



# The Biopolitics of Vaccine Passports

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MARCH 25, 2021

# Surveillance v. Treatment

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- History of mankind offers many examples that in case of a dreadful and untreatable illnesses in the lack of adequate therapy or necessary financial resources authorities inclined to introduce classification or/and surveillance of those who were considered dangerous to society
- Infectious disease always constituted an alteration from the autonomy based health care. Here compulsory care, restrictions of personal liberties are common.





Jeremy Bentham Vision of the Panopticon

Stateville Prison in Joliet, Illinois, USA



# History of Immunoprivilege

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- Kathryn Olivarius
- Yellow fever: 22 full blown epidemics in New Orleans (150.000 people died)
- Social distancing was the privilege
- White acclimated citizens stood atop of the social pyramid
- Acclimated “Immune for life” “baptism of citizenship”
- Unacclimated strangers
- Justification of slavery

# Technocentric approach

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- In the twenty-first century we have numerous other options, including surveillance via technical means, applications, vaccination, and immunity passports.
- We may opt for technical surveillance instead of physical restrictions. But it cannot be a trade off for care for the others.



## Tracking and Tracing Applications

China has long used a smartphone health app built within WeChat to grant people access to public spaces, transport, and apartment buildings



## Green Passes in Israel Made Possible by Mass Vaccination

Vaccinated seniors pose with their green passes at a concert in Yarkon Park, Tel Aviv. Photo: Amir Cohen/Reuters



# New Covid Treaties

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- One of the outcomes of the vaccination passports will be numerous **new international agreements** based on the mutual recognition of the immunity cards.
- E.g. accords between Greece, Cyprus, and Israel allowing citizens with Covid-19 vaccination certificates to travel unimpeded between the three countries have been hailed as a possible first step towards **normalizing tourism** during the next phase of the pandemic.



# Broader Political Context

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- **Scientization of politics** and **politicization of science**
- Scientization of politics – Gil Eyal, *The Crisis of Expertise* (Cambridge, UK and Medford, MA: Polity Press, 2019)
- **biosocial identities, biosocial citizenship** (Paul Rabinow, Nicholas Rose)
- **Quantified self-movement** (Gary Wolf’s article on “The Data-Driven Life”): Numbers are not only a means of knowing the self; they are a *means of governing the self*

# Commissioner for Justice, Didier Reynders:

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- “With the Digital Green Certificate, we are taking a European approach to ensure EU citizens and **their family members** can travel safely and with minimum restrictions this summer.
- The Digital Green Certificate will not be a pre-condition to free movement and it **will not discriminate** in any way. A common EU-approach will not only help us to gradually restore free movement within the EU and avoid fragmentation. It is also a chance to influence global standards and lead by example based on our European values like data protection.”

# Arguments in favor

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- Vaccine passport would allow travels in a more transparent way
- Lockdown measures considerably curtail people's freedom. It is unethical to restrict freedom unless there is a real risk to other people.
- The International Air Transport Association (IATA) is developing its own 'vaccine passport' through an app, which it hopes could be recognized at airports across the world.



# Counter-Arguments Based on Efficiency

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- The efficacy of vaccines in preventing transmission is not yet clear, and global vaccine supply is limited.
- Time limitation is not yet known.
- To check expiry and different circumstances, would also involve logistic challenges
- “Eradicating this virus right now from the world is a lot like trying to plan the constructing of steppingstone pathway to the Moon. It is unrealistic.” (Michael Osterholm). The virus is becoming endemic.

# Covid Exceptionalism

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- One has to think about the new biopolitical world beyond covid
- Someone may ask, why only covid?
- Can we stop at this point?
- What about other infectious diseases?
- Would it generate false perception of security?
- Would bio-social citizenship renegotiated again and again any time a new virus will appear on the horizon?

# Distorting factors

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- Virus nationalism
- Vaccine nationalism
- Biopolitical populism
- Insufficient health care sector
- Privacy concerns
- Tendency towards authoritarian surveillance



# Counter-Arguments Based on Social Justice

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- Passports may create a two-tier society where some people can access support and freedoms, while others are excluded — including the most vulnerable groups.
- If it doesn't stop transmission, whether you are vaccinated or not is largely irrelevant
- Who is being protected?

# Gender Aspects

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- At the moment pregnant women cannot be vaccinated
- And PCR test before all events, before going to theater, cinema is very expensive, only very rich people can manage to finance one or two tests a week
- Can we see the world where women stay at home with children why men travel and go for vacation....

# Possible alternatives or parallel measures

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- Making **transparent access** to vaccination for all
- Strong **preference for care** rather than surveillance
- **Free fast tests** for those who are not vaccinated
- **Mutual help in vaccination campaigns** in other European countries
- **Rebalancing human rights**, reallocation sources for health care





# Post-Covid Idealism?

Piero della Francesca: The Ideal City