
National finitude and the paranoid style of the one

Andrea Mura

Faculty of Social Science, Open University, Walton Hall, Milton Keynes, MK7 6AA, UK.

Abstract This article inquires into the clinical figure of paranoia and its constitutive role in the articulation of the nation-state discourse in Europe, uncovering a central tension between a principle of integrity and a dualist spatial configuration. A conceptual distinction between ‘border’ (*finis*) and ‘frontier’ (*limes*) will help to expose the political effects of such a tension, unveiling the way in which a solid and striated organisation of space has been mobilised in the topographic antagonism of the nation, sustaining the phantasm of a self-enclosed, self-sufficient finitude.

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A strangeness reveals itself ‘at the heart’ of what is most familiar. Jean-Luc Nancy, *L'intrus*

An integral part of our contemporary language, the term globalisation has come to signify the process of increasing interconnectedness occurring on a global scale in almost every sphere of life. Leaving debates on the novelty of these transformations aside, it should be pointed out that until the spatial technology revolution following World War II, humanity had never been provided with a plastic representation of the *globe* in its entirety. Never in the past had a medium in an *extra-terrestrial* position, the satellite, made possible the production of a mirror image for the use of global self-reflection. It is only with orbital photographs of Earth in 1959 that the planet could in fact be concretely experienced as a unified and coherent *globe* at both an imaginary and scopic level. No longer the all too oecumenical difference between *urbi et orbi*, the city and (the rest of) the world through which relations *within* the planet could be measured on the ground of a dual magnitude privileging the *urbs* as the point of departure. But a *mundus* moving beyond the *intra-terrestrial* realm of faith and universal beliefs, and assuming the *extra-subjective* condition of identity proper (*mondialisation*); a *mundus*, whose integral consistency, as we shall see in the



following pages, required a constitutive exposure to the gaze of a radical exteriority: space. Satellite imagery has, we believe, been consubstantial with the re-articulation of human imaginary. But as a new form of exteriority was gained through which a general sense of totality could be articulated, a sense of fragmentation pervaded well-established representations of the world, allowing globalisation to emerge as a highly complex system of relations. The term 'g-localization' is perhaps, then, a widely used and helpful metaphor for the overall reshuffling of common perceptions of space and community in a context marked by the difficult encounter between homogeneity and heterogeneity, centripetal and centrifugal forces, supranational, global tendencies and the reinvigorated emphasis on sub-cultures, local and sub-national ties.

The discussion about the fate of the nation-state has been emblematic of the general debate about the effects of globalisation. In a recent essay, Wendy Brown examines the Westphalian correlation between modern sovereignty and the state, arguing for the gradual subsumption of the former to the yoke of political economy (capital) and religiously legitimated violence, two domains that the Westphalian order had attempted to regulate. In this scenario, the persistent, if not increasing visibility of nation-state walls is said to be iconographic of the enfeebled condition of state power in the age of globalisation. While the theatricalisation of walls would serve as a theological reminder of nation-state sovereignty, the erection of these structures unsuccessfully aims to contain the disaggregating effects of those amorphous flows that globalisation has unleashed – asylum seekers; organised crime; immigrants, ethnic or religious mixing; and so on. In doing so, they strive to restore 'an imaginary of individual and national identity' grounded upon a shared sense of 'containment', 'security' and 'social and psychic integration' (Brown, 2010, p. 26). Although never mentioned in this essay, the concept of paranoia offers useful analytical tools when considering the defensive position that Brown ascribes to national walling, and, more in general, to the 'structural' relation between the nation and a shared need for 'containment' and 'social and psychic integration'.

The clinical figure of *paranoia* will be taken as a central point of reference in this article, fully exposing the psychoanalytic and spatial implications of this general scenario. Although the link between politics and paranoia has been the object of some theoretical interest over the years, the latter has mostly been interpreted in the light of a commonsensical meaning, which highlights its pathological dimension (Davis, 1969; Ramsay, 2008). Crucial features of this clinical figure such as delusions and persecutory fantasies have inevitably been used to explain political phenomena that stand for an assumed dysfunctional character (Robins and Post, 1997; Freeman and Freeman, 2008). The relation between paranoia and conspiracy theory for instance, or paranoia and political actors that typify forms of personality disorder and loss of touch with reality has often been disclosed in political analysis. The deviant property of paranoia has been applied in this way to all kinds of political contexts, regardless of their ideological or historical connotations. In his seminal work on paranoia and American politics, for instance, Richard J. Hofstadter observes

that paranoia ‘is a common ingredient of fascism, and of frustrated nationalisms, though it appeals to many who are hardly fascists and it can frequently be seen in the left-wing press’ (Hofstadter, 1964, p. 7).

The problem with approaches of this kind is that they miss the more physiological dimension of paranoia and its defensive role in contexts of instability. The deployment of paranoia to interpret political phenomena that are perceived as exceptional or deviant, whether they are forms of fascism, fundamentalism, or ‘frustrated’ forms of nationalism, brings the risk of missing the way in which a paranoid logic very often informs political discourses that structure our sense of *reality*. In psychoanalysis, paranoia figures as a defensive strategy aimed at countering a potential sense of disaggregation that a subject is experiencing due to contingent or structural conditions. But a Lacanian reading of this clinical figure also highlights the constitutive function that it performs as a sort of inaugural moment of ego formation, helping us to locate the workings of a paranoid style at the very core of everyday political life. By highlighting the *spatial* and *constitutive* dimension of paranoia, this article contends that more than simply uncovering the defensive strategy of the nation in contexts of instability, a paranoid trait underpins the very articulation of the nation-state discourse in Europe, informing the innermost logic upon which national citizenship has been constructed since its inception.

Although Lacanian scholarship has contributed to uncover the constitutive function of paranoia, attention has mostly been given, to say with Melman, to its ‘symbolic determination’, highlighting the relation that paranoia establishes with symbolic law (Melman, 1994, p. 139). Žižek’s analyses, in this direction, have helped to expose the fundamental tensions that underpin the fantasy of the subject, its relation to that something (*objet petit a*) that should be excluded, mediated and kept at distance in order for the subject to have normal access to reality. Hence, for Žižek, the position of the paranoid as a reversion of this logic whereby it envisages the ‘obscene figure of a non-castrated jouisseur’ who includes *objet petit a* into its experience of reality, realising a ‘radical, unmediated identification with the superego machine’ (Žižek, 1996, p. 143). Žižek’s examinations of the nation in this regard have centred on the mobilisation of enjoyment that the reflexive structure of the nation enacts as ‘an intersubjective space’ (Žižek, 1990, p. 53). Although not the central analytical referent in respect to the nation, paranoia plays here, among other factors, an important function, mobilising the enjoyment of the subject and its fundamental fantasies. In this framework, paranoia is assumed as an ‘externalization of the function of castration in a positive agency appearing as the “thief of enjoyment”’ (Žižek, 1993, p. 280). Although these aspects will all be considered in this article, they will be examined from the point of view of the organisation of space that paranoia activates.

In the following pages, an introduction to the Lacanian notion of paranoia sets out the theoretical context within which to situate an examination of the discourse of the nation in Europe, highlighting an inherent tension between a principle of integrity and a spatial dualist configuration. A conceptual distinction between ‘border’ (*finis*)



and 'frontier' (*limes*) will then help to expose the political effects of such a tension, unveiling the way in which a solid and striated organisation of space has been mobilised in the topographic antagonism of the nation, sustaining the national phantasm of a self-enclosed, self-sufficient finitude. It is by looking at this broad genealogical scenario that we can grasp the paranoid style informing the national 'Self', its compacting as a 'One', and better apprehend its defensive scheme. Such an inquiry will permit highlighting the role of psychoanalytic strategies within reflections on the 'ex-centric' condition of the subject, offering an example of the type of response that a political discourse organised around a paranoid logic (the nation) discloses dealing with such a condition. Emphasis on the spatial dimension of paranoia and the conceptual distinction between 'finis' and 'limes' will also permit providing a model for understanding spatial arrangements in a globalised context, and for rethinking the political construction of territorial and cultural boundaries. Although attention is given in this article to the construction of a solid and striated space, references to alternative spatial configurations (for example, the notion of 'frontier' in the following pages) are also made, with the hope that more exhausting research be pursued in the future.

Paranoia, or the Inaugural Moment of the Constitution of the Ego

During the recovery period following a heart transplant, which was complicated by a long-standing fight with cancer, Jean-Luc Nancy wrote a short autobiographic essay, *The Intruder (L'Intrus)*, in which he addressed the issue of the problematic 'gift of the other', the 'foreignness of the grafted heart' (Nancy, 2002, p. 8). The problems engendered by the reception of the donor heart in the process of this intimate exchange are crucial to an understanding of the function of paranoia in this article. Nancy relates how, in order to prepare his body to receive that most vital organ, he had to be subjected to a chemical process of immuno-suppression, reducing his immune system to a condition of extreme fragility, in order to prevent *rejection* of the new heart after transplantation. This process is *vital* for the acceptance of the donor organ, which would otherwise be interpreted as an *intrus*, an external aggressor, setting off an overreaction of the immune system to defend the body.

A successful post-operative course of treatment, however, does not solve the problematic character of this transferral for the body. What is crucial here is not so much that the heart, 'whose symbolic renown has long been established', risks playing the role of the 'intruder' (Nancy, 2002, p. 7). From this perspective, the metaphor of immune-suppression tells us that the preservation of life sometimes requires a deliberate weakening of defensive strategies; or, conversely, that too rigid a defence of life can rather kill the body. But it is also problematic that the ultimate acceptance of this intruding organ (the donor organ) will blur forever the distinction between what pertains to the body *proper* and what stands as the *improper* of the

body: Nancy being ‘touched by a strangeness’, his heart becoming his own foreigner (Derrida, 2005, p. 97).

That at the very bottom of our innermost intimacy lies a stranger, Jacques Lacan had already formalised through his notion of ‘extimacy’ (*extimité*), a word coined by applying the prefix *ex-* (exterior) to ‘intimacy’ (the French *intimité*). This concept was used to problematise the relation between inside and outside in ego formation, highlighting the complexity of those topological structures whose centre is exterior to the structure itself, therefore rendering the structures *eccentric* (ex-centric) to their own texture. It is the fundamental ‘ex-centric’ and ‘ambivalent’ character of the subject, its being trapped in the ever-elusive play between proper (belonging to one; own) and improper, that marks the inaugural moment of the formation of the ego: ‘the other is something strange to me, although it is at the heart of me’ (Lacan, 1959–1960 [1992], p. 71). But how does this complexity work?

In *The Mirror Stage as Formative of the I Function* (1949), Lacan considers the phase during which the identity of a baby is constructed. The baby, who is ‘still trapped in his motor impotence and nursling dependence’ (Lacan, 1949 [2006], p. 76), is fascinated by the narcissistic ‘spectacle’ that its specular image produces. The image in the mirror is assumed as a point of imaginary identification for the baby (ideal ego), an image representing what the subject would like to be. The splendour in this image rests in its ability to provide the baby with a representation of an identity without fractures, thereby offering the possibility of overcoming its condition of dependence and fragmentation. This produces a so-called eroticisation of the ideal ego, which accompanies a sense of jubilation in the face of this encounter. However, this experience not only typifies ‘an essential libidinal relationship with the body-image’ (Lacan, 1951 [1953], p. 14), but also illustrates ‘the conflictual nature of the dual relationship’ (Lacan, 1956–1957 [1994], p. 17). Together with jubilation, aggressiveness emerges, as the mirror image the baby identifies with is inescapably ‘out of joint’, to quote Hamlet, irremediably other, relentlessly unreachable. This tension between eroticisation and aggressiveness is at the core of the *narcissistic* dimension of identity, and plays a central role when differentiating between the experience of identity formation in Lacanian psychoanalysis, and both the conceptualisation of the ego in other psychoanalytical traditions and ‘any philosophy directly stemming from the cogito’ (Lacan, 1949 [2006], p. 75).

A crucial point of departure when considering how Lacan thinks of identity formation in the subject is the idea that the ego does not fulfil a synthetic function between inner forces (say unconscious drives) and outside social norms (embodied by the superego). For Lacan, the ego stands as the image *of* the other, an image whose exterior character is destined to destabilise forever the illusion of autonomy of the subject, undermining any possible theory of a narcissistic centralism of the ego. The image I identify with is at the same time my own image and the image of the other. It allows me to recognise myself but, precisely because ‘it draws me from the outside of this recognition, it is already an expropriation’ (Recalcati, 2007a). In contrast to a



long-standing western tradition assuming the ego as the actualisation of a necessary potential, and which found the truth of the subject in the inwardness of its being – in the words of Augustine: ‘Do not go outside, return into yourself. Truth dwells in the inner man’¹ – an alien seems here to inhabit human interiority; a lie besieging the innermost truth of the subject. As an Italian comedian put it when performing the role of a popular new-age guru: ‘The answer you are looking for is *within* you ... but it is *wrong!*’ As the ultimate result of a capture into the image of the other, the ego is deprived here of all its traditional powers, and functions as the paradoxical threshold between the proper and the improper of the subject, its identity and dis-identity. But if the identity of the subject is always stolen from the other, if the ‘intrusion’ of the other alters *constitutively* the truth of the subject to the point that, as Arthur Rimbaud put it in his 1871 letter to Georges Izambard, to say ‘I’ is to say the other (*je est un autre*), then the history of one’s identity is the history of an ‘instable’ sequel of identifications.

We can now introduce the figure of *paranoia* through a sentence that we find in Lacan’s *Seminar XX*: ‘I don’t want to know anything about it’ (Lacan, 1972–1973 [1998], p. 1). I do not want to know, nor do I want to see the structural instability of the ego, the uncomfortable *knowledge* that ‘the ego is not master in its own house’ (Freud, 1917 [1955], p. 143). It should be observed that at a certain level, paranoia functions for Lacan as the inaugural moment of ego formation, its principle being ‘realised by the very physiology of constitution of the ego’ (Melman, 1994, p. 137). The position assumed in the phrase above is the position that the ego itself assumes towards its own ambivalence, being structurally exposed to radical alterity. The ego does not accept the internal division of the subject, its constitutive condition of alienation. Faced with an ever inclusive and dynamic contamination with otherness, dispossessing the ego of power and reducing it to an object constantly exposed to the outside, the ego rejects the perceived element of ‘difference’ at the very core of the subject (in Melman’s words, ‘this other who is me’).

Now, the difficult predicament of *neurosis* consists precisely in working out the paradox of the constitutive ambivalence of the subject through symbolic mediation. The crucial psychoanalytic task here is to come to terms with the ‘ex-centric’ condition of the subject, preserving the fundamental porosity of the limit, which both enables the constitution of the ego and threatens its dissolution via misrecognition (*méconnaissance*). The symbolic mediation of language plays a central role, endorsing the ultimate recognition of the intruder as constitutive of one’s truth, and allowing the threshold that separates the subject and the other to remain permeable.

A structural paranoid strategy, on the other hand, operates an *externalisation* of the intruder, of the improper in the figure of the enemy, which *rejects* any symbolic mediation.² By ejecting its internal element of difference in the figure of the enemy, it operates a radical split with the other that rejects the symbolic ‘dialectic’ that we find in neurosis. This entails a *stiffening of the border* between the subject and the other, a *walling out* of the limit separating inside and outside, with the result that this limit loses its permeability. This enables the ego to re-compact itself, enacting a *solid*

identification centred around a *phantasm of integrity*, an image of pure unity and self-sufficiency, without difference, without divisions, without fractures. At a second important level, however, the phantasm of integrity requires the extirpation and detachment of that which contrasts with this self-image. A pure self requires that which cannot be absorbed to be expelled. As no symbolic mediation is here enacted between the inside and the outside, this ‘inassimilable’ element of difference is ejected in the image of the other by way of imaginary projections. The other is no longer the problematic point of reference of the neurotic subject, with which a dialectical and dynamic *conflict* was enacted. Paranoia transforms the other into an ‘absolute evil’, the terrifying one who figures as the locus of my alienation.

The use of Nancy’s essay as a metaphor illustrates how paranoia’s rigid organisation of space entails a hyper-intensification of the immune defence system. A *hypertrophic* line of separation is here erected between the body and its externality, preventing a physiological osmosis with the outside and rejecting the possibility of the gift of a foreign organ. The struggle for a certain symbolic regulation of *conflict* in neurosis leads, then, to *violence* as the excess of a ‘passage to the act’ in paranoia. While, in the neurotic structure, the ‘return’ of the repressed always undergoes a process of symbolisation through codes and ciphers (via symptoms, dreams, and so on) – that is, the return is always a return in the symbolic – in the paranoid structure ‘what is refused in the symbolic order re-emerges in the real’ (Lacan, 1955–1956 [1993], p. 13). The original and internal difference that cannot be symbolised returns in the shape of paranoid *delusions* structured around the figure of a *persecutory* other. Hence the need to obliterate the other *qua* metaphor of language, where language is taken to represent the realm of alienation as such, the signifying space (the universe of the signifier) that imposes on the subject an unavoidable loss, an inescapable cut. Hence also the risk of the subject enacting a violent passage to the act aimed at the suppression of the persecutory other.

In spatial terms, a paranoid style establishes a *solid* and *hypertrophic* line of separation between inside and outside. This *hypertrophic* line of separation we call *border*, as opposed to the more permeable organisation of the limit in neurosis that we term *frontier*. The ultimate aim of strengthening the limit is to ‘immunise’ the subject against any possible contamination from outside, thereby realising the ideal of pure integrity. However, as alienation is not the secondary effect of a contingent appropriation by external forces in a Marxian sense, but is constitutive of the subject, then integrity can only function on a phantasmatic level. The result is that the other assumes the position of an entity haunting the ontological constitution of the self. The exposure to a potential recapture in the interplay of its own ambivalence might finally mean that the subject needs to pass through the border in order to eradicate the other as an ultimate threat to its self-image. We have, here, a fundamental paradox: paranoia instantiates a static binary organisation of space modelled around a hypertrophic idea of the limit, while at the same time, pointing to its ‘violation’, its ‘passing through’. On the one hand, the *necessary* and *constitutive* construction of



the other to be preserved as an absolute negation allowing the constitution of the self as a locus of pure integrity; on the other, an ultimate tension aimed at the eradication of this other, and the call to dissolve any line of separation whatsoever. Some caveats are needed following this overall scenario.

First, a paranoid organisation of space can be maintained within the realm of a radical negation without necessarily realising the premises of a passage to the act, which would dissolve the line of demarcation between the subject and the other. We shall acknowledge that, while constituted on a paranoid principle, nation-states are able to manage this fundamental tension with relative stability. Transgressive actions aimed at the eradication of the outside (and correlative passing through of the national border) emerge in specific structural conditions (radicalisation of the national phantasm in totalitarian or 'critical' settings) by which what is purely imaginary tips over into the Real.

Second, a specular reversal informs this paranoid logic, with the result that any possible eradication of the other coincides with the eradication of the self: the other in me is coextensive with a 'me' in the other. Hence, a fundamental structural link to be found in paranoid political settings between external *aggression* and internal *subversion*, between the external enemy and the much more intolerable and elusive presence of the internal enemy, where the latter is historically imagined as a fifth column to be eradicated.

Third, the problematic exposition to a radical and constitutive alienation of the subject discloses for Lacan the paranoiac dimension of all knowledge. While corresponding 'in its more or less archaic forms to certain critical moments that punctuate the history of man's mental genesis' (Lacan, 1948 [2006], p. 91), the notion of 'paranoiac knowledge' highlights the way in which this primordial ex-centric condition keeps haunting the experience of the subject. Paranoiac knowledge is imaginary knowledge, as any objectifying identification of the ego entails its capture by the image of the other and a misrecognition of external objects, revealing the constitutive tension between the possibility of mastery and the delusion of an absolute knowledge. But paranoiac knowledge is also human and symbolic knowledge, a knowledge that is always 'mediated by the other's desire', and that more broadly reproduces the primordial tension between sufficiency and insufficiency.

When considering Ernesto Laclau's influential analysis of 'populism' as the structuration of a discursive totality organised around an equivalential logic (Laclau, 2005), this perspective could further be extended, suggesting that a populist discourse can in fact work as a paranoid field. At a general level, the formalist structuration of a discourse with its 'irresoluble interiority/exteriority tension' parallels the relation of overdetermination that is enacted in the face of any temporary illusion of sufficiency at the heart of paranoiac knowledge: 'We have referred to "discourse" as a system of differential entities – that is, of moments. But we have just seen that such system only exists as a partial limitation of a "surplus of meaning" which subverts it ... We will call it the *field of discursivity*. It determines at the same time the necessarily discursive

character of any object, and the impossibility of any given discourse to implement a final suture' (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985, p. 111). Beyond this general level, however, the polarisation that a populist discourse mobilises around a system of equivalences (with its simplification and dichotomisation logics) doubles the paranoid defensive strategy described above, allowing a hypertrophic politics of 'border' to halt the constitutive instability of the ego (and its 'discourse'), instantiating a paranoid tension between integrity and duality, the internal fictional homogeneity of the ego as a 'One' and its constitutive *antagonism* with the external enemy.

With this framework in mind, a crucial question will be addressed in the following pages: When looking at the nation-state discourse in Europe, can a paranoid organisation of social space be assumed as the inner logic upon which this discursive universe has been predicated?

The discourse of the Nation

In attempting to offer a discourse-centred reading of the nation-state in Europe, this article is particularly interested in identifying recurrent features in the various accounts of the nation, which confer some regularity on it, informing its *style of discourse*, so to speak. Despite the different ways of organising the European idea of the nation-state, its consistency as a discursive universe would hardly be thinkable without the mobilisation, in different degrees, of three main signifiers: sovereignty, territory and the people. This section suggests that the particular connotation that these signifiers have assumed within the discourse of the nation has been marked by a structural tension between a dichotomous logic and a principle of suture and finitude, realising what has been described so far as a paranoid organisation of space.

In most classical treatises addressing the concept and history of the nation-state in Europe, attention is given to the juridical and legal structure sustaining this political formation, which is seen as a later development of early modern absolutist and pre-modern patrimonial modes of power. Central to this point is the constitutional transformation of the modern state, which entailed the evolution of modern sovereignty in search of a new source of legitimation. Sovereignty was conceptualised as the 'supreme power' (*summa potestas*) giving 'force' and 'authority' to a political order by way of its 'absolute and perpetual' (Bodin), 'exclusive and indivisible' (Hobbes) essence. As supreme power of a political order, sovereignty was thought of, therefore, as the original, unrestricted and unique source of legitimacy of state control, which does not recognise any superior principle of power *outside* itself. These features defined the main classical doctrines of sovereignty, redoubling a principle of theological unity. Within this framework, there were major shifts regarding the *locus* of authority; that is, the *subject* embodying this supreme power of political order, from the transcendental power of God (medieval theories) to the immanent power of the state (modern doctrines), and, in immanent terms, from the absolute power of the



prince (Bodin, Hobbes), to the impersonal power of the law (Kant's juridical principle of practical reason) and so on. In this transition, the locus of power ended up coinciding with the *nation-state*, embodying *the people* of the state and its *territory*.

The appearance and consolidation of the nation-state was crucially intertwined with emerging capitalist processes, reflecting the growing economic influence of a rising bourgeoisie. In the struggle against the 'old powers', the focus shifted then to the community of individuals, born in the same land and now sharing a new sense of belonging: the *nation* (from Latin *nasci*, 'to be born'). Secularisation became a central hermeneutical category in this narrative, accompanying the destiny of modern political doctrines. For many, this required the enactment of a dualistic *modus operandi*, which marginalised more inclusive conceptions of political space in other traditions as well as in pre-modern Europe. Talal Asad, for instance, observes that 'the complex medieval Christian universe, with its interlinked times (eternity and its moving image ...) and hierarchy of spaces (the heavens, the earth, purgatory, hell) is broken down by the modern doctrine of secularism into a duality: a world of self-authenticating things in which we *really* live as social beings, and a religious world that exist only in our imagination' (Asad, 2003, p. 194). Asad contends that the secular, with its endorsement of a binary space, is a relatively recent construction. It was the modern creation of the 'social' that enabled the secular to emerge as a central organising principle, allowing for a separation of the social from other domains. In this overall trajectory, national sovereignty figured as the final step of a movement re-qualifying the fundamental juridical traits of power along a dichotomous model, which celebrated the priority of state immanence over a divine transcendent, and the ultimate primacy of the political over the religious.

This final anchoring of state power to the imaginary figure of the nation required modelling the *signifying image* of the subject upon which the self-representation of the nation could be projected: in a word, the articulation of *the people* of the nation as its historical manifestation. In his analysis of the political imaginary of modernity, Eric L. Santner points to a sort of 'immunological' history linking sovereignty to modern biopolitics (Santner, 2011, p. 246). In the transition from the transcendental and vertical authority of the king to the immanent and horizontal authority of the people, an unbearable excess, which once sustained the symbolic authority of the king, its 'fleshy excess', continued to supplement the new structures of popular sovereignty. From its new location, the *royal remains* kept haunting contemporary body politic, exposing a generalised crisis of investiture of the new national citizen whereby 'the symbolic authority regulating status and social roles – one's *dignitas* – has become radically attenuated' (Santner, 2011, p. 11). While the difficulty to metabolise new modern pressures might have produced individual paranoid reactions, as well exemplified for Santner by Daniel Paul Schreber's case, the immunological paradigm of modernity evidences the general defensive postures that European nations have assumed in this predicament. Drawing on Roberto Esposito's

(2008) reflections on immunisation, Santner points to the play of exchange and substitution that such a paradigm mobilises, and which began already with the emergence of modern sovereignty as a unitary principle of power where ‘the fears each person has with regard to every other are exchanged for the fear *all* now have for the sovereign who represents them qua *subject* of the state’ (Santner, 2011, p. 17). But if a generalised immunising logic has accompanied the transition to popular sovereignty, which kind of discursive traits inform this new emerging subject: the people?

In articulating this central second signifier, the flexibility of tradition and the adaptability of the past as a pool of resources to be mobilised, whether with primordialist and romanticised narratives or more scientific tropes, proved to be crucial. National identity was constructed out of pre-existing ethnic and cultural identifications (Smith, 1986), a product of the ‘collective imagination’, marking the final transition from the feudal ‘subject’ to the modern ‘citizen’ (Anderson, 1983). At the basis of this imagined order, local populations were depicted as communities with a *worldly past*, grounded upon the idea of a biological continuity of blood relation, history and language. This was a common framework among early thinkers in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, including Rousseau, Schlegel, or pre-Romantic writers such as Alfieri, Foscolo, and so on. There were differences across time, however, some stressing the ‘spiritual’ origin of the nation based on race and language (for example, von Herder and Fichte), while others stressed the ‘voluntary choice of individuals’ in constructing the nation (Mazzini) and defining its ‘soul’ (Renan).

In this context, the ultimate dynamics organising the discursive articulation of ‘the people’ rested upon the mobilisation of both a principle of integrity defining the new national self, and a rigid binary relation opposing this new construction to its outside other. As mentioned above, the constitution of national identities in Europe entailed an abstract convergence of *blood*, *language* and *land*. This crucial conjunction was achieved by overemphasising similarities while, at the same time, subsuming differences within the *unitary* spiritual dimension of the people (Balibar and Wallerstein, 1991). Standardisation of national languages, homogenising representations of the race of the people and the institutional and legal qualification of the nation, with citizenship legally anchored to the two principles of *jus soli* (right of the territory) and, above all, *jus sanguinis* (right of blood) – all marked common features in the emergence and subsequent elaboration of the people. Thanks to this general *reductio ad unum* (reduction to one only), national identity was taken to constitute an indivisible *sacred* Self, which was put in radical *antagonism* with its outside. This principle of *exclusionary* negation of difference and creation of pure unity mark not only the ‘pathological’ character of extreme nationalisms (Delanty, 1995), but also the constitutive and foundational asset of the nation. In emphasising the quest for unity characterising the people, and its anchorage to a metaphysics of presence that chains Being to the ontological primacy of the One over the multiple, Hardt and Negri note that a central requirement for the transition to the new national order was the radical distinction between the multitude and the people. A first differentiation in this direction



was made already by Hobbes, who praised the unitary character of the people against the multitude: ‘the people is somewhat that is one, having one will, and to whom one action may be attributed; none of these can be properly said of the multitude’ (Hobbes, 1651 [2004], p. 102). In their recent re-working of this notion, Hardt and Negri describe the multitude as:

a multiplicity, a plane of singularities, an open set of relations, which is not homogeneous or identical with itself and bears an indistinct, inclusive relation to those outside of it. The people, in contrast, tends toward identity and homogeneity internally while posing its difference from and excluding what remains outside of it. (Hardt and Negri, 2000, p. 103)

Although particular emphasis has been given here to the unitary structure of the nation, we have repeatedly underscored the necessary role that otherness play in marking the ex-centric condition of the subject, and eliciting the type of dualistic response that the paranoid organisation of national space sets in motion, allowing for the compacting of the people as a unitary One. A paranoid regime of separation, when linked to concepts of supremacy, rectitude and innocence, has been crucial to sustain the ideal of moral integrity of European nations, enacting an intimate link between national narratives and logocentric orientalist motifs. Since Said’s groundbreaking work, *Orientalism* (Said, 1978), wide attention has been given to the negative dialectic informing the colonial imaginary of European nations, with colonised populations perceived as ‘Other’ and defined in terms not simply of *difference*, but of *radical opposition*. As Hardt and Negri point out, ‘What first appeared as a simple logic of exclusion, then, turns out to be a negative dialectic of recognition. The colonizer does produce the colonized as negation, but, through a dialectical twist, that negative colonized identity is negated in turn to found the positive colonizer Self’ (Hardt and Negri, 2000, p. 128). Hence the long series of dichotomies defining a (colonisable and Orientalising) Other as uncivilised, emotional, undemocratic, allowing for the dialectical construction of the new civilised, rational and liberal European citizen, which finds its primordial movement of reversion in the paranoid logic described here. An early example of this dynamics can be found in the range of discourses on Asiatic despotism that began to circulate in Europe in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In *The Sultan’s Court*, Alain Grosrichard links Asiatic despotism to an ongoing tension between democratic and absolutist instances at the time of the emergence of European nations, which resulted in the re-elaboration of the classic concept of ‘tyranny’ (Grosrichard, 1979 [1998]). Tyrannical tendencies were extracted from the image of Europe, and distorted, located and ejected in the figure of the oriental despot, which came to epitomise the ‘nature’ of Asiatic societies, allowing, at the same time, for the re-organisation of European subjectivities along the unitary, democratic and ‘integral’ character of the ‘people’. The rational and liberal traits of emerging European nations could then be forged and mobilised externally, in colonial settings, and internally, as a disciplinary

paradigm, reflecting the fundamental paranoid relation highlighted above between a phantasm of external *aggression* and internal *subversion*.

From this viewpoint, paranoia performs a central function, articulating the internal discursive and spatial referents of the nation in a way that parallels its originary character as the inaugural moment of ego formation. This basic quality as a constitutive trait, however, can lead to a more assertive dynamic, in which the spatial and antagonistic dichotomisation of the nation is drastically intensified. The narrative of the unity of the people inches here towards a hypertrophic idea of integrity and spatial finitude, in relation to which the people stands as a solid collective. In this context, paranoia assumes the role of an ideological 'structure' by which a defensive strategy is enacted in response to a general perception of uncertainty. This is particularly evident in early twentieth century variants of the discourse of the nation, especially in the inter-war period, with overlapping of hyper-nationalist representations and the phenomenon of totalitarianism in Europe. An examination of the salient features of modern mass psychology in Freud's (1921) *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* helps us to understand the political workings of a paranoid style at the core of not only incipient totalitarianisms in Europe, but also nationalist narratives in that period. Among the most widely discussed features of Freud's group psychology is the dominant position of the Ideal as a Cause (the Great Nation, the Empire, the Church), its ability to perform its organising tasks, sanctioning and offering a sense of general orientation to the unified national community. It is this position that enabled the leader to assume a charismatic role in this period, standing as the apex of a pyramid, which allowed for a vertical and hypnotic identification at the level of the mass. A related feature was the ability of the ideal to cement the bonds among the components of the community, compacting the mass around a common ego ideal. It is here that the principle of integrity of the people is at its most extreme, producing the kind of solid mass that the huge rallies of the pre-war years epitomised. Similarly, crucial components of the discourse of the nation in this context were the pre-eminence of both the universal and the institution (the party, the race, and so on) over the particular and the individual, and the structural position of sacrifice of the citizen (Recalcati, 2007b).³

The ability of a paranoid style to mobilise a hypertrophic, close-knit form of national citizenship is also detectable in the articulation of another central signifier: the territory. Alongside nationalist representations of community, a new spatial formation, the national *territory*, was also devised in modern doctrines of state, which substantially adopted the same binary mechanism of inclusion/exclusion. The consolidation of the modern state, particularly in the later development of the nation-state, required first and foremost the delineation of clear-cut borders. This entailed the absorption of those portions of landscape that had previously separated the land of different lords, and that were not recognised by any state. While territory and population had remained quite vague and non-formalised notions until the emergence



of modern states, an increasing process of rationalisation of land and population was enacted afterwards (Foucault, 1977–1978 [2009]). It is with the modern absolutist state and the nation-state that territory became fully rationalised, with borders across European states being marked by territorial contact. Like the binary construction of the people, the national ‘territory’ entailed a *necessary* and *exclusionary* model of space, as the end of ‘my’ territory *necessarily* coincides with the beginning of ‘yours’ – hence the hypertrophy of this territorial model, with the theatrical construction of walls and curtains epitomising a clear-cut, *shared* and *necessary* distinction between ‘us’ and ‘them’. The territorial outside is not treated here as a difference, but is, again, assumed as a ‘necessary’ negation, where ‘exclusion’ *needs* to be maintained for the basic functioning of the inside as a whole, as an *Us*.

As historian Aldo Schiavone points out, the modern idea of border emerged with the formation of the Westphalian system and became a fundamental legal-political concept with the consolidation of the nation model in Europe in the nineteenth century (Schiavone, 2008). Schiavone remarks, however, that an alternative idea of the limit had characterised the history of pre-modern Europe, one that could not be reduced to the binary dimension of the border and that marked an *imperial* conception of space. This distinction is essential for destabilising monolithic representations of Europe. In the Roman Empire, for instance, space was constructed as a realm of full plenitude: it was *sine finibus* (without end) in that it was thought of as universality without limits and borders, which coincided with the world. Defensive lines like Hadrian’s Wall were considered as tactical machineries at the peripheries of the empire, rather than symbolising the physical space of the end of the empire. They were mobile and temporary (Hadrian’s Wall was superceded by another provisional wall about 100 km north), and their construction reflected a *contingent* strategy focused on local circumstances, and based more on power and culture than territory (Whittaker, 1994; Shapiro, 1997). This universal, all-inclusive conception of space survived the Roman Empire, partially influencing pre-modern notions of territoriality in the *Respublica Christiana* and the Holy Roman Empire (up to its late developments with Charles V’s popular statement: ‘the sun never sets on my empire’).

Central to this article then is a differentiation between an idea of limit that is inclusive, contingent and porous on the one hand, and one that works as a regime of separation on the other, which prefigures a necessary and exclusionary logic for the very thinking of the inside. We can trace here two spatial realms that parallel the kind of distinction elucidated earlier between a neurotic way of qualifying and dealing with the limit (always precarious, porous, contingent) and a paranoid demarcation of the limit (which enacts unilateral counter-positions, elevating the other to the position of a transcendental enemy that both allows and threatens the very integrity and unity of the self). These two realms, related respectively to the imperial notion of *territoriality* and to the national idea of *territory*, defer to the terminological and conceptual distinction between ‘frontier’ and ‘border’. In a recent examination of these two concepts, Dario Gentili highlights the crucial role that pre-imperial Rome

ascribed to the notion of *finis* – hence, the term ‘confine’, for which perhaps a better rendering in English is provided by the term ‘border’ (Gentili, 2008).

The *finis* referred to the delineation of a ‘straight line’, and its original meaning was associated with the idea of digging a groove, demarcating the boundary of a field, and henceforth of a city (hence the term *urbs*, city, from Latin *urvare*, to plough). The *finis* had a sanctified status, and was sacralised through the reference to the god Terminus. This sacred furrow identified then the layout where defensive walls had to be erected, with the city gate standing as the only part that was not sanctified as it had to allow passage and contamination between the inside and the outside. In the myth of the birth of Rome, the competition for power between two twins, Romulus and Remus, is solved with the killing of Remus, who had violated the sacred boundary (*pomerium*) that Romulus had ploughed (Plutarch, *The Life of Romulus*). Romulus’s statement ‘thus perish everyone who may attempt to cross these walls’ marked the beginning of the first kingdom of Rome, which took the name of his founder. Emile Benveniste noted that the authority (and etymology) of the king (*rex*) is inscribed in the very capacity to ‘trace out the limits by straight lines’ (*regere fines*), lines that therefore have psychical as well as symbolic and moral connotations (*rectitude*). The king is the one who demarcates ‘the interior and the exterior, the realm of the sacred and the realm of the profane, the national territory and the profane territory’ (Benveniste, 1969, p. 14). The binary logic of the *finis*, with its overlapping of moral and territorial connotations, informs the paranoid style of the nation-state. The polysemy in the term ‘integrity’ at the core of paranoia epitomises these two fundamental dimensions, deferring to the need for spatial integrity (consistency and indivisibility of both the territory and the people) and moral integrity (rectitude and innocence). The *finis* performs here the function of enclosing the territorial domain of the nation by both realising its spatial *fini-tude* and preserving its moral and cultural innocence.

Unlike the *finis*, the term *limes* was used in post-republican Rome to refer to the kind of defensive lines that were located in the peripheries of the Empire. A translation for this term could be the English ‘frontier’, as used by Frederick Jackson Turner in his 1893 *The Significance of the Frontier in American History* (1921). As Schiavone points out, the frontier is here described by Turner as a ‘state of mind’, rather than a legal, material and institutional concept: ‘it is not so much a line where one stops, but rather an area that works as an invitation to access’ (Schiavone, 2008, p. 5). Similarly, ‘Roman frontiers were more zonal than wall-like’ (Shapiro, 1997, p. XII). Literally meaning ‘oblique’, ‘slanting’ (from Indo-European *el-*, *elei-*, *lei-*, to bow, to bend), the *limes* was not an impenetrable, military barrier separating Roman civilisation and its outside, but semi-permeable areas ringing the empire, and allowing for intense exchange and integration of social and economic activities. As a temporary fortification, the *limes* figured as a frontier in the sense of front area, forehead of a space that was thought of as a universality. Its peripheral quality was given by its distance from the centre of the empire (the city of Rome), but the surface



in which both this centre and its peripheries were situated, the *oikumene*, was a single one with no outside: hence Ovid's emphasis that 'Roman space is both the city and the world'.⁴

The *finis* referred then to a dividing line between rectitude and disorder, sacred and chaos, the interior and the exterior, finitude and openness, whereas the *limes* stood as a zone of contiguity between inside and outside, a road advancing in the *barbaricum*. Resonating with Carl Schmitt's antagonistic distinction between *land* and *sea* (Schmitt, 1942 [1997], 1950 [2006]), Gentili argues that a 'liminal' topography contrasts here with the fixed and linear topography of the *finis*-border, which referred to land, closure and separation. The *limes* is mobile, diagonal, and is often related to the idea of openness and fluidity: hence, the English use of frontier when referring to open spaces such as prairies, grasslands and the sea.

It is with this topography in mind that we consider, again, the paranoid trait informing the discourse of the nation-state. Unlike the *liquid* character of the frontier, its ability to stand as the immaterial horizon of an open and ever inclusive space, the border of the nation reminds us of the *solid* compactness of the national domain, epitomised by its immobile walls and unitary representations of the people. The frontier always exposes the empire to its fundamental ambivalence and barbarianism, to its inability to speak 'properly', to speak the 'proper' language of the subject. It is interesting in this sense that the Greek onomatopoeic word *barbaros*, which reproduced the stammering sound of a non-Greek speaker, played such a central function in the 'civilising' self-representation of Romans – who were barbarians themselves to the Greeks, and whose constant feature, particularly with the Greeks, had been precisely to integrate and assume the improper of the foreigner as their own proper – hence, Horace's statement: 'conquered Greece took captive her savage conqueror and brought her arts into rustic Latium'.⁵ But whereas the frontier allows us to think of the limit as permeable, and is therefore well represented by the non-Euclidian metaphor of a weaving, or a wave (where that which is repressed and disappears, always returns), the border stands as a strict act of insulation. Here is, in the words of Melman, 'an absolute boundary between the inside and outside (the circle) which is the basis for paranoia' (Melman, 1994, p. 136).

Epilogue

In this article, we have suggested that a paranoid style informs the discursive structure of the nation, organising its central signifiers around an irreducible tension between unity and duality. On the one hand, we have examined the operational workings of the paranoid phantasm of integrity, which, we argue, embodies two fundamental meanings: the *solid* character of the nation – its essentialising drive towards the One, its tendency to homogenise and 'compact' national constituents, pursuing an image of pure *finitude*,

which is both spatial and subjective (the territory and the people); and the *moral* character of the nation – its civilisational and ethical mission, which underpins that image of innocence and *rectitude* so crucial to paranoid formations.

On the other hand, we have drawn attention to the dualistic logic of this unity: the one is only possible here by way of a radical opposition with an outside in relation to which it can claim its specificity. While this separation assumes the paranoid form of insulation, it is precisely the antagonistic intensity of this separation that sanctions the specific role of paranoia in the ideological construction of different nationalisms, leading, in critical cases, to a potential tipping over into the real. The higher the threat of a transgression, violation, or suspension of the border, the more hypertrophic and solid the boundary that will be advocated so as to safeguard and immunise the nation.

The problem, however, is that the risk of a transgression is already an effect of the emergence of the one as an undividable entity. The paradox of the border is that in creating the national self, it elevates the outside to the position of a phantasmatic threat to security. Žižek rightly points out that this is true, particularly at the level of enjoyment, the cathectic force sustaining the symbolic identification to the Nation. ‘National identification is by definition sustained by a relationship toward the Nation qua Thing. This Nation-Thing is determined by a series of contradictory properties. It appears to us as “our Thing” (perhaps we could say *cosa nostra*), as something accessible only to us, as something “they”, the others, cannot grasp, but which is nonetheless constantly threatened by “them”’ (Žižek, 1990, p. 52). Enjoyment here irrupts in the obscene construction of the Other as a traumatic Intruder. Hence, a widespread tendency by the nation to cry *theft of enjoyment*: ‘We always impute to the “other” an excessive enjoyment; s/he wants to steal our enjoyment (by ruining our way of life) and/or has access to some secret, perverse enjoyment’ (Žižek, 1993, p. 202).

In the face of the national unity, therefore, duality traps the discourse of the nation in an irremediable tension. It is in reference to this tension that we can grasp the critical quality of the modern national border, its being at the same time ‘division and relation’, its faculty to mark ‘a limit, but also the desire to surpass it’ (Ferrara, 2011, p. 183). As urbanist Anna Marsons puts it: ‘borders, in constructing a new identity, break the sacredness of the One and introduce an element of duality that needs to be solved through sacrifice’ (Marson, 2008, p. 186). This is the fundamental risk of paranoia when the perception of threat to the integrity of the One, which is stirred up by the phantasmatic presence of the ‘enemy’, propels a violent action aimed at the obliteration of otherness: a *passage à l’acte* whose allegoric figure we find in the myth of the foundation of Rome, with the killing of Remus after his transgression of the sacred limit. It is not by chance that, as Marsons points out, various Mediterranean myths on the foundation of a city refer to a conflict between *twins*, always resolved with the sacrifice and killing of one of the brothers. In the negative dialectic at the base of paranoid formations the foreigner outside is antagonised not so much because of the difference it displays, but because of the very sameness it embodies.



Now, a well-established narrative about the nation-state in Europe has celebrated the ability of the nation-state to stabilise its relations with the outside, favouring inter-state equilibrium. Even when war and violent transgressions of borders are enacted, a 'progressive' quality has been ascribed to such outbreaks. The Westphalian state-system has thus been praised for having institutionalised and rationalised conflict at a European level, moving beyond the condition of a permanent, all-inclusive and irrational war of religion. With national borders identifying the point where the sovereign power of a state ends and where another sovereignty begins, a new type of war became possible, one in which two belligerent states can mutually recognise themselves, their 'specular' position as 'equally just', and resolve their tension endorsing the principles of the *jus publicum Europaeum*.

Apart from its partiality – with two world wars well evidencing the paranoid logic of the nation and its immunological response to insecurity – this account fails to acknowledge that such an assumed rationalisation only refer to inter-state relations. It suffices for a subject in war to be deprived of the legal form of the state to be no longer recognised (and even *seen*) as a rational legitimate adversary and included in that plane of equality that allows protection under the rules of the *jus ad bellum* and the *jus in bello*, a point that Schmitt, for instance, highlighted, pointing to the State's hidden lack of measure and rationality outside the state system (Schmitt, 1950 [2003]). The experience of colonialism or recurrent cases of suspension of international law in case of conflict with non-state actors reveal the limits of this rationality, and the inability of the nation-state to symbolise the tension with alterity outside the state paradigm (thus *rejecting* it). The stabilisation of inter-State relations within Europe in this sense seems to be an effect of the very ejection of the phantasmatic traits of the other outside Europe, as we put it earlier.

From a substantial perspective, whether nation-states are able to remain within a relatively homeostatic relation with the outside, as has been the case in post-war Europe, or yield to violent actions aimed at the transgression of the border very much depends on the sense of disaggregation perceived at a given moment and the strategies to deal with it. Recent state wall building, resurgent nationalist populisms and revived divisions among European nations expose the paranoid logic organising the national relation with the outside in global and critical settings. The recent financial crisis in this direction is allowing for the re-activation of immunological strategies and orientalist projections that work both inside Europe (see for instance discourses on PIGS) and outside (resurgent Islamophobic representations). In this context, any invitation to rethink immigration policy in Europe is energetically opposed, with populist movements combining the anxiety of economic bankruptcy with that of a phantasmatic invasion of migrants (and potential terrorists). No matter here the brutal reality of ongoing tragedies at the 'borders' of EU, as the 'paradigmatic' sinking of a boat of migrants in the Italian island of Lampedusa dramatically showed in 2014, leading to 366 victims. This event calls into question the hypertrophy of Fortress Europe *vis-à-vis* the challenges of a sea, the

Mediterranean Sea, which has become a silent graveyard for thousands of people over the last years.

The response of the nation-state so far has been to impose the *rectitude* of the line upon both the fluidity of the sea and the pervasive flows of globalisation. The time might have come, however, to assume the difficult strategy of psychoanalysis aimed at accepting the ex-centric condition of the subject, resisting immunising therapies that risk killing the very social body they would like to preserve. The time might have come to consider the effects of European fears and rethink the logic of the border, allowing the force of inclusivity to permeate the hypertrophic solidity of national walls and populisms.⁶ This entails renouncing the voice of truth of the national subject, and assuming the ethical task of a being in common that is processual and unavoidably ambivalent. Here is the philosophical stance that should inform, as Foucault put it, the critical question today; an ethos that may be characterised positively as a ‘limit-attitude’, standing as a permanent critique of our historical era: ‘We are not talking about a gesture of *rejection* [emphasis added]. We have to move beyond the outside-inside alternative; we have to be at the frontiers’ (Foucault, 1984, p. 45). This, the old and new task for Europe: beyond Foucault, before Foucault, *être à la frontière*.

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About the Author

Andrea Mura is Research Fellow in political philosophy at the Open University’s Faculty of Social Sciences. He has published articles in international academic journals and contributed to several edited volumes in the fields of comparative philosophy, political theology, psychoanalysis, and ideology and discourse analysis. He is the author of *The Symbolic Scenarios of Islamism: A Study in Islamic Political Thought* (Ashgate, 2015).

Notes

- 1 ‘*Noli foras ire, in te ipsum redi, in interiore homine habitat veritas*’, Augustine, *De Vera Religione* (39, 72).
- 2 This inability to operationalise symbolic mediation is associated to the complete rejection of symbolic castration in psychosis: ‘something primordial regarding the subject’s being does not enter into



symbolization and is not repressed, but rejected' (Lacan, 1955–56 [1993], p. 81). Instead of neurotic 'repression', we have here a 'rejection' to 'all means of access' to castration and to the register of the symbolic function (Lacan, 1955–56 [1993], p. 13). Symbolic castration figures for Lacan as the intrinsic logic of language itself. Hence, what is at stake in paranoia is a 'collision with the inassimilable signifier' (Lacan, 1955–56 [1993], p. 321).

- 3 Although Freud's insights into mass psychology have been widely contested over time, his work is not being appealed here as a model for understanding complex collectives in general. Unlike a widespread psychoanalytic tendency, we do not take the solid and exclusionary structure of paranoia as a constitutive feature of mass psychology as such. New investigations in the field of Lacanian psychoanalysis, for instance, have recently highlighted the 'liquid' and 'perverse' character that contemporary mass psychology has come to assume in advanced capitalist societies, reflecting a new type of cynical, narcissistic and anti-institutional social bond (Recalcati, 2007b). Freud's work is referred to in this article as an example of the kind of paranoid logic informing 'discourses' on national collectives in that specific period, though we still believe that such analyses were particularly coherent with the historical form that those same collectives came to assume in a context of exacerbated nationalism and incipient totalitarianism.
- 4 '*Romanae spatium est urbis et orbis idem*', Ovid, *Fasti*, II, 682–683.
- 5 '*Graecia capta ferum victorem cepit et artes intulit agresti Latio*', Horace, Book II, *Epistle* I, lines 156–157.
- 6 Although we endorse the idea of frontier in opposition to borders and assume the former as a *desirable* model for thinking the political construction of territorial and cultural boundaries in a global context, we shall differentiate our notion of frontier from 'imperial' alternatives within capitalistic processes. At stake is a fundamental distinction between the conceptualisation of frontier in a neurotic space as elucidated above, and concurrent variants epitomised by the topographic image of the sea, as first elaborated by Schmitt, or the notion of frontier first discussed by Turner, once subsumed within the logic of advanced capitalism. These imperial *liminal* figures seem to refer to the articulation of a 'smooth global space', where lines and differences are 'regimented in global networks of power consisting of highly differentiated and mobile structures' (Hardt and Negri, 2000, p. 151). The topography of capital in this regard is one of pure liquidity, a smooth space allowing for the ultimate suspension of the experience of the limit. Lines here assume a purely fictitious character, denoting a pervert organisation of social space, which works through the veiling of social and normative limits and the *denial* of symbolic castration (Melman, 2002). A neurotic understanding of the frontier would instead favour the symbolic inscription of immanent and contingent lines, putting the ex-centric and ambivalent condition of the subject at work. This means realising an inclusive social dynamics based on a logic of permeability, and temporal and spatial processuality. Such a differentiation – for all its attendant complexities and ambiguities – exceeds the scope of this article, but remains a crucial task ahead.

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