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Reflections on containment. Debate session comments

*Celia Miralles Buil*¹, *Laurinda Abreu*², *Jon Arrizabalaga*³

¹ Université de Strasbourg, France

² CIDEHUS, Universidade de Évora, Portugal

³ Institució Milà i Fontanals de Investigació en Humanitats (IMF), CSIC, Barcelona, Spain

Abstract. This paper is a transcription of the texts read by three commentators appointed by the scientific committee to open the first debate session convened in June 2020 as a continuation of the virtual QSN conference held a month before. It should be noted that, for practical reasons as well as time constraints (there were researchers from countries with different time zones), the comments did not address presentations in the order in which they appeared in the conference program.

1 Introduction

As the implementation of containment measures in Portugal and elsewhere made it impossible to hold the QSN conference in-person in Lisbon, we found ourselves obliged to organize our meeting on containment materiality using a series of dematerialized tools. After the virtual video presentations were prepared by participants and circulated on the internet on the conference scheduled days (28-29 May 2020), a first online debate session was convened in June. This paper is a literal transcription of the texts read by three commentators appointed by the scientific committee to open that debate session. It should be noted that, for practical reasons as well as time constraints (there were researchers from countries with different time zones), the comments did not address presentations in the order in which they appeared in the conference program.

2 Containment of chemical, nuclear and environmental hazards

The conference papers assigned to this session were:

- Non-radioactive but nuclear? Containment and circulation of wastes from the French nuclear tests in Polynesia, *Teva Meyer*
- Containing chemical warfare: anti-gas measures for factory workers, health staff and the general population in Spain during the Rif War, 1921-1927, *Francisco Javier Martínez*
- Spreading the atom, encapsulating politics: a story of confinement on a nuclear containment building in Barcelona, *Jaume Valentines Álvarez*
- Dilution or containment: controlling radioactive liquid effluents from the 1950s to the 1980s on Marcoule plant *Louis Fagon*
- Radioactivity on tour: the picture of Eve Curie at the Portuguese Oncology Institute (IPO), *Beatriz Medori*

- Containing the earthquake risk in Istanbul's city planning: perspectives from scientists, *Youenn Gourain*

- Deputies, insects and trees: The Pine Wood Nematode in the Portuguese Parliament. *Ignacio García-Pereda*

Commentator: Celia Miralles Buil

This first group of papers deals with a wide range of topics, all related to non-human containment, from chemical and nuclear to the containment of other hazards, earthquakes, and plant pests. It also presents a considerable diversity of experts, tools, procedures. However, among the diversity, the papers present a lot of convergences, and in this short comment I will focus on some of them, as this was the objective of our conference, to study "containment" as a practical tool used to manage a wide variety of "threats".

2.1 Spatial Treatment

First, the geography seems to be a key issue for risk management, regardless of the kind of risk. Spatial treatment is, thus, present in many papers presented at this conference.

"Containment measures include zoning", we can see it very clearly in the paper presented by Francisco Javier Martínez, on the measures related to poison gases during Morocco's Rif war (at the beginning of the 20th century), whether its production in Spain or its use in Morocco. The solution found to protect the civil population from the danger represented by gas manufacture was the establishment of a security perimeter of 3 km around the factory. In that case, the empty space worked as the masks and specific clothes used by the physicians of army hospitals in Morocco to cure the soldiers poisoned by the same gas on the battlefield.

The establishment of a buffer zone adjacent to the Spanish border is also the solution proposed by Portuguese deputies to contain the expansion of the Pine wood nematode, an insect causing pine disease, as Ignacio García Pereda explained in his paper.

This zoning is also an important tool for nuclear containment, studied by many researchers, in this aspect, the paper of Louis Fagon goes a step further. The paper presents the containment of radioactive liquid effluents coming from the nuclear power plant of Marcoule in the south of France from the fifties to the eighties. Louis Fagon explains that the river was at the beginning used as a solution to contain the radioactivity and avoid its concentration on the riverbanks. Nevertheless, progressively, the status of the river changed, and containment by the river left its place to containment intended to protect the river. This evolution could be related to the birth of environmental preoccupations at that time, and also to new technical solutions and new studies.

The use of scientific facts to establish zoning is also the subject of the paper presented by Youenn Gourain, on the management of earthquake risk in Istanbul today. The paper shows the multiplicity of actors and actants in the establishment of risk zones and explains that the established zoning is in fact the result of negotiation between various interests, as risk is in practice constructed.

This negotiation of risk is very present, sometimes implicitly in many papers, could also be related to different priorities, diverse definitions of risk, different reasons to contain.

2.2 Diverse criteria to define danger(s)

This is the second point I wanted to highlight: many papers show the diversity of criteria that make something dangerous, or, in other words, different ways to define the danger(s).

In this aspect, a good example is the paper presented by Teva Meyer on the containment of wastes (gravels and polluted soils) coming from the French nuclear test sites in Polynesia. Teva Meyer explained very successfully that nuclear containment is not limited to radioactivity. Although the wastes are officially not radioactive, they are still nuclear, because of their history, their symbolic charge. It is precisely this symbolic charge that can represent a danger, for tourism, economy, etc. In that sense I feel like saying that to contain

nuclear risk means to contain radioactivity but also contain this symbolic charge and the “bad reputation”, and maybe to contain the information about it as well.

This parallelism between radioactive containment and the containment of information about it has been very well explained by Jaume Valentines in his paper. His first question was: “why I never saw before the nuclear reactor located in Barcelona, in my own university?” His chapter questions the politics of invisibilities implemented in order to make invisible that “containment building” – the space dedicated to containing the reactor. The Catalan anti-nuclear organizations never mentioned it.

Containing information about nuclear risk to maintain *nuclear exceptionalism* was a topic studied in other articles. In Louis Fagon’s paper, we can see two solutions found (voluntarily or not) for this purpose: 1. The multiplicity of administrations that made it impossible for anyone to know the whole picture. 2. The extreme technicality of the reports, which made it impossible for many political actors to understand what the experts were talking about.

Finally, another solution to contain information can be found in the paper presented by Beatriz Medori: to create an alternative story and produce new information. Her paper focused on a picture of Eve Curie, taken in Lisbon in 1940, used by the Portuguese Oncology Institute to promote radioactivity as a good solution for domestic use and anti-cancer campaign. They used the image of the Curie family to neutralize the “bad reputation of radium poisoning”.

To conclude, the papers cited demonstrate the “transversal nature of containment”, something we wanted to explore in our conference. As a historian specialized in health questions, I have been very interested in the use of vocabulary, “quarantine” applied for plant pests by Ignacio García, for instance. Instead of addressing specific questions for each presenter, I will open the debate with two general questions.

I first want to know your opinion on this concept of containment. Are you used to employ it? What does that mean in your particular field? Do you think it is or can be useful and pertinent concept for your research, compared to other concepts as risk, fear or blindness for instance?

My second general question is about futures. Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, many journalists asked historians about the future of pandemics, and we generally said that as historians we cannot make any predictions. Anyway, I am now asking you about the future of containment regarding your own field. Youenn Gourain and Teva Meyer told us a bit about it already, when risk zones are established and containment areas are delimited, the possibilities of economic, social activities, urban planning, etc. are reduced. What are the social, economic, political, cultural, sanitary, or environmental consequences of containment in your case of study? How do public and private authorities try or how they tried to contain the consequences of containment?

3 Containment and control regarding undesirable bodies, objects and ideas

The conference papers assigned to this session were:

- Economic containment: custom laboratories and merchandise inspections in late-19th Century Spain, *Ignacio Suay-Matallana*
- Emigration and Public Health: the sanitary question in the control of the Portuguese emigrants’ exit, *Yvette Santos*
- Genealogies of containment: Migrant labor, *bonifica integrale* and bio-carceral regimes in an Italian agro-industrial enclave, *Irene Peano*
- Ruminations on the Camp Space in the United States during the 20th century, *Jonathan Cortez*

- Containing the Moroccan Feminist Movement: Maintaining Patriarchal Order, *Fatima Ouaryachi*

- Among states, philanthropic societies, and the Red Cross: Managing dead bodies and the crossroads of 'Progress', 1856-1889, *Jon Arrizabalaga, Guillermo Sánchez-Martínez*

- Air, bodies, affects and quarantines: containing fear and constructing atmospheres of security and tranquility, *Quim Bonastra*

Commentator: Laurinda Abreu

The transversal nature of containment, mentioned in this conference call, is well represented in the seven papers of this second group. I'll make a very short presentation of each paper and of its main topics. In general, we are dealing with measures to control the circulation of drugs, medicines, spaces, people, feelings, and aspirations. In different ways, all of them speak about strategies of social and political surveillance and containment.

3.1 Controlling Circulation

Ignacio Suay-Matallana addresses custom laboratories and merchandise inspections as mechanisms for the regulation of trade and health and protection of public and private interests. The idea of customs as scientific spaces is quite appealing. Once these mechanisms were implemented during the second half of the 19th century (cholera times), I'm wondering if you couldn't explain better the connections between the two major cholera epidemic outbreaks (1850s and 1880s) and the implementation and development of these laboratories in the Spanish border.

Also very interesting is Quim Bonastra's approach to the lazaret of Marseille: based on the idea of 'atmosphere', he shows how the lazaretto authorities, and even the workers, tried to control the fear of the epidemic and contain the negative impacts that this fear could have over commercial traffic. The time studied is, again, the second half of the 19th century, during the cholera outbreaks that killed thousands of people. Controlling and containing information in order to create environments of tranquility and security regarding epidemics was a key issue for the authorities. Do you know if these attitudes have been reproduced in other lazaretos?

3.2 Strategies of Social and Political Surveillance and Containment

Yvette Santos, Irene Peano, Jonathan Cortez, Jon Arrizabalaga and Guillermo Sánchez-Martínez and Fatima Ouaryachi's papers bring us other perspectives of containment: the first three papers deal with a topic the historians know very well: roaming people and migratory movements as potential sources of contagion and dissemination of diseases. Therefore, subject to control, persecution, and confinement. Vulnerable populations, exposed to all dangers, whether they were emigrants embarked in Portugal, in the 20th century (Yvette Santos's paper); emigrants who reached the agro-industrial enclaves in Italy, in Foggia (Irene Peano's paper) or migrants that arrived in the USA (Jonathan Cortez's paper: over 6 million individuals lived in the US government-funded camps between 1933 and 1964!)

In the Portuguese case, is it possible to know if the reinforcement of emigrants disciplinary and health control occurred during the Military Dictatorship took into account demands and orientations from the destination countries? Which countries are we talking about?

Irene Peano finds in the Fascist regime, and in its racial and hygienic theories, the root of the containment techniques applied to present migrant workers. Even the spaces where they are settled are the same ones. Could you, please, develop this 'historical' continuity? Especially illuminating the period between the end of the Fascist regime and today.

The camps mentioned by Jonathan Cortez transport us, as a metaphor and in another scale, to the early modern workhouses. Of course, they are better controlled, but, like in 17th and 18th centuries, the authorities want the same: tranquility of the state and of its citizens. And cheap

work, by the way. I'm wondering about the social and work contacts between people contained in these camps and the local inhabitants. It is an interesting topic, knowing the social roots of the USA. Can you speak a little more on this?

Vulnerable are also the women mentioned in Fátima Ouaryachi's paper: like in the previous papers, we are speaking about strategies of social and political control. Here, to contain the expansion of the feminist movement between 1950 and 1957. I'd like to know (but you are not obliged to answer) how do you see the women present situation in your country?

Finally, Jon Arrizabalaga and Guillermo Sánchez-Martínez bring us the relationship between the living and the dead, in other words, the control over the dead bodies. They analyze the debates around hygienic and health issues, under the auspices of the Red Cross, aiming to articulate science and feelings, public health issues and the respect for different cultural practices. The context is, again, the cholera epidemics of the second half of the 19th century. The question that crossed my mind is about the international conferences where this topic was discussed: was there geographical arrangements between different countries on the way how to deal with such a sensitive topic or did scientific and cultural issues prevail over political interests?

4 Containment and social control measures regarding epidemics

The conference papers assigned to this session were:

- Epidemic containment and social control measures in Portugal: the line of lazarettos protecting the land border (1884–6), *Laurinda Abreu*
- Border control in question: transformation of cholera control measures in Japan at the end of the 19th century, *Shiori Nosaka*
- More destructive than guns: contagious epidemic fever and public health in Lisbon. 1810-12, *Ricardo Cabral de Freitas*
- Fever Hospitals in Ireland, 1780, 1797-1804, *Margaret De Lacy*
- Quarantine at the Eastern gate. The Italian Perspective in Alexandria, *Mauro Capocci and Daniele Cozzoli*
- Materiality of Sanitation in the late Ottoman Empire: Urla (Klazomenai) Quarantine in Izmir, *Ufuk Adak*
- The Suez Canal under Quarantine: the Sanitary History of the Mediterranean Gateway (19th – 21st c.), *Costas Tsiamis, Chrisoula Hatzara, Georgia Vrioni*

Commentator: Jon Arrizabalaga

The seven papers included in this third group deal with containment and social control measures (either associated, or not, to stigma) regarding epidemics through a temporal scope from the late 18th century to nowadays. Three of them are focused on Atlantic Europe (Ireland [Margaret DeLacy] and Portugal [Ricardo Cabral de Freitas, Laurinda Abreu]), three more in the Eastern Mediterranean (The Otoman Empire [Ufuk Adak]; the Suez Canal [Mauro Capocci and Daniele Cozzoli; Costas Tsiamis, Chrisoula Hatzara and Georgia Vrioni]) and the last one in Japan at the end of the 19th century [Shiori Nosaka].

4.1 Containing epidemics before and after the bacteriological theory

The papers written by Margaret De Lacy and Ricardo Cabral de Freitas deal with epidemic 'fevers' in the era prior to bacteriology.

Margaret DeLacy has focused on fever hospitals (infirmaries, dispensaries, houses of recovery) in the late 18th and the beginning of the 19th century, with particular emphasis on their differences with similar institutions in Britain, and on the mostly religious identity of

their promoters (Anglicans, Presbyterians, Quakers, few Catholics!, but not Irish Methodists or other newer Dissenting Groups), either physicians (mostly trained in Scottish universities), ministers or the nobility. Needless to say, that all of them were convinced contagionists.

Ricardo Cabral de Freitas deals with a medical controversy on the nature, causes, and treatment of a contagious epidemic fever having appeared on the occasion of the French invasion of Portugal in 1812, whose spread was apparently caused by mass population movements of both, soldiers and civilians. He offers partial results of archival and bibliographical research suddenly interrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic. So far, he has been able to analyze only the views of Henrique Xavier Baeta, and of the editors of the *Jornal de Coimbra* – all these doctors being contagionists but blaming different causes for the epidemic, allegedly as a result of their varied medical training in Scotland and England. Yet, his picture is still pending from an analysis of the report(s) in the case that was provided by a medical commission of the *Academia de Ciências de Lisboa* under the leadership of Francisco Tavares.

The second paper dealing with a Portuguese topic is that of Laurinda Abreu. She examines the defensive line of *lazaretti* or quarantine stations that the Portuguese government along with its national army deployed on the occasion of the cholera epidemic of 1884-1886 in Spain, all along the land border between both countries, in order to prevent infected travelers and goods from entering Portugal by road or rail. At the same time, the Portuguese harbors applied to sea travelers and goods a mixture of the British model of medical inspection and mandatory quarantines. Rather interestingly, Portugal appears to have been preserved from this epidemic, though this did not prevent opposition parties, doctors, and other social actors from opposing these drastic measures to the earliest cholera epidemic of the bacteriological age.

In contrast to the rather rigid view of the border illustrated by the Portuguese case, Japan's control measures against cholera changed rapidly during the last decades of the 19th century, as shown by Shiori Nosaka. This feature looks still more striking given the fact that Japan had remained closed to the Western world until 1868, when it began its period – the Meiji Age, 1868-1912 – of modernization and Westernization to become a world power. I wonder whether one crucial key to explain this dramatic change might lie in connection with the adoption of German bacteriological science.

4.2 Social control measures regarding epidemics and flow of people in the Eastern Mediterranean

The three remaining papers are related to the Eastern Mediterranean as an area of intense flow of people between Asia, Africa, and Europe, not least because of the Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca. The first of them is focused on the Ottoman Empire, another case of an empire having experienced a noticeable process of modernization and Westernization during the second half of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century that led to the rise of modern Turkey after WWI. Ufuk Adak examines the organization of quarantines in the face of epidemic threats like cholera and plague in the relevant port city of Urla (Klazomenai) from 1831 – the date of the setting of the first quarantine in Istanbul – to the first years of the 20th century. He mostly deals with the actors – all of them quarantinists who were actively involved in the International Sanitary Conferences from their beginning and organized the one of 1866 at Istanbul – as well as with the measures undertaken at the quarantine stations, among which the relevance of sanitation technology involving sanitary engineering and bacteriology, which did not stop growing throughout that period.

The last two papers are related to the crucial role played by the Suez Canal as the main gateway between the Mediterranean and the Eastern world. Mauro Capocci and Daniele Cozzoli focus on the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, when two major epidemic threats converged on this area, namely plague in 1899 and cholera in 1902, both of

them having been the earliest ones fought by means of measures emerging from the “microbiological consensus” reached through the Venice Convention of 1897. The paper examines from an Italian perspective the different views by and the controversies among European powers (France, Britain, Germany, Italy) regarding the way how quarantines should be undertaken, views and controversies that stemmed as a result of disparate national interests in terms of health, economy, and politics. Interestingly enough, the isolation of the new El Tor biotype of *Vibrio cholerae* by Felix Gotschlich (1874-1914) in 1905 and the construction of the concept of cholera’s “asymptomatic carriers” were not alien to these controversies.

Finally, the paper by Costas Tsiamis, Chrisoula Hatzara and Georgia Vrioni presents an overview of the role that the Suez Canal has played, from its opening in 1869 to nowadays, in times of epidemics, by examining the debates, controversies and agreements around quarantines in this crucial area, in the context of not only the international sanitary conferences and organizations (such as the Paris *Office International d’Hygiène Publique*, and the World Health Organization), but also the political and diplomatic relations between different empires and countries with interests in the area.

We are grateful to *Ignacio Suay-Matallana* for acting as virtual chairman of this first online debate session.