

4 Death as policy

The EU's criminalisation of solidarity with undocumented migrants

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Introduction

"I didn't have the right to obey [...] They were asking me to take them back to Libya. From a legal standpoint, these were people fleeing a country at war [and] the law bars you from taking them back there". This is how Carola Rackete, the captain of the Sea-Watch 3 (a boat devoted to the rescue of drowning migrants in the Mediterranean), justified forcing her way into Lampedusa with forty migrants onboard after being arrested (Agence France-Presse, 2019). Before an Italian court ordered her release soon afterwards, she faced a three to ten-year prison sentence. Although hers has been one of the most headline-grabbing stories, the harassment that the Italian state has put her through is by no means an isolated incident. The case of Pia Klemp, another German captain facing up to twenty years in jail for saving 6,000 migrants from drowning in the Mediterranean, has stirred at least as much political furore (Klemp, 2019a). And yet, captains Rackete and Klemp are but the most well-known names in an expanding list of Europeans facing prison time as a consequence of the generosity that they showed to undocumented migrants.

Over the last five years, not only have a rising number of ship crews seen their rescue activities increasingly criminalised along the Mediterranean (Bulman, 2019), but a growing number of Europeans have been forced to endure ever more displays of harassment at the hands of EU member states, which have taken it

Domenico Lucano, the mayor of Riace – a hamlet in southern Italy – was arrested for encouraging migrants to settle in his increasingly depopulated town (Musolino, 2018). Cédric Herrou, a French farmer, was facing up to five years in prison and a €30,000 fine for helping African migrants cross the Italian border – only recently, the Appeals Court of Lyon dropped all charges against him (New York Times 2017). Martine Landry, a seventy-three-year-old grandmother from a small town bordering Italy, was facing five years in prison and also a €30,000 fine for helping two Guinean teenagers seek asylum in France – after years of trials and appeals, she was acquitted in July 2020. (Amnesty International 2018). Spanish journalist Helena Maleno Garzón was accused of colluding with human traffickers, even though she probably saved hundreds of lives by alerting the Spanish coastguard to the distress calls of migrants crossing the Mediterranean (Hernanz, 2018). In August of 2019, the criminalisation of solidarity by the EU reached a new low when it refused to share with NGOs distress signals picked up by the EU's surveillance aircraft hovering over the Mediterranean –in contravention of the Law of the Sea (De Standaard, 2019).

How did it come this far? How can we make sense of the EU's persistent criminalisation of its own citizens merely for upholding principles of non-discrimination and solidarity, while the human beings they are trying to rescue are left to drown at sea or are abandoned to agonise in the squalor of EU's migrant camps and externalised detention centres (Specia, 2019)? What to make of the cognitive dissonance that such criminalisation reveals about a political project founded to stand up collectively against extreme nationalism and violence and which still prides itself in "Drawing inspiration from the cultural, religious, and humanist inheritance of Europe, from which have developed the universal values of the inviolable and inalienable rights of the human person, freedom, democracy, equality and the rule of law..." (EU 2008)? How has the unthinkable become mundane?

In this chapter, we rely on Hannah Arendt's reflection on "the banality of evil" (1963) and Zygmunt Bauman's distrust for the

what its implications are for the larger project of post-war European integration. We contend that the criminalisation of life-saving NGOs along the Mediterranean is neither an anomaly nor an exception but merely the extreme manifestation of a chronic trend towards *thanatopolitics* (Agamben, 1995; 1998): the politics of death. The power to decide who lives and who dies is inherent to the deadly border architecture that the EU has put in place. It consists of a normalised, technical system of paper, iron, and camp borders that has now even lead to the criminalisation of solidarity with those who are violently and oftentimes mortally excluded by it. This, we argue, is the banality of evil of our time.

The banality of a deadly bureaucracy

As philosophers preoccupied with unravelling the self-righteous conviction in one's own civilisational superiority that – espoused by European totalitarian regimes – led to the Holocaust, both Arendt and Bauman shared the counterintuitive suspicion that this European cataclysm was not as extraordinary an event as the incredulity of the post-war lamentations made it appear. The volatility of Arendt's view – which received a torrent of mixed criticism upon its publication – was summed up in the very phrasing of her scepticism. "The banality of evil" conceptualised the impression that Adolf Eichmann made upon her as he stood trial in Jerusalem, in 1960: he downplayed his crucial role in the genocide of the European Jewry as though it amounted to nothing more than a mere bureaucrat doing his job. The ordinariness with which Eichmann described his part in the pitiless persecution, coldblooded transportation, and systematic German attempt to exterminate Europe's Jewish population lies at the core of Arendt's moral oxymoron. Her shrewdness was to realise that Eichmann's own account could be seen not only as a cynical defence but also as a darker yet unspoken explanation of the Shoah: not the peak of barbarism reached by a few empowered brutes that the mainstream post-war narrative had portrayed it to be but, rather, the culmination of a civilisational ideal in which German society

Like Arendt, Bauman recognised in accounts such as Eichmann's more than a cowardly excuse: he saw a symptom of a chronic ailment that could not be extricated from the project of European modernity (Bauman, 1989). His critique of the Holocaust remains an indispensable complement to Arendt's astonishment about the lack of responsibility shown by people like Eichmann, who seemed able to perpetrate the worst crimes without being assaulted by their own conscience. Bauman's analysis constitutes a devastating indictment of modernity and, particularly, of its unquenchable thirst for progress. Hence, for Bauman, the Holocaust should not be comfortably disparaged as an act committed by blood-thirsty and irrational barbarians but rather as a conscious policy by a regime that prided itself in having reached a superior degree of civilisation, and for whom the Final Solution represented modern sophistication and rational progress predicated upon science – conspicuously, scientific racism and eugenics (e.g., Günther, 1934). The extermination of “lesser” people in the pursuit of a “perfect society” defined and produced according to the state-of-the-art scientific knowledge was thus not a deviation but rather a natural consequence of the Nazis' commitment to modernity – a project whose roots can be traced back to the biopolitics developed in Europe's colonial dominions and to the segregationist politics of the US (Olusoga and Erichsen, 2010; Whitman, 2017). Perhaps Bauman's critique of modernity could be encapsulated in a concise but evocative turn of phrase: *savagery with perfume*.

What amazed Arendt about the testimonies given at the trial in Jerusalem was the mundanity, civility, and normality with which such inhumanity as Eichmann's could be carried out without meeting much resistance from either those charged with executing such atrocities nor from the victims at the receiving end – Jews and non-Jews alike. Listening to Eichmann and Jewish survivors, the Holocaust seemed to her as though it had been a mere bureaucratic procedure where the Satan one imagined in charge of planning the efficient system of trains that took Jews to extermination camps was no one more diabolic than an

bothered his mind with the simple palliative thought that he was merely following orders and doing his job. On the other side of this banality were both a European Jewry and an entire European society who stood still while a succession of worsening omens descended upon them and waited patiently until six million Jews and eleven million other victims were taken to the slaughterhouse (Arendt, 1963, pp. 8–9).

Hannah Arendt's opposition to the post-war narrative of the Holocaust stirred much controversy because it seemed to downplay the evil of Nazism by characterising it as an act of "banality", a stance that gave the impression to demean the death of millions murdered in Nazi extermination camps. Bauman's scepticism about the virtues of modernity seems equally counterintuitive: how can modernity be responsible for our unparalleled technological comfort yet simultaneously the cause of humanity's most monstrous crimes? The answer, we believe, can only be found by acknowledging the uncanny complexity of humanity, which is precisely the humanist core of Arendt and Bauman's critique of modernity: by no means an exculpation of the Nazi horrors but certainly not a demonisation either.

Arendt's and Bauman's warning regarding the singularisation of the Holocaust derives from a typical humanist preoccupation. By exoticising the Nazis and their atrocities as inimitably monstrous; their victims and their plights as uniquely misfortunate; and their experiences as a distressing but harmless past safely buried under the progress of our times, we may handicap our ability to come to terms with a gruesome but necessary realisation about our personal and collective existence: we have done this before and we might do it again, not in spite of modern technologies and cutting-edge ideologies but on the contrary – aided by them.

The paradox that Arendt and Bauman identified thus lies in the mirage of refinement that modernity conjures up through its baffling technological breakthroughs: their complexity might disguise increasingly sophisticated brutality under the cloak of progress, thus allowing savagery to pass for morality. This is the warning: evil is neither an unusual human disposition nor is it self-evidently

sophistication and inexorable advancement, we may risk falling prey to the overpowering course of history and become such abysmal monsters or such hopeless victims as those we today believe confined to herky-jerky, black-and-white films of the past – without even noticing it.

EU's train wreck in slow motion

What do we see when we examine the deadly politics of the EU through the sharp lens that Arendt and Bauman crafted for us? In order to understand the EU's criminalisation of humanitarian aid we need to zoom out – just like Arendt and Bauman did – and focus on what made this extreme not only possible but “normal” (van Houtum and Bueno Lacy, 2017). What we take away from their perspective is an invaluable scepticism for an uncritical faith in one's own moral rectitude that is supported by an unfaltering trust in history's indomitable progress (Popper, 1966). Such faith contains a latent violence for the imagined misfits – those who, as a matter of choice or fortune, have been either unable or unwilling to seamlessly integrate into an imagined idealisation of modernity, progress, and prosperity; those whose unusual customs, phenotype, politics, or any other expression of uniqueness might challenge established archetypes of order, proper behaviour, cleanliness, and perfection. The rationalistic ethos that relies on the standardisation, homogenisation, and readability of space, population, and culture (Scott, 1998) is threatened by those who, by the very aesthetics of their cultural richness, countercultural idiosyncrasy, or political nonconformism might tarnish the sense of accomplishment of a society that has learned to see in such eccentricity a burden holding it back from the mirage of modern paradise.

We suggest that the EU's rationalisation and normalisation of the extreme – to criminalise solidarity with those that are dying because of its own policy – most manifestly began with the introduction of Schengen in 1985: particularly, with the asymmetrical rights it started to dish out among Europeans and

list of nationalities requiring a visa to enter Schengen was introduced. In the eyes of the EU, the establishment of this pre-border of paper was an almost logical necessity given the introduction of a common EUropean external border. However, it represents a watershed in the history of European integration: the EU collectively started to make a sharp distinction (“the Schengen list”) between countries whose citizens require a visa to enter the EU (largely Muslim and less affluent countries) and those exempted from it (largely rich OECD members and a few exceptions in South America and Asia) (van Houtum, 2010; van Houtum and Bueno Lacy, 2020). This discrimination is based on a nativist principle otherwise expressly forbidden by fundamental rights laws in all EU member states and which runs against the EU’s own Lisbon Treaty and accession (Copenhagen) criteria. The implication of this *paper border* – the most impenetrable of all – is enormous: it relies on border controls which have been outsourced to faraway embassies in third countries, which means that the EU has almost entirely closed off legal migration channels for most of the world (Bueno Lacy and van Houtum, 2013; van Houtum and Bueno Lacy, 2020). For the most part, citizens of these countries can only enter the EU irregularly – e.g., by overstaying their visas, through smugglers, or by crossing borders in other illicit ways. In other words, the criminalisation of solidarity is in fact already built into the very architecture of the Schengen list of 2001. Specifically, the rampant criminalisation of solidarity with migrants is even enshrined in an EU Facilitation Directive against “illegal immigration” that foresees no exception for humanitarian activities (Directive 2002/90/EC) – a legal blind spot that the EU Commission has stubbornly resisted to amend (Bayer, 2019; FRA, 2018).

Without a doubt, deadliness is the most shamefully visible consequence of this paper border architecture. According to the latest estimates, over 40,000 people have died trying to reach the EU since the Schengen area was established (McIntyre and Rice-Oxley, 2018; Laine, 2020; UNITED, 2020). This makes the EU the deadliest border on the planet. Of all the deaths at the world’s

production of death suggests a border governmentality that conforms to what Achille Mbembe called *necropolitics* (2003) and to what Giorgio Agamben termed *thanatopolitics* (1998): the politics to decide who lives and who dies as well as how and why.

The external paper b/ordering and othering by the EU, which we argue is the first EU border, has created a cat-and-mouse game between smugglers and border guards that has resulted in the fortification of a second – ever higher – *iron* border, by which we mean all the land fences, razor wire, and other physical hurdles intended to prevent undocumented border crossings at the territorial limits of the EU; as well as surveillance patrols along the EU's maritime borders aimed at stopping undocumented migrants from reaching the EU – whose ever more callous violence has been normalised over the last decades (van Houtum, 2010; van Houtum and Lucassen, 2016; Howden, Fotiadis, and Campbell, 2020; Edwards, 2020; van Houtum and Bueno Lacy, 2020). Over the past few years, the iron border has even been increasingly pushed away from the actual perimeters of the EU, into northern Africa and eastern Europe. The EU is willingly and consciously financing the efforts by authoritarian regimes beyond its borders, thus effectively hiring them as the EU's gatekeepers of undocumented migration to the EU. These "Pilate deals" – for they evoke Pontius Pilate's infamous hand-washing, which he used as a symbolic gesture to exculpate himself from yielding to a riotous mob's demand to crucify an innocent man (Matthew 27 in Coogan, 2010, p. 1787) – offshore the EU's responsibility for the well-being of asylum seekers to regimes that employ inhumane methods to deter their migration to the EU in exchange for money – e.g., Libya since 2003 and Turkey since 2016 (Bialasiewicz, 2012; Amnesty International 2017). As Turkey's prime minister's recent threat to "open the gates" – i.e., let migrants travel unimpeded to the EU unless it pays more money to Turkey – has made clear (Wesel, 2019), Pilate deals are a strategic liability, for they make the EU vulnerable to blackmail by erratic autocrats. Ultimately, the effect of outsourced border controls is thus, counterproductively, the surrender of responsibility for one's own jurisdiction, the jeopardy

The third bordering strategy that the EU has been developing and normalising as part of its border architecture is its post-border that could be termed *camp border*: the collection of distant and isolating waiting chambers that the EU's cordoned societies have designed to "warehouse" surplus migrants who have managed to overcome its paper and iron borders (van Houtum and Bueno Lacy, 2020). According to Agamben (1998, p. 9), the camp is "the space that is opened when the state of exception begins to become the rule" – where the rule of law is replaced by unpredictable despotism. All across the EU, these spaces of exception have become the dominant policy to manage undocumented migrants, whose scarce political representation leaves them vulnerable to languish far away from the scrutiny of EU societies and thus prevents them from holding accountable those responsible for such abuses. The new camps of the EU have become the most gruesome confirmation of Étienne Balibar's posit about Europe's borders which – as he famously remarked – far from disappearing, are multiplying, yet becoming ever more detached from self-evident political borders (Balibar, 1998, p. 220).

In the archipelago of detention camps that EU member states have set up along the Mediterranean, the rights granted by their liberal democratic constitutions no longer apply to a diverse collection of Muslims, Middle Easterners, and Africans who EU member states have deemed unworthy of the rule of law's protection. The EU is taking no responsibility for contributing to the psychological and physical devastation of imprisoned migrants, which undermines its own legal commitment against "torture and inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment" (Article 4 of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, see: EU, 2000). There are reports of sweeping human rights violations in Greece, Chios, Samos, and Lesbos, the latter of which hosts the infamous Moria camp, which features a chamber of horrors so grim that it is astonishing as well as painfully revealing why the EU is not doing everything in its power to stop this border violence (Lucas, Ramsay, and Keen, 2019). As Bauman concluded in his critique of modernity, "Responsibility is silenced once proximity is eroded; it

179). Solidarity – a concern for the Other based not on charity but on a sense of oneness – requires physical or spiritual proximity and is, in contrast to callousness, undermined by social distance. EU populations see neither the suffering nor the wars nor the economic ruin nor the climatic pressures that push migrants to the EU: they do not see their bodies and minds rotting away in prisons funded by their own taxes either.

What is striking about the banality of the EU's border evil is that, unlike border regimes that show no qualms about espousing outright racism as the rationale for their stringent migration policies (e.g., the US), the EU keeps championing its staunch defence of human dignity and life as the moral imperatives driving its increasingly merciless b/ordering and othering governmentality (van Houtum and van Naerssen, 2002). The EU makes as if its glaringly anti-humanitarian policies should in fact be seen as part of a higher civilisational ideal. Yet, by co-opting the language of humanitarianism and human rights to legitimise an increasingly coldblooded migration policy (Cuttitta, 2017), the EU has exposed the banality of its alleged humanist ethos. Against this backdrop, it is telling that one of the first decisions of Ursula von der Leyen – the recently appointed president of the EU Commission – has been to create the position of “vice-president for Protecting our European Way of Life”. Many commentators have widely denounced this as a “shameful concession to the continent’s far-right” (Plenel, 2019). Unsurprisingly, the position was celebrated as an ideological victory by French far-right politician Marine Le Pen (Euractiv, 2019; Stone, 2019).

Moreover, by hollowing out its own foundational principles, the EU is counterproductively feeding the authoritarian nationalism that it was established to keep at bay. Through the creation of a border system that forces non-EU migrants into destitution and violence as well as mental and bodily decay, the EU is fuelling the imaginations of anti-immigrant authoritarian parties across the EU, whose views on immigration are influenced by conspiracy theories such as the “white replacement theory”, which postulates that primitive immigrants threaten Europe's way of life (Camus, 2012).

banalisation of increasingly atrocious policies and discourse which do undermine the EU's way of life as stipulated in its foundational treaties and as conceived throughout its post-war experience. We would argue, therefore, that through its own bordering strategies and the ethno-exclusionary discourses that they promote, the EU is hollowing out the very solidarity which is needed to safeguard the rule of law and human rights that it prides itself to be founded upon. This is the autoimmunity of the EU's border policy which we have discussed elsewhere (van Houtum and Bueno Lacy, 2020).

We are living through momentous times: we are witnessing now what would have been unthinkable three decades ago, when the EU was established. Today, the EU's policies are helping smugglers line their pockets and laying fertile ground for the proliferation of human rights violations and death among the most vulnerable migrants. Incomprehensibly, these policies have simultaneously weakened the EU by making it vulnerable to geopolitical blackmail by countries like Turkey and Libya while reducing its overall control over its own borders. Insidiously, this border regime is breeding a political culture that teaches division and antagonism while glorifying the criminalisation of the most noble feelings as progress.

The criminalising hubris across the EU is the latest tweak to a border architecture that aspires to fence off the "European way of life" at all costs – even at the expense of the entire post-war project of European integration. It is hard to conceive how this criminalisation of solidarity could teach EU citizens anything other than an aversion for helping others in distress – a venerable sentiment that across the EU is becoming wrong, illegal, and punishable. The Orwellian connotations of this EU border governmentality are as unmistakeable as they are foreboding: SOLIDARITY IS CRIME. How close we are to an EU bureaucracy and political establishment that increasingly exculpates the inhumane and deadly border regime they have erected themselves by claiming that they are just fulfilling "the will of the people" or that they are merely "doing their job".

The EU, this once-most-promising and peaceful project of liberal democracy and solidarity, is experiencing an unprecedented authoritarian turn driven by the patchwork of increasingly illiberal migration policies that have been put in place to manage the arrival of higher numbers of migrants. However, rather than migrants – the all-purpose punching bags in contemporary EU political discourse – the pressure forcing this ever more careless border approach is being exerted by the EU's own inability to articulate a response that is able to host and distribute migrants in a fair way among its member states and in a manner that honours “the universal values of the inviolable and inalienable rights of the human person, freedom, democracy, equality, and the rule of law” enshrined in the Lisbon Treaty (EU, 2007). Given the proximity of the mass horrors inflicted by World War II as well as the unquestionable prosperity that the EU enjoys when compared to the rest of the world, one would believe that the EU's commitment to solidarity, humanism, and peace is unwavering. Yet, it has become increasingly harder to believe in the sincerity – or viability – of the project that the EU claims to embody when, under our very eyes, its leaders are willingly advocating a policy that punishes those who strive to rescue people in need along the ever more perilous borderlands of an EU that, inexplicably, simultaneously aspires to be perceived as a beacon of peace and lawfulness.

We have identified three borders and several border strategies that typify the growing despotism characterising the border policy the EU has developed since Schengen was established in 1985. This border regime makes it impossible, for a large part of the citizens of the world, to travel to the EU legally and safely, thus creating the legal figure of the “undocumented migrant” who in turn is shaped by the paper border, the iron border, and what we have termed the “camp border”. The paper borders refer to the lack of legal channels – either inside the EU or beyond its borders – that prevent potential visitors, students, workers, and asylum seekers from fulfilling their ambition to migrate to the EU with the predictability and safety that only travel documents allow. The iron border refers to the actual material obstacles that attempt to

militarised EU coast guard (i.e., Frontex), and the *purposefully* unsupervised waters of the Mediterranean. The EU's border camps along the Mediterranean constitute perhaps the most worrying biopolitical contraption since the second World War: a rational decision to cause the psychological impairment of undocumented migrants by housing them in spatially segregated camps sometimes so horrifying that migrants will either fall into a state of psychological disrepair so debilitating that they will either be persuaded to go back home "voluntarily" or simply dispose of themselves by committing suicide. Either way, their unenviable fates are intended as a warning to future undocumented migrants. Meanwhile, the location of these detention camps in remote Mediterranean islands keeps the agony of their unlawfully detained prisoners away from public view, thus securing unaccountability for the very possible violation of EU and public international law – with the additional advantage of staving off the outburst of political outrage against the EU.

This tripartite border architecture of pre-borders of paper, *in-situ* borders of iron, and a post-border consisting of camps that the EU has developed over time has become an inhuman system of deterrence that refuses to recognise its violence (van Houtum and Bueno Lacy, 2020). Yet, in spite of all the EU's efforts to deflect blame for its criminalisation of solidarity with refugees, its increasingly appalling treatment of them has grabbed so many headlines over the last few years that the EU's illiberal and authoritarian inclinations are now for everyone to see – particularly for member states' governments attempting to subvert the liberal, democratic, and universalist foundations of the EU (Zakaria, 1997). One could even argue that the lack of solidarity with migrants has created an autoimmune reaction: the solidarity that the EU has criminalised with refugees has also undermined solidarity among its member states, particularly by eroding the sanctity of the rule of law and the discourse and practice of open borders on which the EU rests (van Houtum and Bueno Lacy, 2020). It is worth remembering that, at the peak of the – miscalled – "refugee crisis" in the EU, asylum applications doubled from 430,000 in 2013 to

political landscape across the EU so dramatically that the end of the EU is, for the first time, conceivable. Not only do voters across the EU seem adamant to keep putting in power people who show an overt xenophobia towards the usual suspects of traditional European racism but Viktor Orbán has exploited the latest COVID-19 pandemic to turn Hungary into the first de facto dictatorship in the EU – and Poland seems poised to follow the same path (Berendt 2020). As if these authoritarian trends were not enough, there is a growing confidence noticeable across the EU's diverse political arenas to either resuscitate ideas from entirely discredited fields like scientific racism or to paraphrase fascist and national-socialist politicians from the 1930s (Besnier, 2018; Petrović, 2018). Against this backdrop, there is at least one invaluable lesson that we can take by heeding Arendt and Bauman's warning: it is urgent to rein in the carelessness of those who feel their safety guaranteed by a comfortable position outside of history – as if hardship and suffering were confined to images in sepia documentaries and otherworldly stories in dusty books.

Having said that, there seem to be sparks of hope. One of the most striking are the charges presented against the EU before the International Criminal Court (ICC) for crimes against humanity (Bowcott, 2019). This is both a shameful yet hopeful indictment of a political entity that, by its own admission, was built with the purpose of creating peace and prosperity in Europe through the cultivation of universal rights and freedoms. Although the EU's supranational and national bureaucracies have veered off into uncharted waters, hope is being kept alive by courageous displays of solidarity stemming from the European population. Fortunately, there are women like Carola Rackete, Pia Klemp, and many other European citizens willing to challenge the unconscionable laws that make it punishable to help undocumented migrants. These courageous Europeans are the spearhead of the moral revolt that will be needed to overpower the deadly return of history to which the EU's political elites seem to be sleepwalking us into: our conformity with the most contemptible cruelty has become so internalised that the inherent authoritarianism on which it is

opportunistic medals that EU leaders grant to those who assist the victims of their own border policies. Such is the case of the medal that Anne Hidalgo, the mayor of Paris, awarded to Pia Klemp: not only a gesture too small to honour the tragedy of preventable deaths that the German captain was trying to mitigate but also a token of utter hypocrisy coming from one of the states bearing much of the responsibility for this deadly border policy (Chevallereau, 2019). We bring this contribution to a closure drawing on the words of Klemp herself:

Madame Hidalgo, you want to award me a medal for my solidarian action in the Mediterranean Sea, because our crews “work to rescue migrants from difficult conditions on a daily basis”. At the same time your police is stealing blankets from people that you force to live on the streets, while you raid protests and criminalize people that are standing up for rights of migrants and asylum seekers. You want to give me a medal for actions that you fight in your own ramparts. I am sure you won’t be surprised that I decline the médaille Grand Vermeil [...] Paris, I’m not a humanitarian. I am not there to “aid”. I stand with you in solidarity. We do not need medals. We do not need authorities deciding about who is a “hero” and who is “illegal”. In fact they are in no position to make this call, because we are all equal [...] What we need are freedom and rights. It is time we call out hypocrite honorings and fill the void with social justice. It is time we cast all medals into spearheads of revolution!

(Klemp, 2019b)

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