



MAGYC

Migration Governance and Asylum Crises

Migration as Crisis

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MAGYC: The MAGYC (**M**igr**A**tion **G**overnance and **A**s**Y**lum **C**risis) project seeks to assess how migration governance has responded to the recent “refugee crises” and has since been influenced by it, and how crises at large shape policy responses to migration. This four-year research project (2018–2022) brings together twelve international partners: the Hugo Observatory from the University of Liège (Coordinator), Sciences Po, the University of Economics in Bratislava, the GIGA institute of Global and Area Studies, Lund University, the IDMC, SOAS University of London, the University of Milan, the Lebanese American University, the University of Macedonia, Sabanci University, IfPO/CNRS.

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Migration as Crisis

Special issue proposal

Edited by Céline Cantat¹, Antoine Pécoud² & Hélène Thiollet³

General argument

‘Migration crises’ (or ‘refugee crises’) have become one of the major social and political issues worldwide. This is in particular the case in the Euro-Mediterranean region since the Arab Springs in the early 2010s. But the connection between human mobility and crisis also characterises other regions around the world, such as Latin America or Africa.

These crises are the object of different interpretations. To some, they are the outcome of increasing and uncontrollable migration flows that challenge states’ sovereign authority, while for others they are rather the consequence of receiving states’ inappropriate political strategies and their (mis)management of migration. Likewise, crises are apprehended either as a security issue (as migration flows are seen to threaten the stability and well-being of destination societies), or as a humanitarian/human rights problem (with migrants facing serious abuses, before, during and following their journey).

In this context, this proposed Special Issue aims at developing a critical and constructivist approach to the notion of ‘migration crisis’. Scholarly interest in the migration crisis has very much coincided with the intense politicisation of mobilities and the discursive/political construction of such ‘crises’. As a result, there has been a tendency in the literature to reproduce the sense of urgency and exceptionality that underpins crisis-related narratives. In this Special Issue, we aim at deconstructing such an approach: looking back with a critical distance, we propose a ‘migration-as-crisis’ approach, which posits that, far from un-problematically describing empirical developments, the notion of ‘migration crisis’ is the product of a set of representations that are mobilised by social and political actors to structure the social world, and tied to their specific strategies as to how migration dynamics should be apprehended and governed.

The Special Issue therefore investigates the way in which ongoing migration/refugee crises build upon – and support - specific representations and strategies among the different actors involved in debating and governing migration, including state authorities, but also local governments, international organisations, the media, and courts. While the focus is mainly on the Euro-Mediterranean region, the Special Issue looks not only at the relationships between the EU and its immediate neighbourhoods, but also at migration crises outside this region. All articles share a common critical and constructivist approach to ‘migration crises’ as the

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outcome of contested socio-political and epistemological processes. Methodologically, they privilege a variety of empirical approaches, including observation, interviews, archives and discourse analysis.

The Special Issue aspires to contribute to the ongoing scholarship on crises, which has developed substantially but in which migration-related issues tend to remain under-researched. ‘Crises’ are indeed a productive field of investigation for social sciences: commonly portrayed as extraordinary events (or sets of events), leading to instability or danger, they exist in contrast with certain ideas of normality. As a discursive category, ‘crisis’ is thus underpinned by normative assumptions about what is normal/abnormal, good/bad, desirable/undesirable and what needs to be re/ad-dressed.

In this vein, and expanding on the vision of cyclical crises as systemic components of the capitalist mode of production, Janet Roitman (2013) discusses crises as primarily narrative devices that raise certain questions or framings, while foreclosing others. In this sense, the notion of crisis also holds a performative potential regarding prescriptions on how to return to the desired state of normality (Clarke 2010, 2019). Indeed, crises generate and legitimise specific responses, often referred to as ‘crisis management’, and usually call for a set of exceptional measures in the name of rectifying a situation seen as out of the ordinary.

Yet, as crises have become a feature of the ‘second modernity’ and of ‘risk societies’ (Beck 2009), crisis management is increasingly mainstreamed as a routine mode of government/governance (Boudia 2013) – to the extent that ‘crisis’ narratives and practices now pervade virtually all fields of public administration and policy (Aguiton, Cabane & Cornilleau 2019; Gilbert 2019). In this respect, ‘crisis’ is not only an analytical category to understand reality, but also (and perhaps predominantly) a strategic tool used by a range of actors involved in governing particular situations.

Our focus in the Special Issue is precisely to bring together such social scientific insights with reflections developed in migration studies. The concept of ‘migration crisis’ was first coined in the nineties by Weiner (1995) and has become one of the dominant lens through which ongoing developments are framed and governed. Yet, while the events described as ‘migration crisis’ have been the object of increasing research (see for example Crawley et al. 2017), the concept itself has not yet been thoroughly investigated. This Special Issue therefore proposes a range of empirically-informed reflections on the emergence, uses, epistemology and politics of the migration-crisis nexus. Articles analyse *when*, *why* and *by whom* crisis discourses are articulated, and what such processes reveal about the way in which a certain (ab)normality around mobility is established and reproduced. They also examine the debates and tensions that emerge around the naming of crises: why are some situations seen as crises and others not?

By gathering case-studies in order to propose new conceptual frameworks to think about crises, the Special Issue moves away from the naturalisation of ‘migration crisis’ at work in most media and political discourses, and advances empirical and theoretical accounts of the migration-crisis nexus while contributing to broader scientific reflexions about crisis as a category and mode of governance.

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About the guest editors

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1

Migration as Crisis

Céline Cantat, Antoine Pécoud & Hélène Thiollet

Over the past decades, migration has become inseparable from a narrative of crisis across contexts. Yet ‘migration crisis’ are an assemblage of fragmented, changing, and contested discourses, representations, and practices, which structure the perception of the social world and call for certain ways of governing migration. We introduce the *migration as crisis* framework to address the contingent connection between subjective construction and objective migration processes, to make sense of “migration crisis” discourses, and explain both their pervasiveness and contingency. The metaphorical link between migration and crisis that can be activated or not, and that may or may not be correlated with empirical realities of relatively massive and rapid population movements. By engaging with migration as crisis rather than “migration crisis,” even in critical terms, we unpack the metaphorical conversions required to engineer critical discourses and behaviours in specific contexts, by specific actors, including through the work of academics writing about migration. Empirically, we focus on the European contexts in the 2010s and we denaturalise “migration crises” discourses and historicise the concept as a form of moral panic constructed daily through discrete discursive and political processes by specific actors ranging from media to policymakers, civil society activists and academics.

2

The Making of a Crisis. Migration and Polarisation in the French Press

Michelle Reddy (UC Berkeley, United States) & Hélène Thiollet (CNRS CERI/Sciences Po, France)

Mass inflows of immigrants are believed to create moral panic which impacts attitudes and votes. However, few scholars systematically explore the discursive construction of migration as a crisis in relation to actual migration flows. When and how does migration become a crisis? To answer this question, we draw on mixed methods harnessing automated text analysis, linear regression, as well as qualitative analysis, to analyse “migration crisis” discourses in a corpus extracted from French newspapers between 2008 and 2020. We locate the emergence of ‘migration crisis’ discourses in the summer of 2015, absent massive inflows of migrants or refugees in France contrary to other European countries. We show that conservative newspapers overwhelmingly contribute to framing the crisis as one of “migration or migrant” rather than one of asylum or refugees despite the humanitarian nature of inflows. Furthermore, conservative newspapers do not only mention the migration crisis more than liberal ones, but they also create a sense of slow-burning or creeping migration crisis, as an undercurrent in media topics. Our fine-grained analysis of the case of the migration crisis in the French media offers theoretical and methodological inputs for an empirically grounded and constructivist theory of political crises.

3

Migration as Crisis? German Migration Discourse at critical points of nation-building

Christiane Fröhlich (German Institute for Global and Area Studies (GIGA), Germany)

This paper enquires into how the Federal Republic of Germany has governed migration at critical junctures of German nation-building within a growing European Union. Drawing on documents on ‘Einwanderung’ (immigration) from the archive of the German Bundestag from 1949 until 2022, and on secondary literature on and media representations of (forced) migration, migrants and refugees, this paper traces different depictions of migration in German political discourse at critical moments of German nation-building to answer the question: Which role does the narrative of ‘migration as crisis’ play for the German nation-building project? I argue that to answer this question, it is necessary to understand whether an incoming migrant group is considered beneficial or dangerous (‘critical’) for the hegemonic articulations of an imagined German national identity.

4

Talking about migrants and refugees in times of crisis. A textual analysis of narratives by IOM and UNHCR

Brandon Green (London School of Economics, United Kingdom) & Antoine Pécoud (University of Sorbonne Paris Nord, France)

This article examines the narratives produced by IOM by applying Corpus-Assisted Critical Discourse Analysis to the press releases between 2006 and 2020. In the absence of a binding and coherent international migration regime, the global governance of migration relies largely on normative narratives produced by UN agencies and other intergovernmental processes, in line with the discursive legitimacy traditionally associated with international organizations. Such narratives impact migrants, asylum-seekers and refugees because they support certain policy frameworks among member states. Yet, global migration governance remains fragmented, especially as far as the long-standing divide between migrants and refugees is concerned. The article identifies the dominant worldviews in the narratives of IOM and

compares them to the narratives of UNHCR; it further maps the reciprocal influence of IOM and UNHCR narratives on each other. Results show that IOM and UNHCR have distinct worldviews, associated with different textual patterns, and that, while IOM textual productions seem to influence UNHCR's discourses, the opposite is less true. This would support the view that IOM is currently the leading actor in terms of framing migration, thereby exerting a strong influence on global migration governance.

5

Deterring migration in times of crises: *The ethics of behavioural change in migration information campaigns*

Nassim Majidi (Samuel Hall, Kenya)

The European migration 'crisis' has led to new policy and funding mechanisms from the West, such as the European Trust Fund (EUTF) for Africa and funding from the UK Home Office. These funding sources have in common a dual, and often contradictory, objective: to support migrant protection, while reinforcing a migration management or migration control agenda. They have given flexibility, in a context of « crisis response », to a range of actors with different levels of responsibilities and of transparency when reaching out to migrants, at times to the detriment of one aspect (the respect for human rights) for the benefit of another (irregular migration control), and with questionable results. This article provides an analysis of one programme implemented in Ethiopia and Afghanistan: an information campaign funded by the UK Home Office, between 2016-2019, with a focus on behavioural change among potential migrants. This case study reveals unethical practices in migration information campaigns that go against existing standards in social and behavioural communications campaigns (SBCC). Building on such standards, the article provides a critical lens through which to assess migration information campaigns, through the prism of three criteria outlined in the paper and used to evaluate the results of the programme.

6

The Bosnian war and refugee policy: crisis management and migration control.

Clara Lecadet (CNRS, Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, France)

Based on research in the UNHCR archives in Geneva, this article aims to reflect, through an examination of UNHCR's huge operation during the Bosnian war, on the major role played by the crisis paradigm in conflict management and related population movements, and on the construction and conceptualisation over time of long-term forms of migration management. It analyses how the notion of "preventive protection" which emerges in the early 1990's illustrates a shift in the asylum regime, which concerns altogether the categories of its beneficiaries, the spaces and the very nature of its application. The focus on humanitarian operations taking place as close as possible to the areas which refugees are coming from is at the origin of new patterns of emergency management which intend to contain and eventually hinder massive refugee flows and migration. This new approach of refugees flow was experimented during the Bosnian war ; the UNHCR reflected on this experience and its learnings to build up long term strategies for managing migration in a context of increased States' hostility to the permanent welcoming of refugees. The continuity between wartime and peacetime for experimenting and enforcing new modes of migration management is

emphasized, in order to show that the importance of the crisis paradigm symbolised by open conflicts and wars is thereafter used as a tool to manage migration flows in ordinary times.

7

Migration as « justice crisis »: perspectives on litigation and juridical violence in Calais, France

Annalisa Lendaro (CNRS, University of Toulouse, France)

As a small French town serving as the major gateway to the United Kingdom, Calais is one of the most prominent cases of how migration has been constructed as a crisis in Europe. This article focuses on how this crisis led to the adoption of ad hoc public policies at the national and local level to deter further immigration, for example by securitising public spaces and restraining access to services in the name of 'public order'. This contribution will critically address the connection between migration and public order, by adopting a focus on litigation. To what extent do courts, civil society associations defending migrants, and the police reflect this specific framing of migration as a public order issue? In what circumstances and with what objectives do they use the argument of 'urgency' to rule on issues such as evictions or administrative detention? Using ethnographic interviews with judges, attorneys and legal supporters of migrants, building upon administrative and police archives and documents, and drawing upon socio-legal scholarship, this article underlines how the 'migration-public order' nexus influences the way courts address migration, such as the eviction from informal camps. We argue that this case study is paradigmatic of the evolution of the judicial system, which is the result of the 'security framework' that weakens the rule of law in practice. The article thus argues that the law tends to radicalise in times of crisis: juridical violence is commonplace at the French-UK border, but its capacity to target undesirables also became more visible during exceptional periods like the 2015 crisis in Calais or the Covid-19 lockdown in 2020.

8

Symbolic rewards at the service of asymmetrical cooperation: the case of the EU-Turkey's 'crisis' migration governance

Shoshana Fine (Catholic University of Lille, France)

This article aims to understand why the Turkish government participated in the 2016 EU-Turkey 'deal' in the name of managing the 'migration crisis'. At first glance, this move may seem contrary to its interests in a context where Turkey's accession to the European Union was no longer a probable political project. In explaining the Turkish government's enthusiasm for the so-called deal, the literature often highlights the question of material gains, both economic and strategic. In this article, I argue that the symbolic dimension is critical for understanding this asymmetrical cooperation and offer the notion of a play of 'symbolic rewards' that engage the 'donor' and the 'donee'. These are carried out through a triptych: cooptation, participation and immersion. Each of these symbolic incentives reflect ways in which Turkey is brought into a migration management in-group. My findings are based on ethnographic material including over a hundred interviews as well as participant observation at the head office of an international migration organization.

9

Institutional Creation as a Local Governance Response to Syrian Refugees: The case of Turkish municipalities

Basak Yavcan (University of Liège, Belgium) & Fulya Memisoglu (Istanbul Yildiz Technical University, Turkey)

External shocks constitute ideal moments for exploring the creation of new institutions as well as changes within existing ones. This paper treats the influx of Syrian refugees into Turkish urban centres as a critical juncture moment and investigates the changes in the local governance bodies as a result. Based on interviews, focus groups, and surveys with administrative and non-governmental actors involved in the local response to refugees, we explore the factors that contributed to the emergence of new institutions within municipalities and their institutionalization as bodies able to resist changes of municipal mayors across elections. We investigate how the newly created institutions matter for refugee policy response in looking at various host cities before and after 2019 local elections. We argue that actual change within the way institutions operate takes place in municipalities (and their respective departments within) that have managed to institutionalize their refugee response through innovative and sustainable policy initiatives that can spill over to areas of policy making other than refugee response, which invest in building capacity and multi-level partnerships.