practice of democracy, as well as their interrelations with the process of European re-bordering, 2) investigate the socio-political and economic conditions under which the current process of European re-bordering has come about, with particular attention to the increasing role of media and political discourses in shaping public opinion, and 3) discuss the repercussions of the process of European re-bordering on the democratic system. The article will conclude by inviting scholars, civil society members, and any interested party to open up a more open and democratic debate around the unequal and discriminatory practices of bordering.[1]

Introduction

Over the past 30 years, border scholars from multiple background and disciplines have written extensively on what borders are, where they are located, and how they operate (see, among others, Anzaldúa 1987; Balibar 1998; Paasi 1998; O'Dowd 2002; van Houtum & van Naerssen 2002; Mezzadra & Neilson 2013). Whether they conceive borders as social processes that simultaneously unite and divide territories while creating and shaping identities (Paasi 1996, 1998; van Houtum & van Naerssen 2002; Cooper & Rumford 2011), as pivotal membranes that regulate the different mobilities within the capitalist regime of accumulation (Cross 2013; Mezzadra & Neilson 2013), or as mobile devices that respond to the unpredictability and turbulence of migrant movements (Papadopoulos et al. 2008; Casas-Cortes et al. 2015), the vast and variegated amount of knowledge on borders has been certainly helpful not only to critically understand their changing role and meaning over time, but also to criticise and denounce their aftermath of discrimination, violence, and deaths.

Despite this academic criticism, borders do continue to proliferate and operate, as the recent social and economic crises show. The 2008 financial crisis put at stake the constitutional principle of solidarity in the

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European Union (EU), widening the socio-economic gap between central and peripheral countries. In 2015, the arrival of more than one million migrants on the European shores revealed the inefficacies of the Common European Asylum System, forcing the EU and its member states to temporary suspend the Dublin regulation as well as the principle of freedom of movement within the European territory. The pandemic crisis has further restricted cross-border movements even among European citizens and created further divisions between people, disclosing new and old forms of discrimination and power relations. With the more recent conflict in Ukraine, millions of displaced people have found refuge in other countries, even those that have been traditionally more reluctant to accept refugees, but some of these countries have employed violent forms of discrimination and filtering to select certain categories of refugees and reject others according to specific ethnic, racial, gender, or age criteria.

Despite the rhetoric of the crisis as a turning point for the (re)construction of a better and more inclusive society, we have been witnessing a staggering proliferation of borders in territorial and spatial settings as well as in political and media discourses. This process of border renaissance, I argue, has been taken away from public democratic debate and implemented with little opposition or resistance. When this did happen—as is the case for the numerous demonstrations across Europe against COVID-19 restrictions—the critiques have often disclosed a reactionary and conservative stance, simultaneously claiming unlimited freedom for "us" and further restrictions for "them", i.e., the other, the marginal, the migrant. In other words, not only have borders concretely multiplied in our society, but they also still seem to provide for many people a sense of protection and security, and many people have turned their votes to those parties that could provide that.

The idea that borders constitute a marker of social and cultural identity is, of course, not new in border studies (see, among others, Paasi 1996; van Houtum & van Naerssen 2002; van Houtum et al. 2005). Some issues that have been less investigated, especially in relation to the current process of European re-bordering, are the socio-political and economic conditions under which this process has come about, its interrelations and similarities with other crises, and its relationships with and repercussions for the democratic system. Just as social and economic crises are often the laboratory for the implementation of harsh (and often disastrous) social and economic recipes (Klein 2007; Harvey 2011), the so-called "migration and refugee crises" seem to have paved the way for the further proliferation of territorial, geopolitical, and socio-cultural borders, increasing social, political, and economic gaps between and within countries (Rajaram 2015; Helles et al. 2016; Kasparek 2016).

Drawing from ongoing work at the intersection between political science and political geography, this paper aims at exploring the current process of European re-bordering within the neoliberal transformation of the democratic system, in the attempt to provide a critical angle for a better understanding of the underlying socio-political and economic conditions. The paper will argue that the process of re-bordering shows many similarities with the process of neoliberalism, in that there has been an increasing stripping of the role of parliaments in the implementation of social and economic policies and a parallel delegation of crucial decisions to external and non-elected institutions. Finally, the paper will conclude by inviting scholars, civil society members, and any interested party to open up a more open and democratic debate around the unequal and discriminatory practices of bordering and imagine potential alternatives.

Democracy Under Neoliberalism

Over the past years, the EU has faced many intertwining crises. From the financial crash to the so-called "migrant and refugee crisis", the rise of far-right parties and movements throughout Europe, the burst of the pandemics, and the conflict in Ukraine, these crises have led to the reconfiguration of the social, political, and economic landscapes within and across Europe. As critical scholars have argued, these crises did not emerge from the scratch, but they are the outcome of, or have been exacerbated by the implementation of neoliberal policies in Europe over the past thirty years (Harvey 2011; Fouskas & Dimoulas 2013). Besides, far from having simply deepened the process of socio-economic integration between European member states (see Schimmelfennig 2018a), these crises have paved the way for the further acceleration of neoliberal rationality and the implementation of austerity policies that have increased socio-economic inequalities and broken social and democratic bonds (Peck et al. 2012).

Theoretically developed after the second post-war period and practically implemented with the violent rise to power of General Pinochet in Chile and the elections of conservative politicians Margaret Thatcher in the UK and Ronald Reagan in the USA (Peck 2012), neoliberalism is an economic doctrine that promotes free and unbridled markets through the privatisation and liberalisation of public services, the deregulation of state bureaucracy, the weakening of social protections, and the reduction of government spending (Harvey 2005). Emerged in response to the perceived failures of Keynesianism and social democracy, neoliberal recipes should have stimulated economic growth and created greater prosperity for all, but they have instead increased inequalities within and between countries (Piketty 2017). While a restricted elite of people gained increasing wealth and power, the majority of citizens

have experienced declining living standards, reduced job security, and decreased access to essential services (Stiglitz 2012). Besides, neoliberalism has also weakened the role of the state in regulating the economy and protecting citizens from market excesses, leaving them vulnerable to financial crises and corporate abuses (Harvey 2005).

The advent of neoliberalism has had profound effects not only on the economic sector but also on the political one. The increasing socio-economic inequalities and the promotion of the interests of a wealthy and powerful circle of people at the expense of the general public led to the gradual but tangible erosion not only of public services but of the democratic system itself, prompting some scholars to investigate whether, among the numerous crises affecting Europe, also democracy itself is in crisis (Streeck 2014; Urbinati 2016; Merkel & Kneip 2018). The erosion of democracy has significant implications for social justice, equality, and the ability of citizens to participate in political decision-making processes. Drawing from radical democratic theory, I conceive democracy as an ever-changing battlefield in which different subjects—whether they are citizens or not—emerge every time to claim their rights and raise their specific interests (Rancière 2004, 2010; Balibar 2008).

The relationship between neoliberalism and democracy as well as its repercussion on European politics are complex and variegated (see Hickel 2016; Brown 2017; Holloway 2018), and a thorough analysis of these processes goes beyond the scope of this paper. Here, however, I focus my attention on two interrelated aspects of such relationship: on the one hand, the increasing spoliation of national parliaments and governments and the parallel transfer of decisional powers to non-elective technocratic institutions and, on the other, the gradual homogenisation of the political spectrum, with the convergence of left and right parties to the centre and the attempts—far from being successful—to remove more extremist wings. As neoliberal advocates claimed to solve inflation and stagnation problems through a series of different but pre-defined policies, they came to be seen as expert chefs that could skilfully combine the ingredients of a magical recipe to obtain economic growth. It is in this period that Europe saw the rise of technocratic decision-making: national governments and elected politicians began to rely more heavily on experts and technocrats to make economic policy decisions, arguing that the latter were better equipped to make rational and objective decisions (Crouch 2004; Scicluna & Auer 2019).

The resort to technocratic decision-making, which experienced further heights during times of crisis, led not only to the further erosion of public trust in democratic institutions and to the growing sense that elected officials were unable to manage the economy, but also to the de-politicisation of economic

issues themselves (Hopkin 2012; Garzia & Karremans 2021). With de-politicisation, I do not refer merely to the decreasing interest in or discussion of political issues—in this case, we should talk about a concrete re-politicisation of economic themes at the advantage of certain political parties (see Schimmelfennig 2018b)—but rather to the processing of economic issues outside of democratically-legitimised political institutions (Wissel & Wolff 2016; Scicluna & Auer 2019). Often insulated from public scrutiny and accountability, experts and technocrats have been increasingly behind the scenes of, or even appointed to implement key economic decisions, making it difficult for citizens to hold them responsible for their repercussions (Crouch 2004). Furthermore, such experts and technocrats are often selected among the same elite circles as those who hold economic power, leading to a situation in which economic decision-making is further concentrated in the hands of a small, self-perpetuating elite.

The framing of economic policies as technical issues that can be carefully combined and implemented by experts and technocrats has also led to their de-politicisation (Jessop 2014; Madra & Adaman 2014). When key economic decisions, such as those related to austerity policies or public spending, are framed as technical issues, they are often taken away from public debate or political negotiations and presented and implemented as objective and apolitical solutions (Streeck 2016). Not only has the de-politicisation of economic issues prevented citizens from engaging with and participating in the democratic process, but it has also served to hide dissenting voices and maintain the status quo. Those who challenge the dominant economic paradigm or who advocate for alternative economic policies are often dismissed as "anti-expert" or "anti-science", with significant repercussions on the nature of democratic debate (Crouch 2004).

The limitation of acceptable policy options has often gone hand in hand with the restriction of political ideas in the public scenario, further undermining democratic debate and citizen participation (Chomsky & Barsamian 2003). Since the collapse of the Soviet Union and the advent of neoliberalism, several left-wing parties in Europe, traditionally attentive to labour rights and promoting a conception of society based on class struggle, gradually embraced neoliberal ideas and policies (Berman & Kundnani 2021; Undiemi 2021). The shift of left-wing parties towards the centre of the political spectrum has led to the acceptance and implementation of neoliberal economic policies, either through the establishment of coalition governments with centre-right parties or with the appointment of, or support to technocratic cabinets.

The homogeneity of ideas among left and right parties, especially when it comes to economic policies, has significantly reduced the range of political ideas available within the political spectrum as well as that

of policy options available to citizens in response to emergencies, limiting the scope of democratic debate and the extent of political interventions (Streeck 2014). While the political convergence between left and right parties reduced the differences between the two, making it more difficult for voters to differentiate between them, it has been particularly damaging for left-wing political parties, which lost their traditional identity and political base (Undiemi 2021). The growing sense of political disillusionment and disengagement generated by the lack of clear political choices has often translated either into increasing abstentionism or in the parallel rise of far right and populist parties, which capitalised on the opposition to neoliberal austerity policies.

Over the past years, certain trends seem to have reverted. The rise to power of Syriza in Greece in the middle of a devastating social and economic situation, the emergence of growing social movements such as Occupy Wall Street in the USA and Podemos in Spain as a response to the financial crisis, the appointment of Jeremy Corbin as leader of the Labour Party in the UK and the success of Bernie Sanders in the primary elections for the Democratic Party in the USA, the establishment of socialist minority governments with the support of more radical parties in Spain and Portugal, and the growing electoral consensus of left-wing parties such as La France Insoumise in France testify to the need to address the desires and concerns of the citizens and ensure a more open and engaging public debate.

Whether successful or not, these social movements, political parties, and popular leaders have contributed to open up alternative ideas in the political scene, enlarging the scope of the democratic debate and disclosing a social and political alternative to the neoliberal paradigm. Some scholars have also talked about a parallel process of (re)politicisation of the social that goes hand in hand with that of de-politicisation (Fawcett & Marsh 2014). However, some of these movements', parties' and leaders' position on migration issues, while differing in theory from the ones of the right, reproduce in practice the same violent forms of exclusion, inequality, and discrimination. In other words, when it comes to migration, left parties seem to implement the same traditional recipes that have been employed over the past thirty years, without critically interrogating themselves over their efficacy.

Borders Under Neoliberalism

Thirty years ago, with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the advent of neoliberalism, some liberal scholars provocatively asserted the premature demise of the nation state, celebrating the withering away of nation states and the rise of regional economies within an increasingly borderless world (Ohmae 1990). These events constituted a watershed in recent history, with profound effects within and across countries. Whether we take the state as unit of analysis or we look at the political and economic changes at both local and global levels, the role and meaning of borders have indeed changed significantly. A great example in this respect is the relocation, multiplication, and transformation of European borders during the process of deepening and widening of the European market. The initial process of de-bordering, which saw the abolition of internal borders and the enlargement of the European market, was initially celebrated as a victory for neoliberalism and globalisation. However, this process has been accompanied by a violent process of re-bordering for certain mobilities, with particular consequences for migrants (Mezzadra & Neilson 2013).

Among the numerous conventions, treaties, policies, and directives issued to develop the common market and regulate its crisscrossing mobilities, the Schengen System is probably the most famous. On the one hand, the 1985 Schengen Agreement and the following 1990 Convention, initially developed among France, Germany, and the Benelux countries outside the realm of the European Community and later incorporated in the 1997 Treaty of Amsterdam, established an internal borderless area where capital, goods, services, and workers could circulate freely. On the other hand, the Convention envisaged the relocation of border controls outside the member states' territory and the parallel strengthening of external borders to protect the common market and regulate the circulation of goods and people across them.

As the role and meaning of borders was changing, an intense debate among political geographers, political scientists and critical economists ensued, dampening the initial borderless euphoria. Rejecting the idea of a "borderless world" and putting into question the deterministic vision of borders as natural and immutable institutions, some scholars started to investigate the proliferation of borders in contemporary societies, examining the role of multiple agents, networks and forces in shaping or challenging them (Newman & Paasi 1998; Paasi 1998; van Houtum 2005). In their view, the idea of a "borderless world" appeared both reductive, falling into the "territorial trap" (Agnew 1994) that takes the state as the only unit of analysis, and uncritical, as it fails to assess the constant relocation, proliferation and multiplication of borders across societies.

These scholars dedicated increasing attention to the exploration of the symbolic and practical role of borders in shaping territories, people, and id/entities, while being simultaneously shaped by them (Albert et al. 2001; van Houtum & van Naerssen 2002; van Houtum 2005). In this respect, the same concept of border was deemed incapable to grasp the socio-spatial changes occurring within societies and was reframed in terms of b/ordering (van Houtum & van Naerssen 2002; van Houtum et al.

2005). This concept highlights the ongoing process of creation and proliferation of borders across different scales, with its uneven repercussions on territories, policies, and people. By creating multiple orders of id/entity and mobility across space, the practice of b/ordering continuously reproduces artificial divisions between "us" and "them", simultaneously constructing and rejecting the "other" through the imposition of controls on their mobility (van Houtum & van Naerssen 2002). In this way, b/ordering fulfils "our" intimate desire of protection from (physical or mental) external threats, shaping (our and other) id/entities and reproducing the materiality of territorial borders onto our everyday lives through constraining and often violent practices (van Houtum et al. 2005).

Similarly discarding the idea of a "borderless world" as profoundly uncritical and practically unrealistic (Wai-Chung Yeung 1998; Anderson & Shuttleworth 2004), other scholars acknowledged the structural developments at the basis of the production and proliferation of borders, affirming the importance of borders in perpetuating the structural inequalities among nation states in the context of a supposedly unified global market (Anderson 2012), as well as their paramount role in funnelling the flows of capital, goods, and people at the advantage of capitalist development (Cross 2013; Ferguson & McNally 2014). Through the reproduction of the territorial divisions and socio-economic inequalities between nation states, borders allow the unrestricted competition among both transnational corporations and different nation states, the cost-effective circulation of capitals, and the controlled regulation of labour mobility (Smith 2008; Mezzadra & Neilson 2013). Borders, in this respect, are conceived as important benchmarks of sovereign power, emphasising the role of the states both at global scale, as no international institution could properly function without them, and at the local level, where they can exert their economic, political, legal, cultural, and military powers (O'Dowd 2010; Anderson 2012).

There are multiple ways to look at and analyse the development of the European border regime throughout the last thirty years (see for example Tsianos & Karakayali 2010; van Houtum 2010; De Genova 2017); however, this tension between openness and closure at territorial, geopolitical, and socio-cultural levels, I would argue, has represented the most important characteristic of this process. The more recent crises seem to have only exacerbated this tension and exposed its inherent contradictions. The "long summer of migration" (Kasparek & Speer 2015), the pandemic crisis, and the more recent conflict in Ukraine have shown how the movement of certain categories of people has been subject to increasing criminalisation and securitisation on the basis of class, racial, and ethnic differences, while their social inclusion has often occurred in a position of social, economic, and cultural subordination. If borders have always produced inequalities and multiple forms of discrimination, the current crises are having a tremendous, fast, and ever-changing effect on the European re-bordering process as well as on the multifarious experiences on the ground.

While a thorough analysis of the complexity and diversity of the European border regime and the evolution of its security mechanisms through time would go beyond the scope of this paper, two interrelated aspects of this process are nevertheless worth exploring to understand the consequences of bordering not only on the bodies of people but, more broadly, on the democratic system as a whole. First, the process of securitisation of migration movements has increasingly involved employment of agencies and institutions that operate outside the boundaries of the democratic system, often immune from accountability and transparency for their actions. This process does not merely refer to the externalisation, privatisation, and technologization of security controls through which relevant bordering practices have been appointed to private agencies, third countries, carriers, IT companies, and security corporations, which have come to manage large amount of data and information (but see on this Bigo & Guild 2010; Molnar 2019; Amoore 2021). Rather, it refers to the creation of specific actors that, despite being appointed and funded by European institutions, often operate in a blurred legal area, with increasing roles and funds but without clear legal responsibilities. These actors, which present themselves as security experts, generally conceive security as a scientific target that should be reached through specific management processes and technical operations.

Second, and consequently, the "technocratisation" of security issues and its appointment to specific experts—a process that saw the light with the rise of logistics within neoliberal globalisation (Cowen 2014)—has led to the de-politicisation of securitisation and to the convergence of right and left parties in the management of migration issues. In other words, just as technocratic experts have been increasingly appointed with the ideation and implementation of specific economic policies to solve the alleged social and economic problems of certain countries, removing the discussion of such policies from the public debate, so security experts have gained increasing power in the management of migration movements, presenting security as a technical objective that can be reached through the implementation of specific policies and practices.

The border agency FRONTEX constitutes a perfect example in this respect. First established in 2004 and relaunched as European Border and Coast Guard after the "long summer of migration", FRONTEX has operated within a securitarian framework that governs the mobilities of people entering and circulating across the European territory (Campesi 2015). The creation

and evolution of FRONTEX do not respond merely to the need of fortifying European external borders or to the necessity of protecting its internal territory. Rather, I argue, its underlying roles and functions are better grasped when subsumed within the same mechanisms that regulate the securitisation of mobilities within capitalism, controlling cross-border flows and preventing undesirable or illicit agents from infiltrating the European space.

The protection of EU external borders, the founding regulation of FRONTEX reminds us, is "a necessary corollary to the free movement of persons within the European Union and a fundamental component of an area of freedom, security and justice" (European Council 2004), especially on the eve of the crucial European enlargement to ten more countries, most of which from the former Soviet Union (Monar 2006; Léonard 2009, 2010). In assisting member states with, inter alia, the monitoring of migratory flows, the management of their external borders, the fight against organised cross-border crime and terrorism, and the coordination and organisation of joint operations and rapid border interventions, FRONTEX exerts its technical know-how and scientific expertise to decipher inherently political questions, striking a balance between freedom of movement and securitisation of borders (Neal 2009).

However, I argue the operations of FRONTEX go beyond the mere dichotomy of openness and closure. In the "time-space compression" of border management (Andersson 2014), the agency employs a supposedly neutral securitarian discourse as a governmental technique of border policing, disclosing an intertwining connection between practices of care and control (Walters 2012; Pallister-Wilkins 2015). Just as the revolution in logistics involves the evaluation and management of potential risks rather than their interception and elimination (see Cowen 2014), so FRONTEX is appointed with the identification and interdiction of undesirable agents *before* they can actually penetrate and endanger the whole society, with frequent violations of the right of asylum (Bigo 2005; Neal 2009).

Operating in a blurred legal space where European and national geopolitical interests intersect and superimpose on migration and asylum regulations, FRONTEX has employed its technical and allegedly neutral expertise to prevent, identify, and manage migration movements. Over the years, as security has become increasingly important in the political agenda of the EU and the driving factor of border management, the agency has seen a continuous multiplication of financial resources and personnel as well as increasing autonomy from nation states (Ferraro & De Capitani 2016; Campesi 2018). Especially since the 2016 reform, the new FRONTEX has been appointed with new tasks in border and migration management, such as the "right to intervene" in case of state failure to address migratory

pressures, the possibility to conduct search and rescue operations during border surveillance operations at sea, the enhancement of return and readmission procedures, and the strengthening of diplomatic coordination with third countries (Carrera et al. 2018). These tasks have extended the agency's operations beyond its traditional joint operations or rapid border interventions, complementing, monitoring, or in some cases substituting the functions of member states (Campesi 2018). Despite their reluctance to concede so many powers to a supra-national agency, member states are compelled to do so due to the lack of financial resources in autonomously managing their own borders, scarce coordination at the intergovernmental level, and increasing migratory (and social) pressures.

Besides, FRONTEX operations have been often immune from public scrutiny and accountability, allowing for a culture of abuse of power and impunity to develop (until they became too big to hide, as the recent scandals involving the agency have shown; for an overview see Marin 2014; Aas & Gundhus 2015). In this respect, Campesi (2018, 21; see also Trauner 2012) notes that, despite the obligation to appoint an internal Fundamental Rights Officer and the increasing answerability of the agency to European institutions, the increasing role of the European Parliament to reform the agency has not been "paralleled by effective democratic control over the definition of the policy guidelines" nor by an "effective strengthening of the EU Parliament powers to control the EBCG's operational strategy".

Beside the lack of democratic accountability behind the increasing power of the agency, what I am also interested in here is also how the framing of migration as a security issue and the parallel understanding of security as a neutral and technical matter have reflected on the political spectrum. Its technical expertise in security issues has contributed to present FRONTEX as an agency that, by protecting and strengthening the external borders of Europe, would also safeguard and reinforce the internal market. If the promotion and development of the common market has been the aim of neoliberal policies implemented by left-wing and right-wing parties alike, then their cooperation in justice and home affairs seems the consequent step to protect this market from external threats (see Huysmans 2000; Monar 2001). However, while the right has always emphasised the need for greater border controls and a more efficient management of migration movements, for the left this step has often involved the abandonment or dilution of their solidarity principles towards migrants and the defence of their rights.

With the advent of neoliberalism, therefore, the right and the left have arguably found increasing spaces of convergence not only about fiscal and economic policies (see Mudge 2018) but also, I argue, around migration and asylum issues. Certainly, the rhetoric that the left

and right have employed on migration and integration to appease their electorate may differ (Rovny 2012; Carvalho & Ruedin 2020), as does the position of their voters on such issues (Vestergaard 2020). However, the policies that they implement often share a common emphasis on the management of migration through re-bordering and securitisation measures. In fact, while centre-right parties have tended to cooperate with far-right parties, thus shifting their position on migration towards more conservative stances (Massetti 2015), centre-left parties have adopted more liberal opinions on integration but have embraced stronger positions on (especially irregular) migration, either on their own will (Alonso & da Fonseca 2011) or pushed by competition from the right (van Spanje 2010). This policy convergence between centre-left and centre-right parties has hindered the emergence of different perspectives on migration in the public debate, contributing to reinforce the dominant neoliberal ideology and its predilection for the free movement of capital and goods over that of (undesired) people (Berman & Snegovaya 2019; Berman & Kundnani 2021).

In this respect, the rise of far-right and populist parties all over Europe is not merely an accident, but the outcome of the continuous shift of the political spectrum towards the right and the result of the increasing perception among citizens of the inability of the political establishment to solve the current social and economic crises with the same neoliberal recipes that have fuelled those crises in the first place (Han 2015; Tooze 2018). As left-wing parties abandoned class struggle and the defence of workers' rights to embrace neoliberalism and economic consensus, masses of people have found themselves without political support and guidance, falling back on those parties that could provide security and protection against the social and economic dangers of neoliberal globalisation (Alonso & da Fonseca 2011; Berman & Snegovaya 2019). Although even centre-left parties have often adopted—both theoretically and practically—a narrative of security and protection in the attempt to appease their electorate or conquer a new one, they are often perceived as tied with the bourgeoisie and incapable of defending workers' rights (Undiemi 2021; Hutter & Kriesi 2022).

Bordering Democracies, Democratising Borders?

The current process of re-bordering is not only territorial, with the physical increase in security measures to control and manage migration movements but also political, with the delimitation of the democratic debate over social, political, and economic issues (Chomsky & Barsamian 2003). In other word, the re-bordering process has been territorially externalised to other countries or appointed to private security companies, and politically hidden from public sight, overlooked, or normalised in our everyday life. The removal of

important political issues from the public discourse or their internalisation among citizens, I argue, can have far-reaching consequences on the democratic system as a whole. Papadopoulos (2013) has called this process the "hollowing-out of democracies": while there has been a proliferation of democracies over the past decades, making some scholars talk about a golden age of democracy, the quality and substance of the democratic process have been eroded, due to the decreasing number of voters and the parallel decrease in democratic legitimacy, the growing disconnectedness between citizens and their representatives, and the increasing lack of democratic accountability of political institutions.

The role of media and political discourses has been paramount in shaping the public opinion on bordering processes and migration movements, as well as in influencing political results (Eberl et al. 2018; Matthes & Schmuck 2017). This is particularly evident in the analysis of political concerns regarding immigration: as Mondon and Winter notice (2020), while migration does not seem to represent a big issue among people at the local level, it becomes one of the top priorities at the national level, due precisely to the combined role of media and political discourses in framing it as a security concern. This process of framing, which dates back to the first (irregularised) migration movements towards southern Europe, has further exacerbated with the emergence of more recent crises, bringing with them an even more violent narrative pushing towards the criminalisation of migration movements as well as of search and rescue operations (see Cusumano & Bell 2021; Valente et al. 2021). As a matter of fact, as Zachariadi writes (Zachariadi & Lymes 2020, 269), "There can't be neutrality when the existing relations are unequal": even when the media report on specific facts about immigration adopting a relatively neutral or objective tone, the lack of background information and political analysis on those facts risks presenting them as singular events disconnected from the social, political, and economic structures within which they occur.

The de-politicisation and de-democratisation of political issues have also led to the normalisation and interiorisation of thoughts and actions that have instead enormous hidden social or political costs. With de-democratisation I do not refer to a supposedly authoritarian turn of contemporary democratic systems, but rather to the above-mentioned hollowing-out of democratic practices and rules, as well as to the parallel impoverishment of the public debate. On the political level, for example, Brand and Wissen (2021) note how simple everyday actions like buying a t-shirt or driving a car have been normalised and deprived of any political meaning, overlooking the social and economic processes behind the production and circulation of stuff, and unwillingly reproducing global inequalities and environmental problems. When translating this process of normalisation and interiorisation into issues

of re-bordering, it becomes clear that most citizens know neither how borders operate, nor the social, political, and economic costs of bordering processes. In fact, they sometimes reproduce them in their everyday life, internalising their dividing mechanisms without critically processing them (see Rumford 2013; Yuval-Davis et al. 2019).

Whether implemented from the above or unwillingly reproduced in everyday life, borders seem to still provide a sense of security and protection. As earlier border scholars have argued with the advancement of neoliberal ideas and the multiplication of borders across society, borders constitute important territorial and cultural markers (Newman & Paasi 1998; Paasi 1998; van Houtum & van Naerssen 2002). Over the past twenty years, and even more so after the recent crises, there has been a resurgence of borders along the territorial edges of nation states and the EU as a whole. The fortifications along the Greek-Turkish border, the enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla in Morocco, the Polish-Belarusian and the Finnish-Russian borders, the FRONTEX operations in the Mediterranean Sea, or the wall between the USA and Mexico, just to name a few, represent states' "last bastion of sovereignty" (Dauvergne 2008). In an increasingly globalised world, the control over territory remains a state prerogative that allows them to defend themselves from the global forces and movements that allegedly threaten their sovereignty (Brown 2010).

The resurgence of border controls, however, is not simply an attempt to reinstate a geopolitical authority over a certain territory, but a way to filter mobilities along the lines of class, power, and race, increasing the social, economic, and cultural gaps between "us" and "them". When migration to Europe was functional to the social and economic reconstruction of the countries after the Second World War, it was promoted and incentivised through guest worker programmes (Geddes & Scholten 2016). However, when migration movements would continue after the termination of these programmes, in a period marked by wars and conflicts, violent processes of "accumulation by dispossession" (Harvey 2004), increasing internationalisation of the division of labour, and growing inequalities between the countries of the Global North and those of the Global South, they were met with border restrictions, security measures, and criminalisation.

These measures have not functioned as deterrents but rather as attempts to regulate and filter migrant mobilities, allowing their differential inclusion within the European territory in a position of domination and subordination (Mezzadra & Neilson 2013). The 2015 "long summer of migration" and the displacement of Ukrainian refugees following the Russian invasion constitute pertinent examples in this respect. In the first case, the initial opening of borders along the Balkan route and across Europe facilitated the entrance of hundreds of thousands of relatively wealthy and well-educated Syrian refugees, functional to the economic development of countries such as Germany (Maroufi 2017) as well as to their (self-)promotion as caring and compassionate nations (Mavelli 2017). As the spotlights on the "long summer of migration" turned off, a renovated rhetoric on migration as a cultural threat against "our" way of life spread again, fuelled by the terrorist attack in Paris in November 2015 and the Cologne sexual assaults on New Year's Eve, leading to the reinstatement of border controls within and outside Europe and to the externalisation of border and migration management to Turkey.

More recently, the flight of millions of Ukrainian people after the Russian invasion of the country in February 2022 was initially received favourably by European countries, even those like Poland and Hungary that had not been particularly keen on accepting (certain categories of) refugees in the past through the implementation of distribution mechanisms across the EU. The geopolitical intents of these countries were visible: as Russia was their common enemy, especially after having been under its sphere of influence over great part of the twentieth century, they show solidarity by, among other things, hosting hundreds of thousands of refugees from Ukraine. However, as the conflict and the relative displacement of people continued, it became clear that these countries would only accept white refugees, leaving behind ethnically and racially different refugees. Just like the Polish-Belarussian border crisis of the year before, which saw Poland build a militarised barrier along its eastern border to prevent the entrance of black and brown refugees crossing through Belarus, so with the Ukrainian-Russian conflict the border became a filter to select and separate deserving refugees from undeserving ones according to racial criteria (Fajfer 2021; Klaus & Szulecka 2022).

Through the de-politicisation and technocratisation of migration issues, the growing resort to practices of externalisation and privatisation of borders, and the role of political and media discourses in shaping the public debate around migration, the current process of European re-bordering has become increasingly internalised and normalised among European citizens (Rumford 2013; Yuval-Davis et al. 2019). Securitisation and multiplication of bordering practices are often advanced as (the only) solution to regulate and manage migration movements from both left and right parties, and private technocratic institutions have been increasingly entrusted with the control of territorial borders, with scarce social, legal, and democratic accountability (Fink 2020; ECRE 2021).

The social and political opposition to processes of territorial and socio-cultural re-bordering is therefore not an easy task. An enormous work on the cultural level is fundamental to disassemble the hegemonic ideology of bordering among political and media

discourses, as well as to deconstruct and dismantle the role of the latter in shaping and reproducing such a dominant ideology. It is also necessary, I would argue, to understand and analyse the current process of European re-bordering within the longstanding transformations of global capitalism, with their tendency toward the de-politicisation, technocratisation, and de-democratisation of social, political, and economic issues, thus reconnecting multiple struggles across local, regional, and global levels. Cultural and ideological activities should be accompanied by practical and grounded actions at, across, and against bordering practices, aimed not only at raising awareness on their violent character, but also at dismantling or disturbing their operations.

Bringing democracy back in, however, does not simply mean giving the power that has been delegated to technocratic or private institutions back to the states and their parliaments, nor advocating for the humanisation of bordering practices per se. If borders are instruments of social exclusion, economic inequalities, and ethno-cultural differences, then it would be more coherent to argue for their abolition rather than their democratisation (Walia 2020). However, in a society where political and economic issues have been taken away from public debate, we should bring these issues back on the political scene, enlarge the spectrum of the social and political debate, and involve citizens and interest parties in the public discussion. This is what I mean by democratising borders.

Like other social and cultural processes, borders can be contested, subverted, and dismantled, opening up new spaces for inclusion, solidarity, and democracy. While it is important to look in a systematic and comprehensive way at how geopolitical and socio-cultural boundaries have reproduced through space and time, it is also necessary to explore whether and how citizens and non-citizens have negotiated, challenged, or resisted them. In this sense, the border can represent not only a starting point for the analysis of multiple and intertwining processes at the global, national, and local levels as well as their effects on the everyday life of people, but also a crucial intersection of alternative ideas, mutual practices, and forms of solidarity. Only in this way is it possible to imagine and implement an alternative future, capable of tearing down social and cultural boundaries and connecting people with different stories and from different backgrounds.

Note

1 This essay is part of the Special Section: Border Renaissance, edited by Astrid M. Fellner, Eva Nossem, and Christian Wille, in *Borders in Globalization Review* 5(1): 67–158

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