MAGYC

Migration Governance and Asylum Crises

Migration as crisis.

Framework paper

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MAGYC: The MAGYC (**M**igr**A**tion **G**overnance and As**Y**lum **C**rises) 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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Abstract

This framework paper constructs the 2015 "migration crisis" as a scientific object, moving away from the naturalisation of the crisis operated in media and political discourses and exploring the dynamics of migration crisis-making. To do so, it offers insights on the semantic and political genealogy of the notion in the context of Western European discourses. We argue that an ideal type or generic migration crisis was brought about in the early 2010s, building upon previous situated crises in policy, media and academic discourses produced on migration in Europe. This ideal type in turn gives way to particular ways of dealing *with* and responding *to* migration. Therefore, in line with existing research on the socio-political production of crises, this framework paper traces a genealogy of the generic migration crisis that emerged in Europe around 2015 and seeks to design a research agenda to study **migration as crisis**.

Introduction

This paper proposes a critical genealogy of the migration-crisis nexus based on the construction and growing uses of crisis-talk in media, political, civil society and academic discourses on migration. We examine "migration crisis" as a set of discourses, representations and practices that structure the social world and call for certain ways to govern it. In this sense, we see "crises" as fields of enquiry that are crisscrossed by tensions and debates, and which engage a multiplicity of actors and definitions.

A crisis is commonly portrayed as an extraordinary event, or set of events, leading to instability and danger and affecting a pre-existing normality. In order for a crisis to be named, a course of things accepted as normal, or ordinary, must be seen as disrupted in ways that are considered as constituting a significant breakaway. In this sense, "crisis" as a discursive category is underpinned by normative assumptions about what is good/ bad, desirable/undesirable and what needs to be addressed. The notion of crisis also holds a performative potential regarding prescriptions on how to return to the desired normal. Indeed, crises generate specific responses, usually referred to as crisis management, and often call for a set of exceptional measures in the name of rectifying a situation seen as out of the ordinary. As such, crises legitimise specific regimes of government as well as, within government structures, specific actors.

Yet at the same time, crises have become a recurrent feature of the contemporary age: they have been identified as characteristic of the "second modernity" leading to the advent of the "risk society" (Beck 2009). In this sense, crisis management approaches are increasingly being mainstreamed as routine modes of organising and governing societies. Since the 1990s, "crisis" has increasingly turned into a governance category that now pervades public administration and discourses (Aguiton, Cabane & Cornilleau 2019; Gilbert 2019).

These tensions make "crisis" a topic of choice for social scientists, both as tumultuous empirical realities, as an analytical category that is used by a range of actors for different purposes, and as a discursive tool that shapes responses to particular situations. In this context, scholars have paid careful attention to when, why and by whom crisis discourses are articulated, and what this may tell us about the way in which a certain normality is established and reproduced. They have also examined the debates and tensions that emerge around the naming of crisis, and what those might mean regarding conflicting codings of social reality. In other words, social scientists have developed critical and constructivist analyses of crises and their invocation, as contested social and epistemological processes.

The tensions and contradictions of crisis-talk are reflected in discourses around migration. In particular, over the last decade, debates around migration in Europe seem to "have become inseparable from a discourse of 'crisis'" (Cantat 2016b: 12). In other parts of the world, a widely used oxymoron refers to states of permanent or long-term crisis as exemplified in the cases of Palestinian refugees in the Near East, Afghans in Pakistan and Iran, Somalis in Kenya, Eritreans in Sudan and Ethiopia, or Colombian IDPs, among many others. This permanency of situations assessed as out of the ordinary and exceptional points to the ambiguities of crisis-talk in migratory contexts and interrogates us on the analytical limit and potential pitfalls of the category.

This framing paper proposes avenues for reflection on the emergence, uses, epistemology and politics of the migration-crisis nexus. Adopting a constructivist approach to discourses of crisis, we intend specifically to explore the way in which the 2015 "migration crisis" was constructed over time, through the increasing coding of mobilities as crisis phenomenon since the 1990s and in the context of the harmonisation of EU border policies. Away from the naturalisation of "crisis" operated in most media and political discourses, we thus reflect on the discursive, political and epistemological processes involved in the framing and shaping of

"migration as crisis". This exploration of the migration-crisis nexus leads to assess "crisis migration" and "migration crises" as scientific objects and as socio-political constructions instrumental in specific contexts, for specific actors, and about specific migrant groups.

The key argument of this paper is that "migration crisis" emerged as a generic phrase in media, political and academic discourses to describe migration and asylum since the early 2010s across Europe. The traction gained by this generic migration crisis built upon previous situated and individualised asylum and migration episodes seen as crises that had happened across Europe. This ideal type operates as a category of power, which in turn gives way to particular ways of dealing with and responding to migration. Constructing migration as crisis is thus both a speech act and a form of migration governance.

In order to open a preliminary discussion to the work that will be produced in Work Package 3 of MAGYC, the paper reflects on four key points:

- The **first section** reflects on the growing depiction of mobilities as threats and factors of instability in the 1990s. It reflects in particular on various incidents of "moral panic" that reinforced such representations of migration and crisis and argues that, over the following decades, this association becomes a dominant or hegemonic mode of representation.

- In the **second** section, the paper examines more specifically the emergence of a harmonised policy framework to govern migration in the European Union in the late 1980s and 1990s, and the discourses that accompanied this development. It argues that EU migration policies were framed in ways that reproduced the migration-security nexus identified in the first section.

- Based on these arguments, the **third section** looks at the process and mechanisms through which the association of migration with security issues increasingly led to conceptualisation and description of migration as crisis. It describes three key moments during which migration crisis narratives were

deployed in the EU since the 1990s. We argue that this led to what we call the "generic migration crisis", as a hegemonic representation of mobilies towards Europe that can always be readily invoked to describe migration.

- In the **final section**, the paper shifts to exploring the tensions and debates that - characterise discourse of migration as crisis. It reflects upon the ways "crisis" has been used and for which purposes in different types of literature such as in the media, among policymakers, civil society organisations and academia. On this basis, finally, the paper examines the relation between crisis discourses, as forms of knowledge production around migration, and the production of migration policies in the EU since 2015.

"Migration crisis" in the 1990s: global changes and collective anxieties

The association of migration and crisis is not new. In 1989, a collective volume featuring prominent political scientist and migration scholar Aristide Zolberg and colleagues was published under the title *Escape from Violence: Conflict and the Refugee Crisis in the Developing World* (Zolberg et al. 1989). The volume proposed a contemporary history of refugee crises in the twentieth century and identified three such occurrences. The first and second crises concerned the inter-war period and the aftermath of World War 2. These episodes took place in times of tremendous change in Europe, characterised by the fall of Empires and the construction of nation-states in the first case, and the emergence of genocidal political projects that pushed people into displacement in the second.

The author suggested that a third refugee crisis started emerging in the 1960s. This crisis was mainly connected, in their view, to important geopolitical changes tied to the end of colonialism and resulting processes of state (re)formation. This "third crisis" was characterised by an increase in movement from the Global South towards Global North countries. The main concern of the authors was to identify a crisis in order to push for a reform of the international protection regime so it becomes more suited to the new realities of displacement and better able to

provide adequate protection. It is however interesting to interrogate the temporality and geography of "migration crisis" that is sketched in this seminal volume. Crises only seem to occur when those displaced originate from Europe, or attempt to move towards it. Numerous episodes of displacement and political violence that occurred in Latin America or the Middle East (throughout the 1940s and 50s and thereafter) did not equate to crises for the authors. Crisis is thus used selectively (only in relation to certain episodes) and strategically (to call for particular policies and reforms).

The "global migration crisis"

This analysis reflects the *Zeitgeist* of the end of the Cold War, characterised by a multiplication of debates and discourses around displacement. If Zolberg et al. call for more compassion in response to refugees, it is partly because of rising anxiety and exclusionary narratives regarding mobility in the "new world order".

A few years later, in 1995, Myron Weiner coined the notion of "global migration crisis". Weiner argued that important global changes were affecting not only the nature and volume of migration flows, but also their perception and place in the geopolitical order. The collapse of the USSR and the fall of the Berlin Wall led to increased East-West mobility: in this changing world, the meaning of these mobilities transformed. From celebrated dissidents fleeing the Soviet world, individuals engaging in westward migration projects were increasingly turned into unwanted immigrants targeted by exclusionary discourses.

Crisis-rhetoric thus seems to be above all a matter of changing perceptions. It emerges as a symptom of – and is shaped by – broader developments of the time. In particular, the emerging rhetoric of migration as crisis and threat was underpinned by structural collective anxieties regarding new forms of inter-state relations and connections (including through human mobility). The notion that states were threatened by globalisation (from above) and multiculturalism (from

below) had become a central issue in public and political debates and led to panic narratives about the demise of the nation-state and the territorialised political order (Ryan 2010). Of particular concern was the implication of the end of the Cold War in terms of control over out-migration. The end of the ban on exit was seen as placing the burden of migration control onto Western states' shoulders, while leading to fears over uncontrollable migration flows (which did not materialise however). In the Global South, the shortcomings of the postcolonial developmentalist agenda were becoming increasingly obvious in a context of rising local and global inequalities, in turn leading to fears about departures towards more prosperous northern and western regions.

In this context, the association between migration and crisis that emerged in the 1990s gained centrality in public and political discourse to the extent that it became a normalised discursive and epistemic way to represent and understand mobility. In 2001, Aristide Zolberg and Peter Benda commented that "recent developments in the sphere of international migration … do not provide evidence of a crisis … In this light, the widespread talk of a "crisis" appears as an irrational phenomenon" (2001: 1).

Social sciences also engaged in these debates, in ways that often reproduced (and sometimes challenged) the mainstream terms of the debate. Scholars in particular discussed states' capacity to regulate and control migration in a globalised world (Guiraudon & Joppke 2001; Sassen 2015). This literature included discussions on the compatibility between welfare regimes and migration, on the making of migration policies, on the trade-offs involved in migration decision making processes, on the efficacy of border and development policies in controlling migration, etc. In 1986, Gary Freeman for instance, produced an important study of the relation between national structures and globalising trends, and   wrote that "the openness of national economies poses enormous challenges to the viability and character of welfare states" (1986: 54). Broadly speaking, academic debates on the relation between migration and the state

were underpinned by strong tendencies to methodological nationalism based on a naturalisation of the nation-state form (Wimmer & Glick Schiller 2002) and to a perception of migration as a threat to social cohesion. Crisis-rhetoric also found an echo in some of the most influential ideologies of the time, such as neo-conservative theories depicting migrants as coming from different civilisational background and with cultures incompatible with democracy or liberal values (Cantat 2016a).

Migration and moral panic: from threat to crisis

This leads us to interrogate the way in which global changes fed into anxiety about migration. For Didier Bigo (2002), the systematic connection made between immigration, security and other social problems such as unemployment can be understood as a crisis of state and sovereignty, which in turn is correlated with an "unease" among state citizens. This relationship between trends at the macro-level (challenges to state sovereignty) and the micro-level (hostility towards foreigners and perception of immigration as a threat) is at the heart of the notion of "moral panic", which was first developed in the seventies by South African sociologist Stanley Cohen (1972). The strength of the concept lies in its capacity to "provide evidence of sociological imagination by connecting the conditions of collective anxiety with broader processes of historical and structural changes in advanced industrial societies" (Dandoy 2015: 417).

Peoples' perceptions of what constitutes a threat (or a crisis) is then not merely the product of irrationality and ignorance (in which case anti-immigration feelings could be addressed through the diffusion of sound information). Rather, it must be understood as the byproduct, at the psychological and microsocial level, of broader trends affecting states and societies at large. In Bigo's view, the securitisation of migration is thus "anchored in the fears of politicians about losing their symbolic control over the territorial boundaries" (2002: 65), and connected

to the very functioning of neoliberal "risk societies" in which uncertainties and insecurity are the norms.

To connect the two levels, the concept of moral panic stresses the role of moral entrepreneurs and media in spreading the panic. As far as the migration crisis is concerned, and as this paper documents, there is indeed evidence that the crisis was to some extent constructed through specific media coverage, as well as through the political opportunism of political/moral entrepreneurs such as far-right populist movements. Yet, importantly, and however essential they may be, these actors do not by themselves create the panic, which is of a much more structural nature.

Applying the concept to humanitarian aid, Dandoy (2015) relies on Bourdieu's notions of field and habitus to show how the systematic coding in security terms of certain situations conditions the way they are responded to. In the case of humanitarianism, Dandoy argues that "the widespread sense of concern and anxiety about humanitarian insecurity is a response to effects of hysteresis inside the field of humanitarian aid" (2015: 417). From that perspective, and in line with earlier remarks made by Brubaker (1994), the sense of a crisis stems primarily from the dispositions and habitus of those actors in charge of governing migration. The growing role played by Interior ministers in migration policy, for example, brings about a control-centered habitus that contrasts with the habitus of labor ministries, which used to be involved in labor migration policies. The concept of moral panic thus enables a useful connection between what resorts to "feelings" or "perceptions", and the historical and structural forces shaping societies.

This overview of political and scientific debates in the 1990s showed how a connection became established between migration and a range of fears and anxieties generated by important global changes that were often read as threats to the national political order. The 1990s also marked the period when migration and borders gained in importance in the recently launched European Union. The

next section zooms into how the global *Zeitgest* around migration and security translated into the foundations of EU migration policy.

Migration as crisis and EU policies

Integrating migration and border control in EU policies

As perceptions of migration as a permanent emergency started to permeate Western European political debates, important changes were occurring in Europe. The establishment of the European Union in 1992/3 furthered anxieties over national sovereignty, in a context of growing deregulation of the economy under the auspices of the neoliberal orthodoxy of the time. This coincided with the moment when migration and its control became a subject of growing centrality in the EU, inauguring the process of supra-nationalisation of migration management frameworks. The 1990s indeed witnessed the emergence of a "migration policy domain" (Guiraudon 2003) through various policy instruments, entangling different actors reconfigured sovereignty issues at the national and European level.

The harmonisation of border control in the European Community/Union can be traced back to the mid-1980s with the signature of the 1985 Schengen Agreement leading to the implementation of the Schengen Area in 1995. Already at the time, there was a widespread idea according to which a zone of free movement for EU citizens (and in some cases long-term residents) could only be possible if the movement of people from outside the EU was heavily regulated. This called for a reinforcement of the external borders of the Schengen Area. The 1997 Amsterdam Treaty effectively launched the process of harmonisation of visa, migration and asylum policies across member-states. Interestingly, migration and asylum became conflated. This problematic development was highlighted at the time by human rights' groups who reminded the EU and its member-states that, while migration control is seen as a sovereign prerogative of the state, seeking

asylum and protection is considered as a fundamental right in international conventions – one that should not be affected by changing and exclusionary migration policies.

The process of both harmonising and reinforcing migration and border control continued with the 1999 Tampere Summit where "fighting illegal migration" was a key priority.[1] A 10-point plan was agreed upon by member-states, with a focus on reducing migration through (1) reinforcing border control including through technology and knowledge transfer across member-states, (2) partnerships with countries of origin to prevent departures and increase readmissions and returns; and (3) fighting "organised crime, smuggling and trafficking of persons".

Broadly speaking, the policy framework and underlying logic prevailing to address migration have in essence remained unchanged since 1999. This is not to say that there have not been important evolutions in border and migration management in the EU. In particular, new actors emerged (such as Frontex, the European Border and Coast Guard Agency, created in 2005) and the budget devoted to border control significantly rose (e.g. from 4 billion euros in 2007-2013 to 13 in 2014-2020 and an expected 34,9 billion for 2021-2027).[2] Yet these developments remain at the service of an unchanged vision of migration and its management based on fighting irregular migration and its facilitators through increased security-oriented measures and devices.

Securitising migration

Depictions of migration as crisis and as security issue have thus played an important role in the shaping of migration policies. These developments have been termed "securitisation" and have triggered much scholarly attention (Bigo

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[1] Source: http://www.europarl.europa.eu/summits/tam_en.htm?textMode=on

[2] Source: https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/financing/fundings/migration-asylum-borders_en and https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/budget-proposals-migration-border-management-may2018_en.pdf

2000, 2002, 2008; Bigo and Jeandesboz 2009; Bigo and Guild, 2005a, 2005b; Bigo, Jeandesboz, Ragazzi and Bonditti 2011; De Genova 2007; Huysmans 2000, 2006, 2011, 2014; Ilgit and Klotz 2014; Jeandesboz 2009; Lazaridis and Wadia 2015; Leonard 2010; Togral 2011).

Broadly speaking, the notion of the securitisation of migration refers to the reframing and reorganising of domains and practices of regular politics into the realm of security and to a mode of operation underpinned by narratives of threat that legitimise extraordinary measures (Huysmans 2000). Such measures progressively become normalised and cease to be termed by policy actors and mainstream media as extreme operations, laws and policies. Their reception and perception by other actors, especially among civil society and academia but occasionally even within media and policy circles, may remain contentious.

Drawing on discourses of moral panic identified earlier, securitisation relies on depicting border crossers, and particularly irregular border crossers, as a threat to state sovereignty (Koser 2011). Within this framing of migration as an existential security issue for the state, the deployment of all possible efforts to impede irregular migration appears as a rational response. New border control devices were thus created (both at the EU borders and beyond, through processes of externalisation of border control to non-EU countries), while legal migration channels were drastically reduced (including for people seeking protection).

Beyond the systemic threat to state sovereignty, migration is also framed as a security threat in a context shaped by discourses and policies of the global war on terror and of the fight against organised crime as part of the broad securitisation of transnational and global dynamics (Bigo 2001). Other discourses of global threats further fit in the securitisation of migration. Recently, environmental migration has been constructed as the upcoming global disaster both by policy makers, media and environmental scientists, on the prediction that millions of Southern environmentally displaced people will converge to the Global

North with climate change (Gemenne 2011, 2014). Very recently, the global COVID 19 pandemic has reactivated anti-immigration and anti-immigrant reactions. Several European governments suspended asylum procedures while the external borders of the EU were sealed, including to those seeking asylum. These recent developments took place in the midst of recent claims by neighbouring Turkey that the government would stop preventing refugees from crossing the country's borders with Europe (Stevis-Gridneff and Gall 2020).

In the next section, we look in more details at how the association of migration with a security and a threat constructed the generic notion of "migration as crisis" by focusing on three episodes that were particularly spectacularised in discourses around migration and which gradually fed into the consolidation of crisis rhetoric.

Europe's "migration crisis": genealogy of a generic crisis

The three episodes documented in this section are not the only occurrences of situations where the way mobilities were responded to and represented led to aggravated anxieties and moral panics in recent decades. Yet they are chosen because they had a particularly strong echo within the EU, attracting cross-border media, political and scholarly attention and provoking heated debates around asylum and migration.

They are also situations that are directly related to the development of European policies and to the establishment of the Schengen Area. Indeed, these three episodes follow the reinforcement of the external EU borders and illustrate the connection between the EU migration governance framework and the recurrence of situations seen as crises (Cantat 2016b).

In this sense, the three situations below are chosen as critical juncture points that allow drafting a genealogical inquiry into the process through which the crisis narrative grew into a generalised notion in the EU. Our key argument here is that,

from a series of localised situations seen as humanitarian, sanitary or security crises or emergencies in the 1990s and 2000s, the crisis discourse became a multi-sited and generic representation of a migration or migrant crisis.

Relocating borders, creating "crises"

From the 1990s, several epicentres of migration-related crises came to embody new borders within and at the margins of a borderless Schengen space. They enacted the fragility of the free circulation area when it comes to non-EU citizens and the deadlocks of cooperation between member states. As such, they relocated borders within the Schengen space during "critical" sequences of political and media polarisation.

The **first situation** dates back from the mid to **late 1990s**, when the surroundings of the French town of Calais on the shore of the Channel leading to the UK became the stage for both a local and Franco-British political crisis anchored at the entrance of the so-called "Eurotunnel". In front of increasingly large numbers of people (many from Kosovo) stranded in the vicinity of the port of Calais and hoping to reach the UK, the French government opened a reception centre administered by the Red Cross in Sangatte in 1999, which was closed in 2002 under pressure from the British Prime Minister of the time David Blunkett. The closure of the reception centre led migrants to relocate in makeshift settlements in the surroundings, leading to the emergence of the infamous "Calais Jungle".

The "Jungle" has since been dismantled several times, most recently in 2016, yet the situation in Calais has remained inflammatory for both local and international politics ever since the closure of Sangatte. It serves as a cornerstone of the migration and asylum debates in France, and a fixation point for migration diplomacy between the UK and the EU (notably in the context of the Brexit campaign of 2016), affecting both domestic and regional politics. It also features as a key image of humanitarian emergencies on EU grounds with hundreds of

people living in the woods and facing regular brutality at the hands of the police and the confiscation of their tents and sleeping bags, as well as tensions between NGOs involved locally, municipalities and national governments.

The **second episode dates from the mid-2000s**, when crisis discourses started to describe the mobilities of North- and Sub-Saharan immigrants towards Spain, first through the Canary Islands, and then to the Spanish enclaves in Morocco of Ceuta and Melilla. In 2006, thousands of people reached Europe via the islands off the coast of Western Sahara, while hundreds died in shipwrecks. A "crisis meeting" was then called by Spain in the context of the October 2006 EU Summit.[3] Already at the time, the failure of European border policies were denounced by left-leaning political parties within the EU parliament and right-based Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), who were asking for more stable routes into Europe and effective reception infrastructure for migrants.[4]

But European member-states rather responded with Operation Hera in 2006, coordinated by the European Agency for the Management of Operational Cooperation at the External Borders (Frontex), which had been created just a year before. It aimed at stopping irregular migration from Western Sahara and was considered opaque and unaccountable by human rights CSOs.[5] Simultaneously, the situation deteriorated in Ceuta and Melilla, where in October 2005 more than 10 people were shot with real bullets by Moroccan police, armed with European-purchased weapons and tasked with controlling the border through cooperation agreements, a tool of the external dimension of migration management or "externalisation" (Lavenex 2016).[6] Today, over a decade later, the situation is still ongoing, with regular news of migrants trying to break through

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[3] https://www.theguardian.com/world/2006/sep/04/spain.mainsection

[4] See the resolution of the European Green https://europeangreens.eu/content/migration-crisis-canary-islands

[5] http://www.statewatch.org/analyses/no-307-frontex-operation-hera.pdf

[6] See also: http://www.migreurop.org/article1241.html?lang=fr

the fence separating the Moroccan from the Spanish side and being routinely disbanded at best and molested by border guards and police on both sides.

In the early **2010s**, the **third** spectacular episode occurred to southern Italy and most notably the island of Lampedusa, which has by now become a symbol of the ongoing tragedy of migrants in the Central Mediterranean. Before a major shipwreck in the Spring 2015, inauguring the notion of "Europe's migrant crisis", the route leading to southern Italy from the northern coasts of Africa had already attracted public and media attention, especially following the 2011 regime changes in Tunisia and Libya that made departures towards Europe easier. On 3 October 2013, the capsize of a boat off the coast of the island had led to over 360 deaths and to the launching of an extended operation of search and rescue (SAR) by the Italian government. Several years later, boats continue to sink or capsize, people die at sea and operations carried out by NGOs face the increased criminalisation of SAR operations.

While all the above-mentioned moments share common features and provoked security-oriented responses and panic talks, phrases associating crisis with "migration/migrant" or even "refugee/asylum" were not systematically used before 2011 (the next section explores this point further). Besides, other episodes of refugee arrivals have not been termed migration or refugee crises at all, and did not even lead to specific media frenzy. For instance, the flight of Yugoslav refugees during the Balkan wars in the 1990s was of similar (or even higher) statistical relevance, but was not apprehended as a crisis. Similarly, the return of ethnic German nationals after German reunification was never portrayed as a crisis (Perron & Bazin 2018). The same applies to the current exodus of Ukrainian nationals towards Poland and other countries of Eastern and Central Europe (including Germany).

In 2015, the situation unfolding in the Central Mediterranean became multi-sited and echoed in the Eastern Mediterranean, across the Aegean Sea towards the
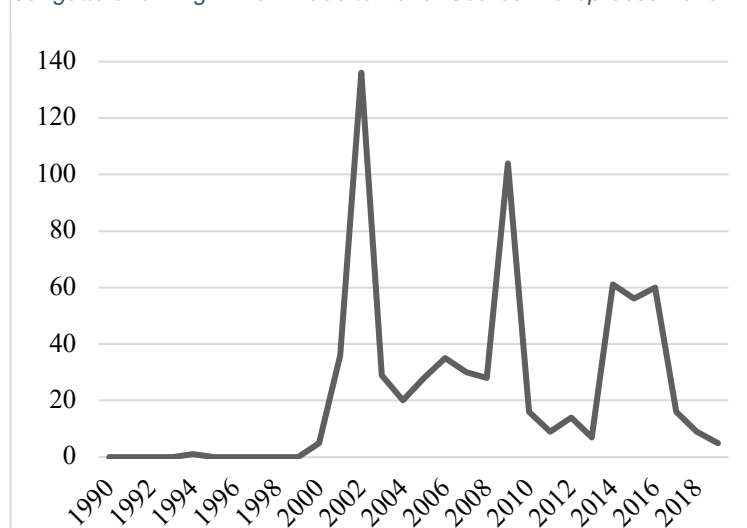
Greek shores and across the borders of Balkan states. This was partly connected to the policies deployed in response to mobilities through the Central Mediterranean, based on the further securitisation and militarisation, which participated in redirecting movement towards other routes. In turn, the dominant rhetoric around migration soon connected the images of overcrowded ships in the central Mediterranean with depictions of groups of border crossers across land. Soon the notion of "Europe's migrant crisis" or "the European migration crisis" gained hegemonic status to describe the situation. This last instance therefore acquired a full generic status across actors: policy makers, media, academic have all endorsed, albeit with occasional critical stances, the terminology. The next sections offer more insight into the processes through which crisis talk became pervasive in different fields.

From local to generic: the construction of Europe's migrant crisis

As mentioned above, the emergence of what we call here a *generic* migration crisis in various types of discourses is made clear by the salience of the words "migration crisis" and its epigones.

Using exploratory analysis on media discourses, we find that the press only started to talk about migration crisis in generic terms in the 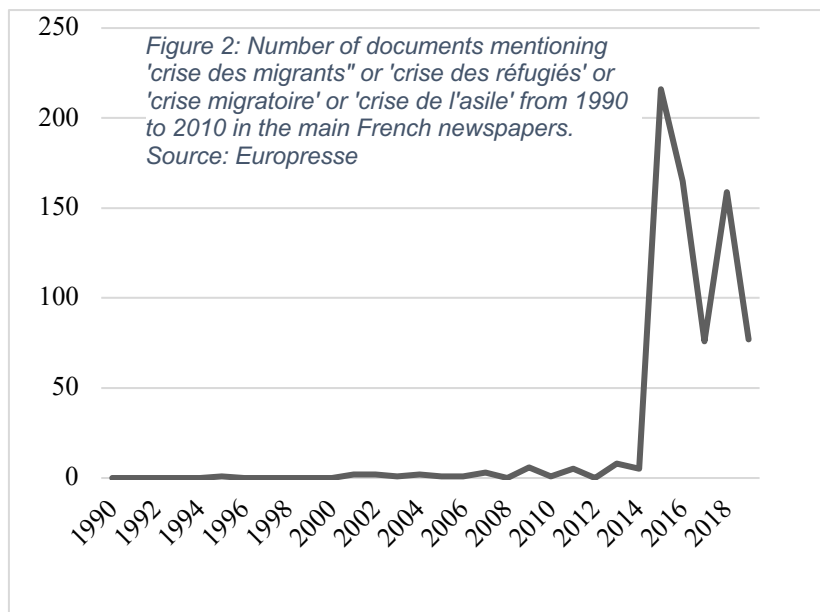2010s. In the French press for instance, the main newspapers in the early 1990s and in the 2000s mostly referred to "Sangatte", "Calais" and to vernacular terms related to asylum and mobilities. These terms remained salient during the most recent sequence, as Calais (as well as neighbouring

Figure 1: Number of documents mentioning the phrases Calais, Sangatte and "migr*" from 1900 to 2019. Source: Europresse 2019

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localities including the city of Grande Synthe) continued hosting informal camps or "jungles" of asylum seekers looking for opportunities to cross the Channel towards the UK (graph 1). Their intensive use reflects the highly spectacular treatment of migration in media discourses.

In the 1990s, phrases connecting "migrant, migration, refugiés, asile" and "crisis" do not appear to describe the situation around Sangatte and Calais. Yet in in the 2010s, in the same newspapers, a shift occurred towards the generic use of "migration crisis" as an overall framework to comprehend, describe and manage migration and asylum flows (graph 2). The notion of "migration crisis" only became the main discursive framework to characterise migration events in 2014.

In other words, rather than merely describing migration dynamics, discourses centred on the notion of crisis selectively identify certain episodes and moments across time and space. In so doing, they convert or translate migration dynamics into migration crises by (re)phrasing, (re)framing, (re)formulating and potentially distorting observable phenomenon. Both operations of selection and translation are crucial to understand

Figure 2: Number of documents mentioning 'crise des migrants" or 'crise des réfugiés' or 'crise migratoire' or 'crise de l'asile' from 1990 to 2010 in the main French newspapers. Source: Europresse

the social production of crisis discourses.

Similarly, in some of the main German newspapers (Süddeutsche Zeitung, Tageszeitung, Focus, Spiegel), despite large numbers of arrivals of *Aussiedler* and *Spätaussiedler* or ethnic Germans after German reunification, and of refugees
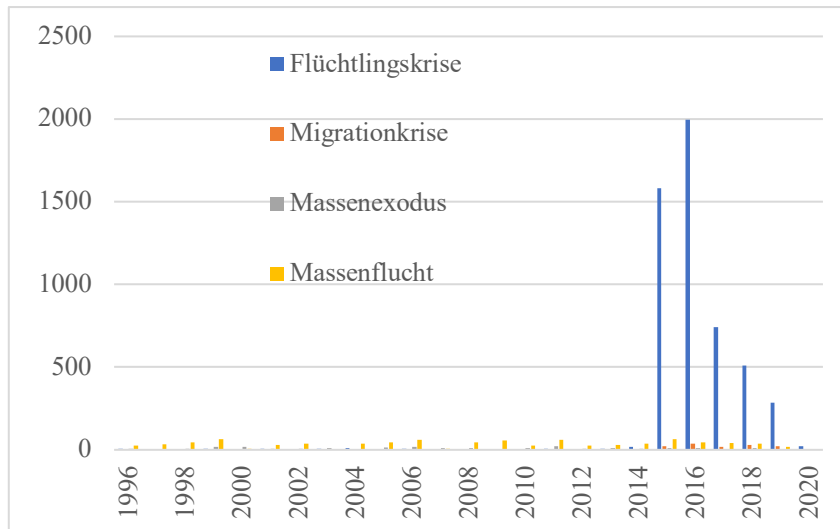
after the Yugoslav and Kosovo crises of 1992 and 1999, the term *Flüchtlingskrise* only peaks in 2015 (graph 3).

Figure 3: Number of documents mentioning key terms describing migration and asylum crises in the main German newspapers 1996-2019 Source: Factiva

These limited analyses certainly do not offer a comprehensive statistical treatment of media discourses across Europe. However, they offer fruitful insights to think about the emergence of a generic migration or refugee crisis. They trace back the process through which crisis rhetoric gained hegemonic status to speak about migration in/to Europe.

By now, it seems that the association has become so normalised that it is permanently perceived that a "crisis" is ongoing or imminent. The case of France in 2015 is interesting in this regard: the country only received 6% of all new asylum applications in Europe, yet considered itself as equally involved in the 2015 "migration crisis" as neighbouring Germany, where over a third of all new applications were filed (Eurostat 2016). This reveals not only the normalisation of crisis narratives, but also their elasticity and the way in which they can easily upscale and extend.

The case of Hungary is also striking in this respect. While the country has seen very large number of transiting migrants in 2015, its extremely restrictive immigration and border policies, including the building of border fences, have led to a drastic reduction of the numbers of asylum applications which plummeted with less than 300 people receiving refugee status in the country in 2017. Yet, the "migration crisis" has become, as per Prime Minister Viktor Orban's own words, "the number

one issue in the country" and a feature of all public debates, electoral campaigns and political speeches (Daily News 2018).

Having explored how the notion of migration crisis gained hegemonic status over the last decades, the paper now moves on to exploring some of the tensions and disputes that remain or have been generated by the notion since 2015. It argues that while the perception of a "crisis" was broadly shared, its nature and causes became the subjects of heated debates opposing different actors. This plurality of meanings attached to the notion of crisis encourages us to study crisis discourse as a changing signifier, which requires contextualisation and explanation.

Exploring crisis narratives since 2015: semantics, framing and controversies

As talks of "Europe's migration crisis" started in April 2015, the rhetoric of crisis was promptly adopted by the media, policymakers, civil society and academics. However, the consensus around the experience of a crisis becomes more complex as soon as the crisis requires definition and specification. Indeed, in the months following the naming of the crisis, a battle of qualification ensued: crisis as one of migrants or refugees? A political crisis of the European project and its bordering attempts, or perhaps a humanitarian crisis affecting primarily people on the move? Crisis as a lack of efficiency of the EU and its member-states at implementing security measures and border control devices, or a crisis of solidarity between Europe and its outside, and across member-states themselves?

"Refugee" *vs* "migrant": from editorial disputes, to policy and expert debates

A striking manifestation of such disputes was the editorial disagreement opposing BBC News to Al Jazeera English in 2015 over whether to qualify the crisis as one of

migrants or rather one of refugees.[7] This debate was not confined to the media sphere, and questions around the best way to describe the protagonists of the crisis also animated policy debates and scholarly discussions, as discussed below. Yet the opposing positions defended by each broadcaster constitute an important illustration of the ways this debate unfolded, and the implications that came with it.

In the summer of 2015, at the peak of the "crisis", all articles on the topic of migration published on BBC News started appearing with the following disclaimer:

> A note on terminology: The BBC uses the term migrant to refer to all people on the move who have yet to complete the legal process of claiming asylum. This group includes people fleeing war-torn countries such as Syria, who are likely to be granted refugee status, as well as people who are seeking jobs and better lives, whom governments are likely to rule are economic migrants.

A few weeks later, in response, news outlet Al Jazeera English (AJE) took a different editorial decision. Referring to migration paths across the Central Mediterranean, in August 2015, online editor Barry Malone (2015) explained that,

> For reasons of accuracy, the director of news at Al Jazeera English, Salah Negm, has decided that we will no longer use the word migrant in this context. We will instead, where appropriate, say refugee.

The decision taken by AJE was justified not only insofar as "refugee crisis" would be a more accurate qualifier from a descriptive perspective, but also because of the changing meanings and moral implications associated with the terms under discussion (Blanchard & Rodier 2016). In his editorial, Malone (2015) explained that "the umbrella term migrant is no longer fit for purpose when it comes to describing

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[7] This section is based on a paper presented by Cantat, C. (2018): "Remaking the Refugee along the Balkan route: exclusion, struggles, resistance" within the panel she co-organised entitled "Making, Unmaking and Remaking Refugees" on 12 April 2018 at the AAG Annual Meeting in New Orleans

the horror unfolding in the Mediterranean. It has evolved from its dictionary definitions into a tool that dehumanises and distances, a blunt pejorative". Conversely, BBC News seems to withdraw its right to name and categorise mobility until the state, seen as the appropriate and qualified authority to do so, has emitted its judgment. The British broadcaster argues that relevant state authorities are expected to establish the identity of the protagonists of migration events of 2015, and that it is therefore impossible to qualify the crisis in terms other than generic.

This debate about the qualification of the crisis and the appropriate denomination of people on the move is in reality highly political insofar as it echoes the distinction on which the overall European architecture of migration management and in particular the governance of irregular flows has been built, namely that between "economic migrants" and "refugees". Within this system, the formers are seen as undesirable and need to be promptly returned to countries outside European territory, while the latter, after being recognised as such through arduous asylum procedures, are granted the right to stay. In this sense, crisis representations and debates are not new, they rather seem to be exacerbating existing social and cognitive categories.

Interestingly, while AJE articulates its editorial decision as a gesture of compassion and solidarity towards people on the move, it has been criticised by migrants' rights groups. Critics argue that AJE's position reinforces this dichotomic view of mobilities, and the idea according to which people can be neatly categorised as either "migrants" or "refugees". In doing so, it attributes a higher moral validity to refugees and fails to challenge stereotypes surrounding other forms of mobility. Judith Vonberg from the British NGO Migrants' Rights' Network for instance argues that "[b]y rejecting the term "migrants", Al Jazeera gives credence to the illiberal voices telling us that migrants are not worthy of our compassion" (Vonberg 2015).

This brief overview of one of the most striking illustrations of the debate around whether the crisis pertained to migrants and refugees already indicates the political nature of the discussion. Disputes over the qualification of the crisis are not merely terminological disagreements or divergences about representing reality accurately: they already anticipate the manner in which different ways of describing this reality will produce different material responses. In this sense, the battle over words has implications beyond the realm of representation, and is truly about shaping answers. For instance, when right-wing formations and anti-migrant parties describe all people on the move as motivated by exclusively economic reasons, they are already calling for their push-back from the territory of Europe (Perraudin 2015).

A similar terminological debate characterises discussions of the 2015 crisis among multilateral organisations.[8] In the work of these organisations as well, the distinction between forced and voluntary migrants – between humanitarian and economic mobility – works as a sectoral boundary between migration and asylum policies. Despite the empirical incongruity of such clear-cut dichotomy, this distinction breeds two realms of policymaking, and allocates responsibilities to specific agencies and agents. In the discourses of multilateral organisations, the distinction seeks to create legal and operational sanctuaries, and crafts a division of labour among international organisations and within national governments and administrations, as illustrated by the title of "The UN migration organisation" granted to the IOM in 2016, as opposed to the UNHCR, "the UN refugee agency."

But these boundaries are far from clear-cut. Organisations' mandates and consistencies evolve along the lines of multilateral politics. The IOM's website thus claims "to provide humanitarian assistance to migrants in need, including

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[8] This section if adapted from a communication by Thiollet, H. (2019) "Mixed Migration from the Horn of Africa to the Mediterranean: Discussing the Multilateral Politics of Migrant Labelling," within the panel "The Global Refugee Crisis: Causes, Consequences, and Solutions" at the 115th Annual Meeting of the American Political Sciences Association, Washington DC USA from Aug 30 to Sept 2 2019

refugees and internally displaced people." In practice, boundaries are even more blurred when actors feel they face a crisis. As moments when routinised responses are not available or seem inappropriate, crises open venues for the reconfigurations of policy domains. These reconfigurations are reflected in and supported by organisation' strategies to produce and disseminate data and information about migration. By generating information on the numbers of migrants and their characteristics (gender, nationality, status, age etc.), they make and unmake migration as crisis. The labelling of migration as crisis migration (refugee flows) or a migration crisis (of both irregular migrants and asylum seekers) is crucial to the emergence of migrations crises which in turn, are crucial to the legitimisation of policies, funding and programs.

In academic discourses, the dichotomy between forced and voluntary migration has largely been seen as problematic. Researchers explain that both belong to a "continuum of experiences" (Erdal & Oeppen 2018; Fussel 2012; Richmond 1994). They also insist on the irreducible plurality of reasons and motivation that trigger mobilities, and the impossibility for authorities to adequately activate categories of governance (Carling & Collins 2018). This directly challenges the foundation of migration management which is grounded in operations of labelling and filtering between "forced" and "economic" migrants.

But academics have also at times contributed to the "stickiness" (Erdal & Oeppen 2018) of the distinction. In particular, both scholars and civil society actors have expressed concerns that challenging the distinction would only result in undermining the fragile rights to protection that refugees enjoy under the global refugee regime. The normative and discursive distinction between migrants and refugees has served from the 1950s onwards as a ground for "at least" protecting the latter at the expenses of the former (Long 2013).[9] Scholars have also tried

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[9] Similar debates have happened within "refugee studies" or "forced migration studies" (Chimni, 2008). Critical histories of *refugeeism* (Chimni, 1998) have questioned the role of knowledge production or "refugee studies" in creating a "myth of difference" between refugees in the North and in the South legitimizing a differential legal treatment of asylum seekers in both contexts and the

avoiding categorising mobile people and people "on the move." Alternative terminologies were introduced such as "asylum migration" (Koser & Van Hear 2003), "crisis migration" (S. Martin, Weerasinghe & Taylor 2013) or "survival migration" (Betts 2013b, p. 4). The "migration-displacement nexus" was thus coined as a "new concept intended to capture the complex and dynamic interactions between voluntary and forced migration, both internally and internationally" (Koser & Martin 2011) allowing to overcome the epistemological deadlocks and bypass the political dangers of labelling. But the "categorical fetishism" (Apostolova 2015) that distinguishes migrants from refugees has proven quite resilient both in policy and in scientific discourses. It resurfaced with more political momentum in times labelled as "migration crisis" as in Europe in 2015 (Crawley & Skleparis 2018). Both in academic and policy discourses, the lines between categories were organised as battle fronts in a highly politicised arena to discard migrants' claims or protect refugees' rights (Thiollet 2019).

"Security" *vs* "humanitarian": political framing for intervention

The oscillation between calling the crisis one of refugees or migrants mirrors another debate: that opposing a security approach to the events to those evoking a humanitarian reading (Panebianco 2017). This translates for instance in the analysis of Austrian media production during the "crisis" which highlights that "established narratives of security threat and economisation are most prominent" while "humanitarianism frames and background information on the refugees' situation are provided to a lesser extent" (Greussing & Boomgaarden 2017).

The reading that connects "crisis" to the securitisation of borders has itself two variations. On the one hand, some commentators called for further reinforcement of the border security measures taken by the EU as a means to stop undesirable

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"solutions" offered by the UNHCR to refugees, between voluntary repatriation, resettlement and local integration (Chimni, 2004).

migration, while on the other hand an alternative analysis sees the crisis as produced through European security practices and calls for a shift in paradigm.

In both cases, the crisis is seen as a political one: for those advocating further securitising, the crisis represented by migration is translated into a broader yet disaster, one of an existentialist nature, threatening "European culture and way of life".[10] As mentioned, this portrayal is not new (Huysmans 2000; Bigo 2002; Buonfino 2004). Yet it finds renewed fuel with the discourse of crisis (Murray & Longo 2018). In turn, this depiction of migration as menace has been mobilised to call for further crack down on migration, to "properly close" borders and to "effectively end the crisis" (see Toscano 2015; Lazaridis and Konsta 2015; Lazaridis and Tsagkroni 2015, 2016 for case studies of the intersection of far right politics and immigration in Italy, Greece, the UK, and Scandinavian countries). This dynamic is flagrant for instance in the cases of former Italian Deputy Prime Minister Matteo Salvini, Prime Minister Viktor Orban in Hungary, Czech President Milos Zeman, among others.[11]

The approaches that see the "crisis" as generated by the overtly securitised nature of EU migration policy (Andersson 2016, 2017; Baldwin-Edwards, Blitz and Crawley 2019; Blanchard & Rodier 2016; Bojadžijev & Mezzadra 2015; Cantat 2015; Collyer and King 2016; Cornelius, Martin & Hollifield 1994; Crawley and Blitz 2019; Morice 2019; Lendaro, Rodier & Vertongen 2019; Rajaram 2015; but also Castles as early as 2004) also highlight important elements. The first one concerns the gap between migration research and policy (Baldwin-Edwards, Blitz and Crawley 2019; Boswell, Geddes & Scholton 2011; Sutcliffe and Court 2005; Ruhs, Tamas & Palme 2019). This observation concerns the fact that a wide range of scholarly (Andreas and Snyder 2000; Bigo and Guild 2005a; Andersson 2016 among others) and civil society studies (Amnesty International 2014; PICUM 2019; Migreurop 2016

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[10] A discourse echoed on the other side of the Atlantic, see for instance
https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2019/jul/17/existential-crisis-posed-mass-immigration/

[11] See also Open Democracy (2012) dossier on "Security and the Far Right".

to name but a few) have long shed light on the shortcomings and counterproductive implications of the European approach to migration and border control. In spite of the availability of these investigations, and the fact that some of them are paid through European funds, their impact on policy has been minimal. This has been recently powerfully highlighted in an open letter sent by migration scholars to the president of the European Commission and calling for a radical revision of current EU policies on mobility and migration governance based on research findings and recommendations.[12]

Scholars have also connected counterproductive and humanely damaging migration policies with the rise of economic interests (Andersson 2016; Gammeltoft-Hansen and Sørensen 2013; Rodier 2012). They argue that controlling borders has become a lucrative field for some actors who have thereby developed incentives to push for a continuation and intensification of security-oriented practices at the border. This development has been coined the "illegality industry" by Ruben Andersson (2016) and the "business of xenophobia" by Claire Rodier (2012), who both show how migration control devices and the production of migrant illegality have become a field of profit for the security industry. In this perspective, the framing of migration towards Europe as a security-related crisis can play a key role in the shaping of policy responses that in turn benefit particular actors.

Critical scholars have also highlighted another type of gap concerning migration policies, best known, in the formulation of Cornelius et al. (1994), as "the gap hypothesis". The main idea behind the gap hypothesis is that the perception of a crisis emerges when there is too wide a disconnection between claims made by politicians and policymakers regarding the control of migration and borders, on the one hand, and the reality on the ground, on the other hand. In other words: "the gap between the goals of national immigration policy (laws, regulations,

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[12] Letter available here: http://admigov.eu/upload/Call_EU_funded_researchers.pdf

executive actions etc.) and the actual results of policies in this area (policy outcomes) is wide and growing wider" (Cornelius et al. 1994: 3). This hypothesis highlights that there are at least two variables shaping perceptions of migration: promises made by politicians and the reality of migratory movement. In turn, the gap between the two variables, which give rise to perception of "crisis" or "uncontrollable flows", may widen if either of them intensifies. In this sense, the perception of a crisis may result from an intensification of political claims that all migration will be stopped (see Trump's "zero-tolerance" for instance, HRW 2018) and from dynamics internal to the political discourse, rather than from a rise in migration numbers themselves.

Besides the fact that migration policies may not succeed in their proclaimed goals, there is also the fact that existing policies are not always applied or that policymaking does not in fact follow its own stated objectives. For instance, scholars have highlighted that the objectives presented by migration policy may in reality be unrealistic or even undesirable. This may be because migrant workers are in fact needed in a given country, leading to contradictions between nationalist discourses of border control and capitalist need for labour (Cantat 2016b; Marfleet 2016; Fysh and Wolfreys 2003), or because certain policies and measures are not actually implemented (see De Genova and Peutz 2010 on "deportability"; also Morice 2015 on deportation and regularisation in France). For an earlier period, the 1960s, a key illustration of the gap between discourses, practices and policies can be found in the words of a former French Minister of Labour who claimed that "clandestine immigration in itself is not without benefit, for if we stuck to a strict interpretation of the rules and international agreements, we would perhaps be short of labour" (Gaspard & Servan-Schreiber 1985 : 28-29).

In other words, there is a way to speak of migration (as a problem, as a crisis) that is readily utilised by politicians, but it is not necessarily reflecting policy practices. A crisis can emerge when there is too large a difference between discourse and practice, between expectations and reality. In Europe and beyond,

contemporary realities of migration are broadly disconnected from the exclusionary discourses of "closed borders" and "zero migration" formulated by many politicians who readily instrumentalise migration and scapegoat migrants for short-term electoral gains. This is because the reality of the migration situation in the world, linked to a variety of complex and often interconnected factors, including changing global relations, the constant need for migrant labour as well as growing number of forcefully displaced people, tends to be overlooked in policy and political discourses which promise to stop a phenomenon that exists way beyond their control and for important structural reasons. In turn, the growing breach between what is promised and the socio-political reality of Europe comes to feed perceptions and feelings of crisis.

On the other hand, a humanitarian assessment of the situation also exists, in particular among NGOs engaged in SAR operations at sea and in helping people on the move along migratory routes. This interpretation calls for immediate humanitarian action to save lives and alleviate the conditions in which migrants stranded at various stages of their journey find themselves. The operation manager of MSF, for instance argues:

> The response by European governments to the humanitarian crisis in the Mediterranean Sea and Libya has been a race to the very bottom. One year ago, we implored European governments to put people's lives before politics. We pleaded for a humane response—for an end to the dehumanization of vulnerable people at sea for political gain. Yet one year on, the European response has reached deplorable new lows.[13]

The humanitarian crisis narrative is thus mobilised to call on governments and the EU to act "humanely" and to separate their response to the crisis from party and electoral politics. A similar rhetoric has been put forward by a range of important non-governmental actors, including the Migrant Offshore Aid Station (MOAS) or

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[13] https://www.doctorswithoutborders.org/what-we-do/news-stories/story/european-policies-continue-claim-lives-sea

Human Rights Watch, as well as political foundations such as the Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung. Activist groups also borrow from the humanitarian and/or solidarity register: they insist on the deadly situation at the border and on moral responsibilities to provide support to people on the move.

This tension is visible in EU discourses: although the adopted policies in the name of crisis have been overwhelmingly conservative, they have also been framed within a discourse of care for people's rights through the invocation of the Union's commitment to saving lives at sea. While this is not a new tendency, the conflation between security and humanitarian aims becomes more salient in times seen as "crisis", when conflicting accounts of the nature of, and solution to, the crisis become articulated by opposing commentators. In 2006 already, Ilkka Laitinen, then Frontex director, spoke of Operation Hera (to prevent irregular migration from West Africa to the Canary Islands) as follows:

> *Operation Hera* stands out. By implementing preventive measures off the West African coast, Hera has almost completely stemmed the flow of irregular migration to the Canary Islands via this particularly hazardous route. As a result, hundreds if not thousands of lives have been saved. I think this has to be considered one of our most important achievements.

In 2015, following the April tragedy, Fabrice Leggeri, head of Frontex, explained that the mandate of the agency was not to save lives and to pursue search and rescue operations. Commenting on an ongoing Frontex operation he explained:

> Triton cannot be a search-and-rescue operation. I mean, in our operational plan, we cannot have provisions for proactive search-and-rescue action. This is not in Frontex's mandate, and this is in my understanding not in the mandate of the European Union.

A few years later, on the front page of the agency, the same Fabrice Leggeri boasted:

> Last but not least, Frontex officers involved in search and rescue operations have helped save more than 65,000 lives in the Mediterranean since the new mandate came into effect. Fundamental rights are integrated into Frontex operations from their inception, ensuring that all those fleeing war and persecution are able to apply for international protection.

This emphasis on fundamental rights and the humanitarian mission of the agency has been mainstreamed into official communication following public outcries regarding repetitive deaths at the EU's borders and the observation that the agency prioritised border control over human lives.

These examples show how important the dispute over the qualification of the "crisis" may be, and how each interpretation is in turn connected to a particular conceptualisation of the social world, not only in interpretative terms (what is happening) but also in ethical terms (what is our responsibility and what we should do). In turn this has crucial implications over the types of responses that are offered to the crisis, as will be explored below.

Turning to debates that called into question the empirical relevance of the notion of "migration crisis" and primarily considered "crisis" as a productive/performative category, the next section explores further the performative aspects of crisis rhetoric.

The performativity of crisis: debating the foundations of EU policy responses

Figure 4: Number of academic documents including the terms "migrant crisis, refugee crisis, migration crisis, asylum crisis" in their title, abstract or keywords from 1995 to 2018 in social science scientific outlets. Source: Scopus
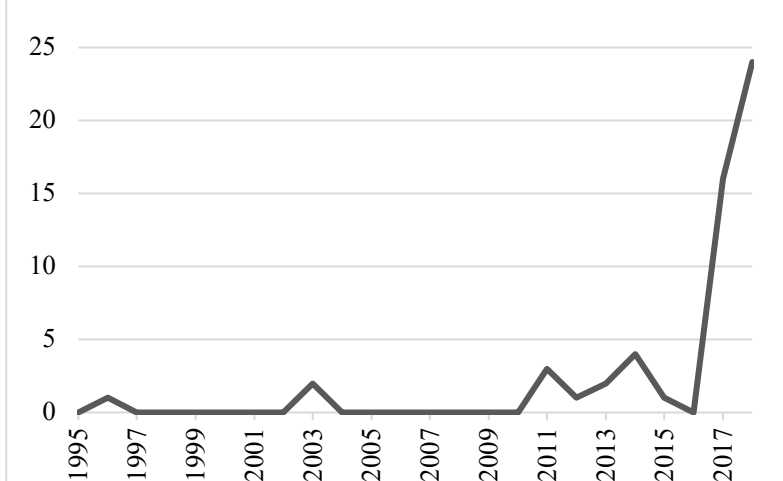
As shown in graph 4, the occurrence of the term "crisis" has spiked in academic literature. Scholarly debates however have often adopted a critical stance on the framing of migration as crisis. If the crisis rhetoric is so highly contested and possibly of little analytic value, we may then wonder why it retains such currency and why so many recent studies have attempted to "unravel" the migration crisis (Crawley, Düvell, Jones, McMahon & Sigona 2017).

Critical investigations into the crisis have in fact taken many forms and many have questioned the use of the notion. In this vein, scholars have emphasised the limited number of arrivals to Europe compared to the scope of displacement in other regions of the world (Thiollet 2013), and in the Middle East in particular as the broader region is a site of protracted mass displacement or enduring crisis (Fargues 2017; IDMC 2019), or in proportion to the overall population of the EU (Andersson 2017). They have also proposed historical perspectives that relativise the scale of the situation in relation to previous episodes of migration, such as European colonialism, or European emigration to North America in the early twentieth century at a time of capitalist expansion (Menjívar et al. 2019). Even in shorter-term historical perspective, scholars have shown that current displacement episodes are not in radical discontinuity with previous trends, and have reminded us that the conflict in Syria is "not the first to push civilians to the borders of Europe: before it came the civil war in Lebanon from 1975 to 1989; the

conflicts in the former Yugoslavia during the 1990s, the civil war in Algeria in the early 1990s, and the wars that affected Iraq from 1980s onwards" (Rigoni 2019: 130).

Other studies invite us to think crisis narratives in relation to a politics of fear (Altheide 2002; Glassner 2010) and to assess their productive and performative aspects, by reflecting on what responses become authorised when a social phenomenon is named as 'crisis' (Jeandesboz and Pallister-Wilkins 2016; Cantat 2016b; De Genova 2017). Another set of questions also arises when examining why some migrations are seen as "crisis" while others may not (Allen et al. 2018). Migration spoken of as "regular", insofar as it is organised and sanctioned by states through visas and residency permits, is generally not constructed as crisis. It thus seems that what produces the crisis is not arrivals and settlements as such, but rather their uncontrolled nature. In turn, this has led scholars to shift their gaze away from studying the mobilities that are framed as crisis, and rather towards issues of state sovereignty and territoriality.

An important strand of scholarship, along the lines presented above, questioned "whose crisis" this truly was (Rajaram 2015). For Lendaro, Rodier and Vertongen (2019), the crisis in question is not that of migrants or refugees but one of the practices of welcoming, while Agustín and Jørgensen (2019) see it as a crisis of solidarity. Others yet consider the crisis as pertaining to European migration policies (Bojadžijev & Mezzadra 2015) or to the overall European project (Cantat 2015).

At the EU level, there indeed existed a consensus that migratory episodes in 2015 consisted in a crisis. It was broadly accepted that this crisis was due to a deficiency in terms of border control and surveillance. This particular reading of the crisis thus called for one particular response: further control. As Zolberg and Brenda already suggested in 2001: "Indeed the prevailing sense of an 'international migration crisis' has profoundly inflected the consideration of policy

alternatives. In particular, it has been invoked to justify draconian measures to protect national borders, even at the expense of obligation" (2001:1).

On April 20, the day after the shipwreck that killed 850 people, a special meeting of Interior and Foreign Affairs Ministers of the member-states was held in Luxembourg to design an emergency action plan. On April 23, the European Council called a meeting where it built upon the 10 points enunciated in the action plan and brought them under three key objectives: (1) strengthening EU presence at sea through Frontex and its ongoing operations, Triton and Poseidon, whose budget will be tripled for 2015 and 2016; (2) fighting traffickers who are described as the main causes of deaths as sea (in a move that tends to invisibilise both root causes of migration and the effect of journeys of European policies); (3) preventing "illegal migration flows" through an intensification of the EU's cooperation with departure and transit countries (including Tunisia, Egypt, Sudan, Mali, Niger and Turkey) and through an intensification of returns (called "readmissions"). A final point regarding "reinforcing internal solidarity and responsibility", including through a voluntary pilot project regarding internal resettlement across the EU, was added to the program.[14]

The deployment of brutal strategies of bordering and the intensification of practices of migrant control, detention and deportation across Europe are thus in continuity with the foundations of EU migration policy identified above. In other words, "the current crisis management builds on pre-existing practices and enables their consolidation" (Jeandesboz & Pallister-Wilkins 2016).

At the same time, it is worth nothing that the intensification of contradictory discourses around the crisis also produced some unexpected effects. While the supranational response was focused on reinforcing border surveillance in the Central Mediterranean, the emergence of the Balkan Route on the east side of

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[14] Source: https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2015/04/23/special-euco-statement/

the Union led at first to uncoordinated responses and to member-states responding in a chaotic manner. Faced with the mass arrival of people at its eastern border, Germany briefly suspended the Dublin Regulation and invited Syrians to enter the country to claim asylum. This led to the opening of what was labelled the Balkan Corridor, whereby a quasi-legal pathway into Germany was created along the mostly non-EU states of the Western Balkans.

Germany was however isolated in this stand, as Hungary finalised fences at its southern and eastern borders on 15 September, which was shortly followed by Sweden announcing new border control at its border with Denmark, and later with Germany. Meanwhile, Austria introduced barbed wire fences at its border with Slovenia. By early December, a proposal that border controls might be reintroduced for two years inside the Schengen free movement area was put forward by the EU's Luxembourg presidency.

Eventually, in mid-December, in order to "save" Schengen, the European Commission proposed the creation of a European Border and Coast Guard, which would inherit from and considerably extend the powers held by the previous EU border agency, Frontex. The final agreement for the creation of the new agency was signed in June 2016. In March 2016, after several restrictions had been introduced, it was announced that the Balkan Corridor was officially closed. The situation along the Balkan route came back to one of illegality, brutality and pushbacks. Additionally, measures adopted to "control the crisis" included the right for border guards and Frontex agents to use various so-called non-lethal weapons including tear gas and water cannons, as well as new enhanced "technical means" such as CO_2 detectors and service dogs (for more details of the 'rapid interventions', see Frontex Activity Report, 2015).

In spite of the brief and exceptional period when the Corridor was open, this series of measures evidence the violence that can become authorised through discourses and *dispositifs* of crisis. It also exemplifies an issue long identified by

social scientists when they assess border and migration policies, namely their reactive and, at best, palliative nature. In other words, besides the fact that European responses to mobility have been mostly brutal and security-oriented, national and European authorities have also merely adjusted to events in an often-disparate and uncoordinated manner, and have proven unable to imagine and implement coherent policies (Lacroix 2016). Importantly, such "crisis management" responses tend to overlook the rule of law and checks and balances, and to move away from the ordinary decision-making rules in ways that further weaken fundamental rights for migrants (Carrera, Santos Vara and Strik 2019).

Thereby, what we see is that the temporality of the crisis approach seems to impede the very development of long-term, systemic policy measures that could consider root causes rather than immediate effects. As noted by MacAdams, approaching a situation as a crisis "risks side-lining *everyday* systemic issues such as poverty, vulnerability and environmental fragility (…) and overlooking relevant legal frameworks, such as human rights law" (2014: 30). Crisis representations, because they isolate and de-historicise the social situations they claim to describe, do not account for entrenched inequalities and social hierarchies. Moreover, because they justify the adoption of quick and emergency measures, they represent an opportunity for various actors to push forward their agendas and interests (Andersson 2016; Carrera et al. 2019; Blockmans 2016). They tend thereby to reproduce unequal power relations and, in this sense, they may already prepare the next "crisis", by cementing the very circumstances that produce situations seen as crises in the first place.

Concluding remarks and research agenda

The repetitive naming of the crisis is historically situated and has developed in particular contexts. By illuminating the steps through which the association between migration and crisis has been built, this paper allows not only a critical

assessment of crisis narrative and of constructions of migration as crisis: it also encourages us to think beyond these terms. It provides evidence of looping effects between policies that are produced to respond to perceptions of a migration crisis, and the recurrence of situations seen as amounting to migration crises. In turn, WP3 will be concerned with ways to step out of this crisis loop by deconstructing the ways crises are built, and challenging the naturalised and normalised forms they have gained in recent decades.

The deliverables leading to this consolidated model will comprise of a series of working papers and articles on the definition, narratives and perceptions of migration 'crisis' focusing on the 2010 European migration crisis. In addition, an Open access timelines and mapping of the revolution and war in Syria (2011-2017) based on narratives (videos, images, testimonies) will be provided:

D3.1: Production of a research/policy document on the definition of a 'migration crisis' [12]

D3.2: Special issue of a journal on the topic Narratives of the migration crisis [24]

D3.3: Working paper on the construction of the crisis-invasion discourse by different stakeholders in Italy [6]

D3.4: Policy Brief on the asylum management process of hotspots in Southern Italy [8]

D3.5: Two conference papers on the crisis narrative of the asylum emergency in Italy, and the multiplicity of actors involved in the hotspot governance approach in Italy [14]

D3.6: One peer review paper will be written on the humanitarian/securitization contrast of discourses and control practices in Italian hotspots [18]

D3.7: Working Paper on the Turkish perceptions of the EU migration deal based on Parliamentary Debates [24]

D3.8: Open access timelines and mapping of the revolution and war in Syria (2011-2017) based on narratives (videos, images, testimonies) from below [48]

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