CONTESTING EUROPEANISM: MIGRANT SOLIDARITY ACTIVISM IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

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Introduction

In this paper, I present some of the findings emerging from my PhD research, which is concerned with the discourses and practices of pro-migrant organisations in the European Union (EU). This topic deals with fundamental questions addressing the core of the European project: the extent to which the European Union welcomes and accommodates non-European migrants can indeed be conceptualised as a test-case for claims of a post-national and cosmopolitan Europe. Soysal (1994), for example, has argued on numerous occasions that, in western European societies and under the pressure brought about by the experience of post-war immigration, national citizenship is losing ground to a more universal model of membership grounded in a deterriorialised notion of personal rights. In this perspective, European citizenship, perceived as a post-national relation between a new form of political entity and the residents of its territory, has been upheld as possessing a great potential for challenging the national concept of citizenship and providing protection and rights outside the framework of the state-citizen relationship. My PhD research proposes to examine such claims by, first, interrogating the nature of the European Union and the associated notions of European identity and citizenship and, second, looking at the types of mobilisation emerging in support of migrants and the impact of these mobilisations on dominant notions of Europeanness.

The politics of 'Europeanism'

The European Union claims to be a novel political and institutional form that goes beyond the nation-state and the nationalist excesses of the first half of the European 20th century by offering a new post-national model of political belonging. In this discourse, European citizenship and the Schengen Area, which allows the free movement of European citizens within its territory, are presented as the most accomplished examples of the European departure from traditional concepts of membership and borders.

However, a closer examination of the processes at work brings out two major elements that come to challenge these claims. First, the concept of European citizenship, that articulates the relationship between the residents of Europe and the European political entity, features important limitations. Indeed, by being uniquely derivative (which means only individuals already citizens of an EU member state can acquire it), it goes against the claim that Europe offers post-national forms of belonging and political membership. Second, while the Schengen Area does bring freedom of movement for EU citizens and (some of) its residents, the dissolution of internal borders has been matched by a reinforcement of the external borders of the Area so brutal in its stated desire to repel migrants that expressions such as 'fortress Europe' and 'Europe at war against migrants' have been gaining currency. While these expressions tend to ignore the process of *differentiated inclusion* (rather than hermetic closure) operated by the EU borders, they are nonetheless revealing illustrations of the stance the EU has taken towards migrants. In fact, Schengen operates as a single state for international travels and relies on understandings of borders, territory and identity strikingly similar to those operated in the nation-state form. In the context of a dominant European discourse emphasising the novelty of the political and institutional formation of the European Union, observing the elements of *continuity* at work in the European project is an enlightening approach. For thousands of migrants trying to reach Europe, the border remains as material and tangible as ever.

The question these two observations raise relates to the role of the border in the construction of the EU. It seems to me that, for European politicians suffering from a lack of legitimacy that has given rise to the idea of a 'European democratic deficit' and to a number of tools aimed at monitoring European public opinion vis-à-vis the Union,[1] the border remains a crucial institution whose function is primarily

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[1] Most notably, the Eurobarometer created in 1973.

ideological. Numerous scholars have addressed the role played by the border in the creation and consolidation of the nation-state. As Paasi argues (2011: 63), understanding borders is inherently an issue of understanding how states function and thus 'how borders can be exploited to both mobilize and fix territory, security, identities, emotions and memories, and various forms of national socialization'. Indeed, through its capacity to delimitate a supposedly homogenous 'inside' from a radically different 'outside', the border has been mobilised as a prime instrument of definition of the 'nation', this 'imagined community' examined by Anderson's (2006) seminal work. Similarly, the idea according to which the EU will gain full legitimacy when there will exist a self-identified European people has been repetitively put forward by Eurocrats and European opinion makers. From there on, one of the main tasks of the European Union is to produce this European people – a difficult task in a part of the world where, a mere century ago, national rivalries opened up the way for decades of war and destruction.

This is all the more challenging since, against a background of centuries of national enmities and the absence of substantial identity narratives that could bring together the people of Europe into a convincing 'imagined community' and trigger mass allegiance toward the EU, the Union has been the target of increasing popular discontent particularly since the Eurozone crisis and the brutal imposition of austerity measures on the people of its member states. In this context, as Fran Cetti (2010) puts it, 'the survival of locally or regionally based capitals in an internationally hybrid world of instability, regional conflicts and economic convulsions demands … an inherently ideological operation to postulate a unitary set of interests in the attempt to displace social antagonisms and secure legitimacy'. Examples of discourses aiming at naturalising Europe can be found throughout European Studies manuals. Jordan (1973) for instance claims that 'Europe is a culture that occupies a cultural idea' while, for Ertl, Europe is 'a community of people who hold numerous beliefs, exhibit specific behaviours, and overall participate in a general way of life that would include a philosophy or an ideology' (2008: 27). I call these ongoing attempts at conjuring a sense of European belonging the 'politics of Europeanism' and locate them within a vital struggle for meaning on the part of the EU.

In contrast with such essentialist narratives, a number of scholars have elaborated critical reflections on attempts to form a European identity. Gerard Delanty (1995) claims that defining Europe has always relied on representations of what it is not and been characterised by the lack of European unity besides that achieved through adversity. He demonstrates that lines of exclusion/inclusion have always been at the heart of projects related to the idea of Europe and that Europe's cultural and political identity has historically been articulated through a process of constant re-construction of 'ins' and 'outs' reflecting particular sets of power relations at given points in time. Ideas of Europe have been characterised by their production of an excluded otherness, in both geographical and 'mythological' terms, which evolves in content throughout time (different 'Others' are mobilised towards the elaboration of different projects) but remains constant as a mechanism. His conclusion is that these dynamics of exclusion are more than ever at work in the EU project: 'who is a European is largely a matter of exclusion, and in the dichotomy of self and other which constitutes the discourse of European identity, Europeanness is constructed in opposition to the non-European, in particular Islam. This sense of the uniqueness of the European is today emerging as a basis for a kind of supranational identity and citizenship which European integration does not have' (Delanty 1995: 9).

In line with this author, I argue that, in spite of its claims to represent a supra- or post-national political entity freed from the restrictive tendencies of the national form, the process of production of a European identity has relied on similarly exclusionary mechanisms. In order to trigger a sense of allegiance within the population of its member states, the EU has resorted to the figure of the foreign Other, traditionally mobilised in national identity-building enterprises, as an ideological counterpoint against which what qualifies as European can be defined. This Other has been revamped to fulfil the need of the

large regional project and has been granted alleged civilisational and cultural features. The idea of the 'migrant', sanctified in European legislation as the 'third country national', has been of utmost importance in the construction of European self and otherness. In this respect, I argue that, rather than making nationalism obsolete, EU integration is actually crafting a form of hyper-nationalism. European identity is thus created at its external and internal borders – in its regime of visa and residence permits, in its retention centres, in its discriminatory policies against migrants within member states and so on. As Haynes puts it:

> it is here, in both the ideas and practice of immigration control, perpetuated both at the intergovernmental level and at the level of the EU, that the new 'Europe' is being forged, as much as in the debates and celebrations of internal unity (Haynes in Dale & Cole 1999: 25).

Contesting the EU border regime

In this context, it is possible to see why groups and movements contesting EU border controls and immigration policies engage with issues at the heart of the European project, unsettling one the key mechanisms used to justify and stabilise its existence. Between June 2012 and September 2013, as part of my fieldwork, I conducted participatory observation and interviews with activists engaged in migrant solidarity work in three EU countries, namely France, Italy and the UK, and tried to grasp the ways in which their activities challenged and destabilised the dominant European discourse. Groups working in solidarity with migrants in Europe are varied and plentiful: they range from Brussels-based organisations engaged in policy work and lobbying of EU institutions to research groups concerned with documenting and reporting on imprisonment practices in detention centres, to numerous community or activist groups providing day-to-day practical support to migrants. Before starting my fieldwork proper, I spent some time 'filtering' these groups in order to select the type of practices and discourses I would be focusing on. My main criterion was that my participants had to be involved in migrant solidarity work at the European level, rather than solely in local or national contexts. Through this pre-research process, I identified 11 groups and campaigns in the three above-mentioned countries. I then conducted 29 in-depth interviews, lasting an average of two hours and a half, with representatives (members, staff or volunteers) from these groups and networks.

Before moving on to discussing some of my research findings, I would like to present three recent developments that have been affecting the political practices and identities of the groups and networks participating in my research. Solidarity campaigns and groups opposing and denouncing the way in which migrants are treated are by no means new. They have featured in Western European countries' political and social life in various forms since the emergence of immigration controls and the importation of migrant workers for industrial purposes as early as the late 18th and early 19th centuries.[2] However, I would argue that the groups and movements I am looking at in my research present some qualitative differences when compared with previous forms of migrant solidarity. The groups created recently specifically to address issues engendered by the Europeanisation of migration frameworks and those that existed before but have both been pushed into engaging with European issues have been shaped by the new political and social context of migration in Europe.

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[2] See for example Cohen S. (2001) *No One Is Illegal: Immigration Control and Asylum*, Stratford Upon Thames: Trentham Books or Hayter, T. (2004) *Open Borders: The Case Against Immigration Controls*, London: Pluto Press.

First, there has been an irruption of migrant-led struggles which have brought a new migrant subjectivity into the political discourse associated with migration. The intervention of migrant-led initiatives in the political space of European societies is a relatively new phenomenon that has nonetheless deeply affected the ways in which pro-migrant groups operate and conceptualise their work. The French *sans-papiers* movement of the 1990s is a well-known example of this. A large part of the scholarship on the *sans-papiers* focused on the affirmation of the political subjectivity of non-citizens and the disruption of the traditional understanding of democracy, civil rights and citizenship (Wright 2003: 5).[3] Though the relationship of the organisations and groups I have interviewed with migrant-led groups varies, the conceptual recognition of a subjectivity and agency of migrants, as a diverse and heterogeneous group, is unanimously asserted.

The second development is the emergence, since the late 1990s, of various contentious political and social interventions that can be loosely brought under the label of anti- or alter-globalisation politics. While the groups and networks participating in my research had variable relationships with the alter-globalist movement, the strong inscription of migrants' issues in platforms such as the European Social Forum had led to new frames of analysis of migrants' issues, which in turn influenced the understanding and discourse of my participants. In particular, my participants believed that border control practices of a given EU member state could not be seen as simply the expression of an unjust national government. Rather, they inscribed their analysis within a larger reflection on the roles of borders globally, and their relationship with other global dynamics of domination and exploitation.

Finally, the institutional terrain on which these groups and campaigns are fighting diverges from that of previous pro-migrant initiatives. The participant groups and campaigns exist in particular local and national settings operating through their own political institutions but, at the same time, they all engage in European-level political practices. This supranational engagement has followed the realisation that immigration and asylum controls had changed and had to be fought at different levels and by addressing different actors – in particular that there was a need to fight beyond national boundaries and to confront trans- and supranational institutions (see below for a detailed analysis). The evolution of the centre of power and decision-making into a multi-layered and complex transnational and intergovernmental assemblage has thus called for new structures and tactics in order to efficiently address the new political and institutional setting in which they operate.

When and Why: The Emergence of Transnational Pro-Migrant Actors in the EU

In order to test the hypothesis of an increasing transnationalisation of migration struggles in the EU in response to the harmonisation of immigration laws and policies, I used various qualitative methodological tools. In the following lines, I will focus on the data I collected through interviews, during which I asked my participants some open-ended questions concerning their relationship with the EU and the way in which the communitarisation of immigration and asylum had affected their work. A strikingly consistent narrative emerged, identifying a number of key moments in the development of European legislation which decisively encouraged activists to operate at the European level and to develop transnational links. The following session offers a brief summary of the narrative collected. It is worth adding that a number of 'crisis moments' such as the 1999 events in Sangatte or the 2011 'crisis of Lampedusa' were also of prime importance to impulse further and more radical series of actions.

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[3] See also McNevin 2006 and Lowry and Nyers 2003.

The harmonisation of legislative frameworks governing issues related to migration and asylum has been a key area of cooperation between EU member states at least since the 1985 Schengen Agreement. The rationale for Europeanising immigration and asylum policies was that the free movement of people within the EU/ECC space could only happen if, first, all member states applied identical criteria regarding entry requirements into their territory for 'third country nationals' and, second, if the controls which had been waived at the EU's internal borders were reported and reinforced at its external borders. These legislations, which had started as inter-governmental regulations, were fully incorporated into European legislation with the 1997 Treaty of Amsterdam. The Treaty was implemented at the 1999 Tampere Summit, which was strongly criticised by European civil society organisations for its secrecy, lack of transparency and the association it made between 'immigration' and 'security' (Statewatch 2003). Subsequently, the harmonisation was further codified with the 2006 Schengen Borders Code[4] and the 2010 Schengen Visa Code[5] which legislate on border surveillance, joint controls and cooperation between member states regarding border checks and govern the role of the European external border agency, Frontex.

Several participants explained that it was not until the mid- or late 1990s that they took full measure of what was happening at the EU level. They acknowledged feeling concerned following the 1985 signature of the Schengen agreement, in particular as it failed to address the issue of the status of 'third country nationals' and started to refer to the reinforcement of Europe's external borders, but it was not until the 1992 Treaty of Maastricht, which created the EU and European citizenship as an exclusively derivative status, that the discriminatory and exclusive nature of the Union was fully grasped. Soon after Maastricht, the process of Europeanisation of immigration and asylum laws was initiated, boosted by the 1995 implementation of Schengen. This process encouraged closer collaboration between activists in different EU member states, both to exchange information in order to understand what the effects of these developments were and to share ideas about how to resist them. A participant from Gisti summarised these evolutions as follows:

> At Gisti, there was a preoccupation since the late 1980s … regarding what would come out of the Schengen Agreement. Some of our members were paying close attention … to something which the French *associations* were not talking about - the implementation of this Schengen agreement, which was going to reorganise circulation inside what was then the Schengen area … and all the consequences it would have on the status of migrants in France… But it was really difficult to work with our traditional *associative* partners, because all this seemed very theoretical for these partners. It wasn't there… Contrarily to what was happening in other countries, the French government never publicly announced the negotiations or what was being talked about in Brussels about the implementation of this Schengen Area (…) But we quickly anticipated that from this system would come out many things which would have rather serious implications, and that we had to be ready for what would come next. And thus to find partners elsewhere, outside France… (Anne 2012)

While it might have been the case that, at first, the developments were going unnoticed in France, participants in Italy which, like other Mediterranean countries, was suddenly turned into a border guard country for western and northern European member states, draw a very different picture:

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[4] See *Schengen Borders Code* < http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2006:105:0001:0032:EN:PDF> [last accessed in March 2014].
[5] See *Schengen Visa Code* <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=CELEX:31995R1683:EN:HTML> [last accessed in March 2013].

In Italy, until the mid 1980s, we didn't have any immigration law. Issues to do with migration and residency were still governed through a royal decree from the 1930s, which basically gave administrative discretion on the matter. Of course, I am not saying that Italy was a heaven for immigrants. But that changed very rapidly after 1995, when the Schengen Agreement was coming into place, and Italy was told it had to adopt immigration policies that were along the lines of those that existed in northern European countries. Not only the law changed, there was a discourse to go with it, and you could see the change in people's attitude, you could see racist graffiti appearing on the walls … You know, there was definitely a new form of racist discourse in the media, by the politicians, that was being pushed forward, in the name of Europe. So we had to tackle this (Zak 2012) [6]

It is on the occasion of the 1999 Tampere summit that, for the first time, these diverse experiences were brought together by activists. Schneider, a No Border activist and blogger, remembers the days leading up to the formation of the No Border network before 1999 as follows:

It all began with a meeting in Amsterdam, at the margins of a big demonstration against the EU summit in 1997 ... The priorities and objectives of the political work in each country were gravely different, but what the groups had in common was the demand for practical, political intervention at the base i.e. grassroots politics. The new network was … concerned with systematically creating the preconditions for a Europe-wide collaboration, whose purpose was in the first place to enrich the every-day activities in each and every country … Yet, although a regular exchange of information was arranged amongst the participants of the first network meeting, the initial zest soon died away … However, this was about to change: in 1999 the network was renamed "Noborder" and relaunched with the European-wide protest action to mark the occasion of the EU's special summit "justice and the interior" in Tampere. This latter was expressly dedicated to the aim of standardizing the asylum and migration politics in the European context. In the preparation some Noborder groups had managed to connect with promising contacts in France and, above all, in Italy. On this basis a common European day-of-action was arranged (…) to protest in a decentralized but coordinated manner against a new chapter in the politics of separation: (…) more exclusion, more control, more deportation.[7]

For these activists, the word Tampere became shorthand for the Europeanisation of immigration and asylum policy. It came to stand for the very process whereby a certain Europe, based on a system of segregation and discrimination and on a discourse of exclusion, was taking shape. It was a key moment in the history of many of the autonomous migrant solidarity groups: from then on, they started to consistently try 'to match the level of the attack' (Sean 2012). Following the Tampere counter-demonstrations, the European No Border network emerged. 1999 was also the year of PICUM's establishment in Brussels. PICUM came about at the initiative of a group of grassroots organisations from Belgium, the Netherlands and Germany, which shared similar concerns regarding the lack of protection for undocumented migrants in the new European legal framework on immigration and asylum. A PICUM participant explained that:

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[6] Similarly, in Portugal, the post-Salazar immigration laws passed in the mid 1980s had to be strongly tightened under pressure from the EU in 1993, in preparation for the implementation of Schengen.
[7] http://www.tacticalmediafiles.net/article.jsp;jsessionid=82879400D2D0FFB4F4C701D6D2584FD7?objectnumber=44008

As the laws around migration were being transferred into the legal structure of the EU, groups in various member states realised that … the issue of undocumented migrants was left out of these juridical developments and that they would not gain any form of protection through the process of Europeanisation. We felt undocumented migrants and the problems they face had to be defended in the EU, and the best way for us to have leverage was to join forces and literally 'turn up the volume': make our voices louder by shouting together (Daniela 2013)

Tampere called itself a summit on 'freedom, justice and security', presented as core tenets of the European project. But activists were quick to denounce that the quest for a European identity was being led at the expense of many other European residents: all those who did not have citizenship in one of the member states. European citizenship did not therefore move away from the exclusionary features of national identity discourses but, in fact, added an additional layer of exclusion for non-citizens.

How and What: Activities, Tactics and Tools of Pan-European Pro-Migrant Actors

With the successful institutionalisation of the nation-state, peaking in the late 18th and 19th centuries, political action and affiliations had become increasingly concentrated at the national level. In this paper I have argued that, in the case of the supranationalisation of political frameworks that is taking place under the auspices of the European Union, the dominant attempts at fostering a sense of shared political destiny among the 'people of Europe' has largely failed. Yet, a process of transnationalisation of contentious politics has nonetheless been taking place in order to oppose and challenge discourses and policies coming from the EU. During the course of my interviews, I asked members of the participant organisations and campaigns to explain the ways in which they developed, strengthened and expanded pan-European links. The sets of activities, tools and tactics they described fall into three (non mutually exclusive) broad categories: communication and decision-making, network (building and expanding) and organising joint protests and actions.

- *Transnational communication*

Communication tools used by pro-migrant groups across Europe can be divided into two separate, yet sometimes overlapping, categories: on the one hand, groups and campaigns develop internal communication tools, including transnational and crossborder ones, and, on the other hand, they design ways to communicate with the wider public, the media, relevant political institutions and other groups focusing on different issues. In this session I focus mainly on the first type of communication tools. As many scholars examining internal communication among activist networks have observed, mailing lists are the preferred communication tool for many transnational activist groups and campaigns (Kavada 2007; Saeed, Rohde and Wulf 2011). For example, since 2003, Migreurop has run a public mailing list intended for the 'circulation of information and debates about the European externalisation policies and detention centres for migrants'[8] which currently has 1227 subscribers.[9] Subscription is opened and the average number of emails is just over 100 per month.[10] However, Migreurop is also organised through a number

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[8] http://archives.rezo.net/archives/migreurop.mbox/Y5XOJHJPMKROR5HKN4OMMFDBI5N3LZPV
[9] Figures checked on 19 March 2013.
[10] These are my own calculations based on list circulation during six months (July to December 2012).

of working groups devoted to organising the network's activities related to specific topics,[11] which all have their own private mailing lists.

Similarly, all No Border groups in Europe have set up local mailing lists where they exchange information relevant to their particular contexts, but there also exists a Europe-wide list, the Action-2 list, where information and announcements are exchanged between groups and activists across national contexts. The history of this list is an interesting illustration of the dynamics of transnationalisation of pro-migrant activists in Europe and the interaction between online and offline developments. It was agreed to set up the list in October 2004 in order to help coordinate the second European day of action for migrants that had been called for at the European Social Forum (ESF) in London that year. The call-out that circulated online was aimed at 'all groups, networks and social movements, not only the ones working on migration-related issues'. At the time, groups from Italy, France, Spain, Germany, the UK, Greece, Portugal, Belgium and Slovenia decided to set up the Action-2 mailing list in order to communicate with each other about the demonstrations and actions they were planning in their local and national contexts at this occasion. After the day of action took place, the list remained active and it is used to this day.

Besides providing transnational communication structures, these mailing lists have also play a key role in 'Europeanising' issues, as one of the participants from Fasti put it:

> If we face a problem and we need other activists and organisations to know about it quickly, in order for example to elicit a quick response, well if we send an email to the list, the local problem becomes immediately European. (Sonia 2012)

In this sense, this communication process among activists and groups contributes to the construction of a more sophisticated analysis and a common discourse, based on the wide range of experiences and information circulated on the lists. It is worth noting here that this form of transnational communication tools were first developed and used by the anti-capitalist movement and later appropriated at various levels and in various ways by other types of groups and networks. They are another telling example of the influence of the 'global' anti-capitalist movement on activists in Europe and the West more generally.

- *Building and expanding networks*

I have distinguished between communication and network-building activities in the sense that network-building work, both internal (consolidation) and external (expansion), has the clear intention of recruiting and retaining members. 'Maintaining a network alive,' says Migreurop coordinator Laura (2012), 'is not a small task; it is a systematic and organised job. This job requires structures and tools, which allow equal participation of all and solidify the links between our various members'. The wide availability of online tools, which allow the active involvement of network members or fellow activists, is of course crucial in this regard. Laura adds (*ibid*):

> We are not a political party, we are an associative network, and what that means is that we do not have a centralised decision-making power and then members implementing them. Our network is a horizontal platform, which means we need tools to allow horizontality in our everyday work.

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[11] For example, Migreurop has a group working on detention, another on externalisation, as well as several working groups working on the different aspects of its campaigns.

And if you want a network to be transnational, you must develop transnational horizontal networking tools. (…) This is why we have our working groups, and we internationalise the daily life of the network. We have more and more Skype meetings so that our colleagues in other countries can participate as much as people here in France or nearby. And we also do a lot of translation...

Migreurop also organises yearly *rencontres internationales* ('international meetings') for its members. The first such meeting took place in Seville, Spain, in 2005. Given the network's wide geographical spread, it has since tried to have these meetings in various countries inside and outside Europe and to cover the travel costs of representatives from its member organisations. There have been *rencontres* in Rabat, Morocco (2006), Paris, France (2009), Istanbul, Turkey (2010) and Cecina, Italy (2011). The *rencontres* are, above all, the main opportunity for network members to meet each other in person and, therefore, play a vital part in the strengthening of the network. As the network's coordinator argues that meeting in person 'adds something qualitatively different: it does not mean we cannot work with people we have only met virtually, but something gets strengthened when there is face to face contact' (Laura 2012). A number of partner and like-minded organisations are also invited to attend these meetings, which has been crucial to the expansion of the network.

Though they can be successful at reinforcing links between groups in the case of a tight network like Migreurop, some participants offered contrasting assessment of large international meetings as mere formalities with little concrete outcomes. A Migrants' Rights 'Network (MRN) staff member was of the view that

some of these things [European meetings] are definitely over-estimated. (…) We still go, but I find very little value in that sort of, err… (…) It is sort of an external initiative: a "we need to share experiences, and we need to talk" (…). But it is always the same people, the Brussels people and a few more who are reps of big NGOs in member countries… Or maybe sometimes you meet groups that are so different to you that you don't really see the usefulness of meeting them… On the other hand, some of the less formal ways of collaboration have a lot more added value to them… the problem with that is that it is very difficult to sustain them because you kind of, I mean, you obviously need funding for pretty much everything you do (Jack 2012)

This quote above touches on three important issues characteristic of large transnational events: the risk that only a small cosmopolitan elite will be represented, the varied organisational models across the groups and the obstacles to collaboration that they can pause and the lack of autonomous resources available to most transnational networks and campaigns. The difficulties associated with cooperating across local and national contexts and the sense of an elite-biased Europe are two important factors which I will come back in details in the next session.

- *Transnationalising protest*

Certain forms of Europe-wide protests have by now become strongly associated with the migration field. An important example in this regard is the No Border camps. No Border camps deserve particular attention as a form of politics and activism that redefines the scope of contentious action in the field of migration in Europe, while at the same time following a long tradition of protest tactics, that of the

protest camp. No Border camps are also of interest, I would argue, because they have influenced the discourses and practices of other pro-migrant groups by bringing direct action to the migration struggle field and by expanding the boundaries of the acceptable discourse when it comes to the issues of migration, sovereignty and citizenship. No Border camps aim to re-politicise the sanitised everydayness of repressive immigration and border controls by exposing their devastating consequences on people's lives (Sean and Alex 2012). They typically take place at symbolic spots of the EU border regimes such as physical borders, immigration detention centres, near airports associated with forcible deportation and, as was the case with the Strasbourg and Brussels camps, at emblematic sites of EU power and decision-making. These camps can be looked at through Hakin Bey's notion of 'temporary autonomous zones' (Walters 2006) in the sense that they aim to create temporary spaces that elude formal structures of control. Typically, a No Border camp will be a horizontal space of experience-sharing and political debates, with various workshops and discussions, as well as a number of planned and spontaneous direct actions and protests aimed at the 'disruption of the running of the border regime' (Sean and Alex 2012).

Several participants of other groups and networks are regular attendants of No Border camps. They are also keen to co-organise protests with groups from other countries. Laura (2012) explains that inter-associative campaigns are an increasing focus for Migreurop, which used to primarily focus on internal networking work, but has now realised the 'complementarity between strengthening the network inside, and expanding it outside'. The case of Boats for People (B4P) is illustrative in this respect: the campaign was largely supported by Migreurop and its member organisations, but a number of other associations, groups and individual activists also supported it in a variety of ways. According to a participant in B4P:

> Taking part [in B4P] brought us closer to other activists and groups. We might have known them through emails but now we feel we have comrades. And new projects have come out of the campaign, like Watch the Med. This campaign was just the start of something bigger (Nidal 2013)

An interesting effect of the transnationalisation of pro-migrant protests in Europe has been the sharing and mixing of tactics and strategies between and across groups and networks. For instance, B4P's idea of a flotilla stopping over at various symbolic points of the EU border regime around the Mediterranean Sea, and staging symbolic actions and protests to denounce the effect of EU policies on people's lives, strongly inspired another campaign: one year later, in the summer of 2013, a new flotilla project called 'Voices from the Border' was planned with participants from the Netherlands, Belgium, France and the UK. One of the 'Voices from the Borders' main members, a Dutch activist based in Amsterdam, was involved in B4P the previous summer and decided to initiate a similar campaign in his own context and with another set of partners. This is an interesting illustration of the ways in which tactics used by pro-migrant groups and campaigns travel beyond their original site and are re-appropriated and re-used in different spaces by other activists.

Another example of this has to do with the forms of actions that pro-migrant groups and activists stage. Organising conventional symbolic actions and protests has been a common tactic. For instance, at the launch of the Frontexit campaign, in Brussels in March 2013, fake migrant raids were orchestrated with Migreurop activists staging street arrests in public spaces in order to make this practice visible to passers-by. However, some groups and networks, such as the No Border and Stop Deportation networks, have focused on more unconventional direct rather than symbolic actions, with the aim of actually interrupting immigration control practices. (Sean 2012) These include actions intended to disrupt, delay or

stop immigration raids and forcible deportations, where activists attempt to physically block the arrests or deportation of migrants. Direct action does not try to directly pressure national and European authorities into stopping or changing their policies. Rather, it aims to intervene in the process and disrupt it, using various types of traditional and innovative protests, occupations and blockades. Such actions also often target non-state actors, such as security companies, travel agents and airlines complicit in forcible deportations. Tactics include the occupation of the company's offices or calling for the boycotts of particular businesses.

While direct action has somewhat become a 'trademark' of certain radical, anarchist-affiliated activist groups, such as the No Borders, it has also participated in radicalising the field of migration struggles at large. In particular, through situated interactions in various sites of the EU border regime (e.g. Calais, Greek islands of Lesbos), No Border activists and members of more traditional organisations exchange techniques and discuss their conceptual understanding of the European immigration system in a way which often leads to further convergence. Oscar (2013) from Migreurop explains that

> We might not be in the position to do this kind of direct radical actions ourselves because of our various members and supporters but it is great to have the No Borders here, they are pushing the frame in the right direction for all of us.

The above paragraphs offered a brief overview of some aspects of the Europeanisation and transnationalisation of pro-migrant struggles. To sum up, the process of harmonisation of migration and asylum laws in the EU has involved legal, discursive and practical developments, which have caused grievances and encouraged contentious reactions within the migrant solidarity activist scene in different European countries. The transnationalisation of resistance has been seen as essential in order to 'match the level of the attack', or has organically developed in response to some of the transnational practices of the EU. This has led to the formation of crossborder links between groups and movements supporting migrants and freedom of movement in Europe which point to the gradual emergence of a social movement in solidarity with migrants. As Anne (2012) puts it,

> Our first attempts (…) to work with European partners were a lot more difficult (…) I really think there was a shift, in the years 2000s, in the relationships we were able to establish with our European partners. I think one aspect is that indeed migration policies have Europeanised and that similar issues started to emerge (…) And there also was, as I mentioned with the European Social Forum and the World Social Forums, the influence of the social movements, that started developing in all domains, not only migration but a lot of domains – housing, women struggles… (…) It started mixing people, mixing activists, making them meet, speak to each other… (…) And this created a sort of culture that enabled the emergence of a common openness, of common values and of common actions.

Pro-migrant activists and Europe: wither European identity?

The previous session has illustrated an increasing 'contentious practice of Europe' by pro-migrant activists. I now turn to the most delicate part of my research which aims at addressing the following questions: what is the relationship between this 'practice of Europe' and the European Union? Do activists put forward coherent sets of propositions to reform and ameliorate the features of the European

Union they mobilise against? Do they offer alternatives to the exclusionary understandings of European identity and citizenship which I have described? Since this is a part of my PhD research that I am still working on, I will only offer a number of preliminary comments which can constitute the basis for a more thorough discussion during this workshop.

First, while the term 'Europe' was comfortably referred to when I was interrogating my participants about which aspects of Europe they opposed, it became a more complicated concept when I tried to elicit positive or alternative representations of what 'Europe' or the Union could be/become. This meant two things in practice: first, that references to European values, identity, citizenship as frames to propose inclusive models of membership were overall absent. In turn, I had to bring the terms to the table and thus actively participated in the co-production of the discussion on Europe futures. Second, in response to the question: 'how do you relate to European identity?' or 'do you feel European?', the most common response was: 'what do you mean by Europe?' or, as participant Yasmin (2013) put it, 'which aspects of Europe are we talking about exactly?'. It had not been the case when I had asked such questions as 'what do you think of Europe's immigration policies?' or 'tell me about your work around European borders'.

This phenomenon seemed to be linked to a conceptual difficulty in 'imagining Europe' and to an overpowering uncertainty regarding what 'Europe as a whole' meant: while concrete European measures could be identified through their material impact, giving a broader meaning to Europe was a challenge. It seems to me that this constitutes a finding in itself, which indicates the limited identification with Europe as a pertinent political space for the formulation of claims and radical propositions. In general, my participants positioned themselves cautiously toward the idea of Europe and their answers were marked by a level of indeterminacy. Sonia (2012) for example told me:

> I don't see the end of the European Community, I mean the end of Europe as a community, maybe not 'the' Community – you know what I mean – I don't see *this* as a solution… hmmm… At the same time… hmm… I don't see the European Union as a solution either... it's more like the origin of many problems, especially for us. It's complicated (laughs) I mean, I am not sure there is really space to create the Europe of activists and struggles which we want here. So what do we do? Do we ditch Europe and look somewhere else? But where do we look? (laughs) It's true of Europe, but I mean isn't it true of the whole world?

One of my participants told me that the European project was characterised by such strong contradictions that it became an 'unusable word beside using it to denounce its damaging effects' (Martine 2013). Many of them also mentioned a discursive monopoly over the term 'Europe' by the European Union which made it a 'saturated' term with little potential for radical claim making

> It is impossible for us, I mean for my generation at least, to think of Europe without having the European Union in mind. I see the EU has a capitalist class project and I reject it. So I don't really think in terms of Europe, European identity and so on… I have other references – I am more inclined toward global solidarity (Tony 2012)

Others extended a critical reading to Europe as a history and as an idea:

> I was living in South America for a few years (…) I wanted to escape from everything I associated with Europe, with this country, with imperialism and capitalism (…) I saw Europe as involved in a system of wealth, privilege, power and nationalism that I really didn't identify with… (Sean and Alex 2012)

Overall, the narrative that I have re-constituted through the various stories and testimonies collected is one of *disengagement* from Europe, both as a project and as notion, articulated by a majority of my participants. I chose the term 'disengagement' here because many of my participants came to this conclusion following a series of disillusionments vis-à-vis the European project – which must be distinguished from other forms of (nationalist) Euroscepticism. As put by participant Sean (2012). 'the good thing about being an anarchist is that I do not need to explain that I don't like Europe because I prefer the state!'.

This 'disengagement narrative' had several variables: some participants observed that the more they worked against some of the effects of the EU in the area of immigration, the less they believed the Union could be reformed. Others explained that the frame of debates and the process of decision-making in the EU were biased in such a way that one could only be heard if they adjusted to what is audible to the EU, thus making radical claims unspeakable. Participants also spoke of the feeling that working with the European institutions amounted to 'being co-opted' and that this realisation had led them to formulate claims and undertake activities outside the frame of the European Union. Some mentioned that, through activist experiences with non-Europeans, their sense of belonging and solidarity had been extended to become a broader radical cosmopolitanism which refuses national as well as European borders. Among those, a number of participants developed sophisticated arguments about the interrelation between situated, local struggles tackling 'the expression of Europe as it is manifested to us' (Zak 2012) and global solidarity in which European borders had little relevance. A striking example was that of an emerging discourse about Mediterranean identity as a source of mobilisation in solidarity with migrants. Several participants referred to a 'two-shored Mediterranean', which displaced frames of belonging toward the south to highlight similarities rather than conflict with migrants and which included groups and networks working on both sides of the Sea. In the same vein, participants explained that the transnationalisation of their practices was European in shape as they (re)acted where the EU was the most obviously visible, but that in fact their concern was not to shadow Europe but to follow the lines of movement of migrants and hence to extend well beyond European borders.

Conclusion

In way of an initial conclusion to my (on-going) research project, I would like to stress *the existence of a gap between my participants' practice of Europe and their (lack of) identification to the European political project*. This is an important observation which challenges the majority of mainstream and critical narratives regarding social mobilisation in the EU. Indeed, two main (competing) arguments are usually put forward. On the one hand, mainstream debates around European identity have generally argued that feeling European was a question of time: in this view, people would develop a form of European *habitus* as the EU becomes more present in their life (notably Habermasian approaches, see Habermas 1994, 2001, 2001b and in Cronin and De Greiff 2002: 197-217). On the other hand, a more critical take has been criticising the Europeanisation process as an 'elite business', reserved to a small group of privileged European citizens: in contrast, the majority of 'ordinary people' do not engage in crossborder activities, which in turn explains why they do not identify with the EU (Kuhn 2012). In both accounts however, the assumption is

that to be exposed to or engaged in pan-European activities leads to higher levels of identification with Europe. My research investigates the discourses and practices of highly politicised members of the European public, who are intensely engaged in crossborder activities, and reveals that they do not feel any more 'European' for doing so. Quite the opposite, some of them have been feeling less positively inclined toward the European Union and the notion of Europe as they have engaged in pan-European activities. This reveals that the relationship between the EU and its 'citizens' is not merely mediated by organisational and material factors, as is so often argued, but indeed by ideological and political variables.

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