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INTERVIEW WITH DEBORAH COWEN FOR SAQ

Deborah Cowen, Glenda Garelli, Martina Tazzioli

The focus of the special issue is on migration. While we are aware that this is not your topic of research, your work has however played a crucial role in the past few years also in critical migration literatures. Any connection to migration that you may feel comfortable drawing would be extremely welcome.

1. How does the notion of crisis play out in the logistics sector? And how do you see your work on logistics and critical infrastructures contributing to the current conversations about crises as not just as functionalist impasse but also as a sites of interruption and a moment of possible political reconfiguration?

There are so many ways I want to respond to these questions that it could take a book. Instead, I will draw a few points of connection that may help open up more conversation across fields. First, I want to suggest that the field of logistics is wrapped tightly – often violently - around human migration, and the connections between these fields are not novel or new. Since its ancient genesis, logistics were centrally concerned with the movement of people – not commodities. Some of the largest migrations of people in global history were those of troops marching to or from battle. Managing and sustaining those movements is the field of military logistics, and the foundation upon which modern logistics were built. The entanglement of logistics in migration persists in the modern era. We could think with Fred Moten and Stefano Harney who consider the trans-Atlantic slave trade the first large-scale modern experiment with logistics. This was a mass movement of people who had been legally transformed into property. At this crucial juncture where logistics took on its modern form, people could be seen as cargo, or could be governed as such. The modern era is in fact marked by a profoundly logistical relationship to migration and mobility. States, empires, and their militaries have long relied on logistics to wage war, while logistics have also been crucial to the enormous displacements associated with colonial settlement. For instance, in the nineteenth century North American context, General Sheridan outlined a deliberate military logistics of destroying "the Indian's commissar" through the slaughter of the bison, as the most effective means of displacement and dispossession. 'Critical infrastructures' like the transcontinental rail lines made the slaughter possible. Trains moved within the herds, serving as mobile hunting platforms that enabled the decimation of their population from millions in the 1860s to just 300 by 1889. We could shift to much more recent atrocities of large-scale forced human movement like the holocaust to register the eminently logistical nature of genocide through industrial efficiency. Today we could say that migration is profoundly technoscientific, and reliant on multiple logistical systems. Transportation is key as are the digital and surveillance systems that constitute them, but so are the systems of 'humanitarian logistics' and 'refugee logistics' wherein states and corporations aim to govern crises of many kinds through the management of mobility. And of course, the politics of infrastructure are present through all of this. The very making of territorial borders is a question of infrastructure, as are the camps and detention facilities through which so many migrants are contained. All this to say that migration already knows a lot about logistics. And vice versa.

But back to your questions about crisis.

Logistics and critical infrastructure are a source of crisis *and* a key response. They are domains in which crises unfold or emerge, but it is also here that some of the most active recasting of political life is taking place. Perhaps the most recent and striking display of crisis in the logistics sector proper

was the 2016 Hanjin bankruptcy. The collapse of the enormous South Korean shipping giant left infrastructure and livelihoods in limbo in locations across the globe, and marks the extraordinary volatility and violence of logistics.

If we are to consider planetary scale dispossession a crisis, we could look to the recent revelations of the Panama Papers, and the roots of that crisis in the practices of the shipping sector. This event is diagnostic of a model of global capitalism built on a *fiscal flag of convenience-* a legal technology that allows for the geography of ship ownership and operation to be delinked from the geography of regulation. The Flag of Convenience, or Open Registry, allowed shipping companies to register their companies and follow tax, labour and environmental law in an entirely different national context from where they were actually owned and operated. The Flag of Convenience in fact had its genesis in Panama almost a century ago. Violence and dispossession was built right into its design, as colonial rule in Panama, and classed and racialized violence for multinational seafarers and port workers across many other sites were the conditions of its possibility.

The logistical shadow of migration suggests that the economy, at its very core, relies on borders to contain and control labour, while it also relies on its own capacity to work across those same borders. In other words, supply chain capitalism operates through the manufacture and manipulation of territorial control, as well as its selective transgression. This is not news to many, it is worth emphasizing, that the particular material histories of the rise of logistics locate racial and colonial violence within the very structure and logic of the contemporary space economy, rather than as just effect.

But as your question suggests, logistics and infrastructure are not only implicated in the making of crisis- they are also sites of some of the most important recasting of political life. Some of these potential futures are exciting, others terrifying, but regardless of the direction of change, it is in the worlds of logistics and infrastructure that key struggles over collective futures are unfolding. Infrastructure has become a chosen solution to a number of crises by transnational financial institutions and entrepreneurial states. Even more than the delivery of pipes, cables, rail or ports, infrastructure delivers the potential of big and stable returns for institutional investors. We see this with the creation of a national infrastructure bank in Canada, designed to recruit large investors into the financing of infrastructure projects. The financialization of infrastructure is contingent on the creation of revenue streams for investment funds, and even the accounting firm KPMG has raised concerns about the initiative because of its implications for the privatization and pricing of water, for instance. Perhaps more insidious than user fees is the emphasis on 'value capture,' which could allow financial benefactors to reap the rewards of infrastructure investment that come through increased value in real estate markets. Value capture builds the economic logics of gentrification into the motives for infrastructure projects. So while infrastructure is touted as both the means to a properous, productive, connected future at a global scale, the largest of institutional investors gobble up formerly public infrastructure, making the basic functioning of complex societies contingent on profit-seeking monopolies and processes of dispossession.

And yet, infrastructures are, of course, not only of concern to states and corporations, but to the communities that rely on them for the necessities of everyday life, or who stand in the path of their often violent assemblage. To take just one example from the myriad on offer, we could look to the standoff at Standing Rock. The work of the water protectors remains critical in contesting the toxic, colonial violence of corporate pipeline infrastructure, while also demonstrating the potential of actually existing radical alternatives. Standing Rock is not only about disruption in the more limited

sense of blocking or disabling, but is also about the creation or expanded sustenance of autonomous forms of life through alternative infrastructure. This is at the centre of my current interests -- the ways in which movements and communities that are contesting the violence of infrastructure are involved in some of the most creative political work of assembling alternative forms.

2. In your recent contribution for the Verso blog on "infrastructures of Empire and Resistance" you mention that the crisis of infrastructure is not just about a "lack" but also links to "too much of infrastructure". Can you expand on this notion of critical infrastructure between lack and too much of infrastructure? As migration scholars, we find this particularly helpful in thinking about the global border regime, a regime that's not only characterized by a lack of safe channels of arrival but also by an excess of infrastructures of control.

In many ways, it should not be surprising to hear that some systems are bad for us, profoundly uneven in their impacts, that they may be oversupplied or even redundant. The critique of social systems is a hallmark of radical movements and thought. That socio-technical systems can cause collective and targeted harm, that they often foreclose or inhibit more creative, just and sustainable futures is the daily and deadly life of infrastructure. Maybe it is the materiality of these systems, and their seeming technicality which makes their excess seem odd. Or maybe the notion of excess infrastructure seems strange because so many peoples are painfully underprovisioned, and the profound materiality of these gaps in infrastructure - clean water or safe housing or reliable transit – causes collective bodily harm. In fact, it is often the very same people and communities facing gaps in infrastructures of these sorts, and an excess of infrastructures of security and surveillance. The notion of excess infrastructure reminds us is that struggles for the future can never stop with questions of quantity. Infrastructure underpins particular social orders and thus transformation of one relies on the other.

3. How does the perspective on logistics allow to move beyond a state-centered analysis? And how do you see it play out in some concrete cases?

I cannot think of a way to tell a story about logistics without the state. The state has long been a key force in the field and remains so, although in changing form. From a North American perspective, we might say that the state functions like the Robin to a bolder and more dynamic corporate Batman. Robin follows Batman's lead, but Batman needs Robin, intimately. We see this cooperation and collusion between the state and the corporate sector clearly in the recent disclosure of the role of the (public) police in protecting the private pipelines of oil logistics companies over Indigenous peoples and their supporters at Standing Rock. And this only echoes long histories of private security protecting imperial states, for instance in the use of the Pinkerton men to protect rail infrastructures that enabled the movement westward and to discipline workers who made these systems move. We also see it in the 'public-private- partnership' of war and extraction in places like Iraq, where (public) militaries hand over detention facilities to private oil logistics companies once they have 'secured' the spaces of circulation. Today Camp Bucca is known as the Basra Logistics City.

But the bigger story of logistics, as I have suggested repeatedly, is not simply the privatization of state force or the militarization of trade. The entanglement is a feature of a much more profound imperial co-production – making the separation between spheres seem recent and strange. The complex political-legal production and regulation of piracy is one domain wherein this is evident. So

is the history of colonial rule through the Hudson's Bay or East India Company where the state and the corporate sector together crafted a deadly logistical life. Even the revolution in logistics of the mid twentieth century emerged out of a deeply logistical form of mass state warfare that was supported by corporations. The achievements of military logistics in managing mass technoscientific warfare were then deliberately brought back to the corporation by figures like Robert McNamara (himself a perfect hybrid of these entangled worlds). Post WWII efforts to transform the military art of logistics into a corporate science saw the logic of efficiency of movement, measured historically by military concerns for minimizing the time and cost of movement, superceded by corporate models of (exchange) value maximization. With the example of the flag of convenience, we see one of the essential roles of the state, in terms of crafting the legal infrastructures for corporate rule. It is the state that creates the legal infrastructure that allows corporations to transgress the national borders that they continue to mobilize and exploit.

4. In the context of the migration crisis in the Mediterranean, we've witnessed an increased militarization against migrant journeys logistics and, in parallel, a growing criminalization of smugglers who organize these trips as well as NGOs working to provide support for safe arrivals and rescue operations. How do you see this context in light of your work on logistics?

The targeting of fugitive infrastructures, infrastructures of emancipation or just survival like those that enable the movement of migrants you mention, has a long and brutal history. We could turn this question around and say that insurgent infrastructures - not necessarily good or bad ones, but those defined by the challenge they mount to status quo systems - have become vital and plentiful enough to threaten what Mezzadra and Neilson describe as the 'operations of capital'. It is because of the meaningful alternative they propose that the infrastructures of the oppressed provoke new forms of surveillance and attack. We could think with Katherine McKittrick about the underground railroad as an infrastructure and a geography that had to remain concealed for these very reasons. Or we could look to the more recent and large scale imperial efforts of the US military to target and disable 'insurgent infrastructures' in Vietnam. One-off protests and petitions do not threaten the status quo, but sustained alternatives that open up both the imaginative and practical possibilities for other ways of life certainly do, and these are anchored in infrastructure.

5. In your piece "Anti-blackness and urban geopolitical economy," you talk about the need to analyze the politics segregation and internal dispossession, reading through a colonial lens the urban context. Such an analytical grid seems particularly useful to us for rethinking the articulation of the government of migration between politics of extraction and dispossession on the one hand, and production of spaces of confinement on the other. Can this insight into internal colonies be helpful in engaging with the production and the government of spaces of migratory control, within the urban context and in informal refugee camps?

I live in a settler nation state that was literally founded through the building of a railroad that simultaneously involved violent dispossession of Indigenous people and their forcible containment in reserves. Deliberate mass starvation, organized by the federal government was used to move Indigenous people out of the way of the rail and into reserves, and 'pass systems' were used to control Indigenous peoples' movement to and from. It is through a combination of displacement and containment that settler states transformed Turtle Island into the domestic space of empire. This continent was also forged through the transatlantic slave trade and the plantation economy that combined forced movement and containment. So it seems to me that challenges thinking across

forced movement and containment are more a feature of our frames of analysis than their coproduction in the world through infrastructure. As for the particular usefulness of mobilizing the insights of internal colonialism to approach the government of spaces of migratory control, I would say the frame offers a broad but key starting place for thinking across the strange national puzzle pieces of bordered territories. The basic idea of internal colonialism – that imperialism operates in its 'domestic territory' as well as abroad, has been of interest to me since my first book, which connected the story of social citizenship to the nationalization of war. What Nemoy Lewis and I were keen to encourage with that blog post you mention was a relational engagement with urban anti-Blackness that recognizes its long term translocal operation, as well as its more recent financialization, and to look to an important thread of the Black radical tradition that insists on this transnational lens. It is the simultaneous recognition of the particular forms imperial violence assumes in domestic space, and insistence on its imperial character that I have found most helpful about that literature.

6. The concept of autonomy that this special issue re-interrogates posits the excess of subjectivities in relation to power captures. Does this approach somehow speak to your work on the frictions and struggles of logistics spaces?

The emphasis on autonomy exposes the central conceit of logistics – that life itself is manageable. But as your frame suggests, response to rule is not always one of obedience. And what is more important to autonomy than the capacity to reproduce a social formation differently? Even if only in small and grassroots ways, the history of insurgent infrastructures and counter-logistics shows us this practically and empirically. Serious struggle demands not only resistance but alternative infrastructures that can sustain movements beyond singular events and actions. How/do alternative social worlds reproduce themselves outside of the systems they oppose? Infrastructure is an answer.