Chapter 6
The Immune Space:
Monitoring Narratives in Contemporary Pandemic

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ABSTRACT

In the context of SARS-CoV-2 health emergency, strongly framed in the normalization of logic of risk, the authors analyze three digital platforms of contagion containment and population tracking in order to investigate, through a comparative-descriptive analysis, the relationship between different socio-political-cultural contexts and the respective responses adopted—the Chinese government tool Health Code, the South Korean app Corona100, and the Italian app, Immuni—to counter a single global emergency. The objective is to investigate the framing operations that introduced on a global scale the use of apps in bio-security and immunity regime for which individual privacy increasingly collides with collective security. The authors consider central the opening of a debate on how the logic of risk and worst case scenario are paradigmatic nowadays in the development of increasingly sophisticated systems, potentially invasive of privacy, even in function of complex threats interconnected on a global scale.

INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary social space, emergency, exception, control, security and risk structure practices and policies that, in function of increasingly frequent states of crisis, introduce technological systems and digital platforms aimed at containing the emergency, defining security spaces and monitoring flows of goods and people. Through these systems there is a functional confluence between physical and digital dimensions, in which the latter is used to regulate the former.

Post September 11, more and more states of crisis, complex threats extended to the global scale and widespread individual insecurity have led to the consolidation of the *normalization of the state of emergency* (Agamben, 2003, p. 11). This condition is identified, at the legal level, with the permanent *state of exception*: a governmental and legislative strategy of *extrema ratio* increasingly adopted today, which normalizes the exception, to the detriment of ordinary law, converting the "contingent fact" into "law" (Agamben, 2003, p. 40). At a spatial level, the permanent emergency and exception are translated both in the frequent militarization of public space and heterogeneous territories considered "at risk", and in the diffusion and strengthening of technological systems capable of collecting data and monitoring areas extended to national and international scale, borders, people. Thanks to these systems, there is the above mentioned functional confluence between the physical and digital dimensions. In this order, which has been consolidated in recent decades, especially in the more economically developed countries, there is the idea that society is constantly going through a condition of crisis and catastrophe, within a temporal dimension without a precise moment when the *disaster occurs* (Fisher, 2009, p. 27). Thus, *risk factor* becomes dominant device capable of ensuring behaviour, conduct and opinions as a function of an action that institutionalizes forecasting and outlines, from time to time, *worse and worse scenarios* that consolidate the coincidence between the concept of *freedom* and *security* (Comitato Invisibile, 2019, p. 63).

All these facts are defined by Didier Bigo as "politics of discomfort": a condition that affects and regulates all levels of society (2008, p. 8) and that places on the same level extremely heterogeneous phenomena (migration, terrorism, epidemic, climate or economic crisis), against which equally heterogeneous mechanisms of monitoring and socio-spatial organization are equally developed (2008, p. 19).

In the last instance it is outlined state of security, within which every level of security corresponds to a projected threat and in which every political subject to defend is opposed to a subject (individual, collective, biological) to fight, dangerous and a-political, understood as a reproduction, in the opposite sense, of the former (Cavalletti, 2005, pp. 17-18, p. 59, pp. 222-223). In this sense, the concept of security is extremely *mobile*, and, similarly to this, so is the concept of risk; in function of this *mobility* is defined, from time to time, the degree of power of the *regulatory authority* and the devices promoted by it (Lam, 2012, p. 167).

The relationship between the concepts of emergency, exception, control, security and risk is now evident in the orders of bio-economy, bio-politics and bio-security – the latter clearly dominating today. To articulate these orders, Donna Haraway's concept is adopted: "human beings, like any other component or subsystem, must be localized in a system architecture whose basic modes of operation are probabilistic, statistical. [...] organisms have ceased to exist as objects of knowledge, giving way to biotic components" (1991, pp. 163-164).

The condition of bio-politics, today extremely evident, for example, along border and frontier areas, makes the latter real interactive architectures that change according to the citizenship of those who cross them. Borders, understood as pure prototypes of more or less porous bio-political spaces according to citizenship, are built and deconstructed as devices of regulation between birth and nation (Petti, 2007, p. 6). *Necropolitic* spaces, taking up the concept coined by Achille Mbembe (2016), in which the violent security policy of border control takes shape by deciding directly on who has the right to live and who to die, within a state of exception that unequivocally questions inalienable human rights.

To this order is added today's neo-liberal regime, in which the individual collaborates in the construction, on a global scale, of *surveillance capitalism*. This economic system is a bio-economy that exploits human experience as raw material, useful to optimize and standardize market logics, and that imposes a new collective global order based on *absolute security* (Zuboff, 2019, p. 13).

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