NARRATING EUROPE'S MIGRATION AND REFUGEE 'CRISIS'

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Abstract

It is very clear – as many journalists covering the unfolding migration and refugee crisis have pointed out – that geography lies at the heart of the events taking place in Europe and the Mediterranean. It is a story of borders and routes, of distance and proximity, and of location and accessibility. The role of (re-) bordering has been fundamental in states' attempts to 'manage' and 'control' the refugee and migrant flows and, in this respect, we observe a return to the more traditional practices of bordering – physical barriers and personnel-heavy security controls – rather than the previous processes of 'externalizing' and 'internalizing' border management. In the Eastern Mediterranean and the Balkans the external border of the European 'fortress' has been prised open, whilst the free-movement ethos of the Schengen area has been compromized by EU states' reactions to the large-scale movement of migrants and refugees and recent acts of terrorism. In this introductory paper we bring a critical geopolitical lens into play in order to understand the European, regional and global power geometries at work, and we critically examine the political and media rhetoric around the various discursive constructions of the migrant/refugee 'crisis', including both the negative and the Islamophobic utterances of some European leaders and the game-changing iconicity of certain media images.

Narrando la 'crisis' migratoria y de refugiados en Europa

Resumen

Está muy claro – así como lo han señalado varios periodistas cubriendo la crisis de migración y refugiados – que la geografía está al fondo de los eventos que se están llevando a cabo en Europa y el Mediterráneo. Es una historia de fronteras y rutas, de distancia y proximidad, y de ubicación y accesibilidad. El rol de (re-)fronterizar ha sido fundamental en los intentos de los estados de 'gestionar' y 'controlar' la circulación de migrantes y refugiados y, en este sentido, observamos un regreso a las practicas tradicionales de fronterizar – barreras físicas y controles de seguridad con mucha personería – en vez de los procesos previos de 'externalizar' e 'internalizar' la gestión de las fronteras. En el Mediterráneo oriental y en los Balcanes la frontera de la fortaleza europea ha sido abierta con fuerza, mientras que el carácter distintivo del libre-movimento del área Schengen ha sido comprometida por las reacciones de los estados europeos al movimiento de tan grande escala de los migrantes y refugiados y las acciones terroristas recientes. En este ensayo introductorio usamos un lente critico geopolítico para entender

las geometrías de poder europeo, regional, y mundial que están trabajando, y examinamos la retórica acerca de las varias construcciones discursivas de la 'crisis' de migrantes/refugiados, incluyendo los dichos negativos e Islamofobios de unos líderes europeos y la influyente iconicidad de ciertas imágenes en los medios.

Palabras clave: Europa, 'crisis' migratoria y de refugiados, fatalidades de migrantes, legitimación, geografía política, política de Union Europea

Introduction

On 19 April 2015 around 800 people were drowned in the Mediterranean Sea south of Lampedusa – the small Sicilian island – when the hopelessly overcrowded and unseaworthy boat in which they were trying to reach Europe capsized. This tragic accident, the most significant loss of life in a single such incident ever recorded, marks the beginning of a *narrative of crisis* associated with the movement of people to Europe. Unfortunately, none of this is new. Over the last few decades, undocumented migration, meaning travel organized specifically to avoid the institutionalized system of state regulation, has become increasingly common across the Mediterranean. These dangerous journeys have often resulted in tragedy, yet this past year has been perceived differently.

Since the 19 April tragedy, continued fatal accidents and growing numbers of people crossing the Mediterranean have fueled a language of crisis associated with this undocumented migration. Yet the unease of this 'migration crisis' is not primarily caused by migration itself, but by repeated evidence that the member-states of the European Union are unable to respond effectively. This introductory paper, like the rest of the contributions in this special issue, seeks to examine the origins and nature of this 'crisis'. As Lindley argues, the language of 'crisis' is powerful, indicating something that is both anormal and bad (2014: 2). In these terms, the current crisis is not one of migration, nor even of refugees or humanitarian action, as others have argued (UNHCR 2015) but, rather, using the term of Habermas (1988), one of 'legitimation'.

Habermas' classic work (published in German in 1973 and in English in 1988) examines the crisis of capitalism, which he argues may be of four closely related crisis types: economy, rationality, legitimation and motivation. All rely on the central theme of legitimation, which highlights the requirement of the modern liberal state to be seen as governing in the interest of citizens, beyond the formal democratic mandate of government. In order to gain the continued consensus of citizens, state administrative institutions must be perceived as good, just, and governing in the broader interest. A specific crisis of legitimation is associated with socio-cultural implications of state involvement in the economy. A legitimation crisis results from a widespread perception that state institutions have failed in normative terms.

We feel that this diagnosis captures the current situation in Europe particularly well. Although the 'crisis' is widely expressed in terms of migration, it relates much more broadly to the perceived legitimacy of state institutions to perform the increasingly wide range of administrative functions that are necessary to manage the complex realities of state facilitation of the market economy. This increasingly takes place at the European Union (EU) level. Indeed the EU's responsibility for coordinating border control at the 'external' borders of Europe[1] is directly related to the gradual suppression of internal controls, originating in the 1985 Schengen Agreement, associated with the expansion of the European Single Market. The expansion of the EU's remit into migration management and border control, which is now seriously critiqued by both left and right, is therefore initially a result of the expansion of the state and supra-state's role in managing the economy. This introductory paper sets the analysis of this legitimation crisis into the context of the entire special issue. It falls into three main sections which examine, in turn, the ways in which migration data are presented, the distinctiveness of the current crisis, and the central role of political geography in explaining it. A final section overviews the remaining papers in the special issue.

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1   This shorthand has become common in critical literature on the European Union. We use it here in territorial terms to distinguish the current EU28 from the far more territorially uncertain and culturally defined notion of 'Europe'.

Characterizing the 'crisis': difficulties with data

Although the 'migration crisis' is about much more than migration, the ways in which the 'movement of people' (to employ a broader and more neutral term) is measured, categorized and understood is undeniably an important contributory factor. The measurement of movement is extremely challenging and subsequent categorization of that movement is inevitably highly political (Collyer and de Haas 2012). This starts with the choice of the information to be measured.

The significance and frequency of fatal accidents is perhaps the most significant concern underlying the crisis narrative, yet it is also one of the most difficult areas in which to collect accurate information. In any fatal accident there is a close link between accuracy of information, identification of those killed and tracing family members, all closely related to basic human respect for the dead. It is the lack of this respect which aggravates the tragedy of fatalities of undocumented migrants. Data on the number of dead in the incident on 19 April 2015, like all such tragedies, are still approximate. Only 28 people survived and 24 bodies were recovered, so estimates of the number of dead are based on survivors' testimonies of the number of people on board when the boat left Libya. These vary from 700 to 900. The UNHCR (2015) cites a figure of 'over 600'; the figure of 800 that we have cited comes from a first-hand interview by the BBC with a group of survivors (BBC News 23 April 2015). Such variation would be unimaginable in any other transportation disaster. It is a powerful illustration of the diminished value of human life. It also undermines the potential to use fatalities as a measure of severity in these situations.

The Missing Migrants project, managed by the International Organization for Migration, has become the most widely cited authority on these statistics (IOM 2016). Despite the tremendous uncertainties surrounding the information, their figure of 3,770 fatalities in the Mediterranean in 2015 has gained a level of authority by repetition and is widely used in both media reports and academic analysis. This figure is clearly unacceptable and is one of the most significant concerns driving the humanitarian argument for

crisis. Yet, given the larger number of crossings of the Mediterranean, it is not dramatically different from the previous decade. Fargues and Di Bartolomeo (2015) conducted an analysis of the risk of dying at sea on a Mediterranean crossing which has fluctuated between 1 and 4 percent since the substantial undocumented migration in the Mediterranean began in 2001.

A second widely cited statistical measure is the number of people who have entered Europe without authorization. Undocumented migration is, by its very definition, impossible to count accurately, though that proviso never appears in media commentaries. There are two widely used proxies for undocumented migration to Europe: quarterly data from Frontex (the European border control agency) on 'detections of illegal border crossings at the EU's external borders' (Frontex 2016), and the total number of asylum applications registered in the European Union. Both statistics have been widely cited as if they were the reality of the situation, but they are approximate indicators, at best, of the numbers of people arriving.

Frontex is initially clear in the description of its central statistical measure, though the way the data are then presented and used, particularly by media sources down the line, camouflages this clarity considerably. It is important to highlight two important features of data on 'detections of illegal border crossings at the EU's external borders'. First, it relates only to detections. The number of individuals who cross a border undetected is unknowable, so the accuracy of the measure basically relates to the effectiveness of surveillance operations. On maritime borders, surveillance is relatively accurate but, on land borders without sophisticated surveillance mechanisms, undetected crossings are likely to be higher. Second, this measure relates only to border crossings, not to numbers of individuals. This is likely to be a much larger discrepancy, since the same individuals may be recorded several times. A journey from Turkey to Germany, for example, involves an entry into Greece, then a crossing out of the EU into Macedonia and a second crossing of an external EU border into Croatia or Hungary. Nando Sigona (2015) highlighted this practice in a publicized exchange with Frontex, estimating that, if

these figures are interpreted as individuals entering Europe, they may lead to as much as double counting.

Using asylum statistics as a proxy for un-documented entry to the EU is equally problematic. According to Eurostat (2016), in 2015 there were just over 1.3 million claims for asylum registered in the 28 member-states of the EU. Given the widespread fingerprinting of asylum applicants through the EURODAC database, it is more certain that each application was registered by a different individual. Still, there is no record of how these individuals entered the EU, nor how long they had been there before registering an asylum claim, so it would be a mistake to interpret this as the number of people who entered the EU in that year. It is also a mistake to interpret these data historically. The previous peak in asylum applications in the EU occurred in 1992, when just over 672,000 applications were received (Eurostat 2016). This has fueled widespread reports that the EU received double the previous maximum number of asylum applications in 2015. Yet, in 1992, there were only 15 countries in the EU, compared to the current 28. Although most of the 13 newest members receive very few asylum applications, Hungary received the second-highest number after Germany. The 15 states that were members of the EU in 1992 received just over 1 million asylum applications in 2015. This is significantly higher than the 672,000 for 1992, but well short of double the previous peak – in fact it represents an increase of 49 percent.

Each of these statistical measures has been used as if they were much more accurate than they really are. They have also been used in ways which exaggerate the significance of recent movements compared to historical periods. This is certainly not to say that migration is objectively irrelevant, but the nature of the presentation of the movement of people is an important element in how the crisis has been framed. This has informed the regularly updated political response, which is always introduced in terms of changing strategies of migration management. However, these have ultimately drawn attention away from the underlying issues of legitimation at a European level.

The legitimation crisis and the 'European response'

The European Union has not experienced anything approaching the scale of the current refugee situation in Lebanon, or even Turkey or Jordan, since the Second World War. Displacement in Europe during and immediately after the war motivated the construction of the global regime of refugee protection, founded on the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees. There have been other significant arrivals in Europe, notably the 1991 movement from Albania to Italy and Greece, and other displacements across the Western Balkans from 1992 onwards. Although those displacements are far short of movements elsewhere in the world, they were similar to the situation experienced in the EU in 2015. Significantly, the European Union coped quite successfully with these earlier refugee and migration episodes. In 1992, Germany received 438,191 applications for asylum, only marginally fewer than the 476,510 received in 2015. Although some institutions were undoubtedly stretched, there was nothing like the current rhetoric of 'crisis' or developing right-wing activism.

The panicked response to the 2015 'crisis' contrasts significantly with these earlier events. Certainly, nothing so bold as the 1951 Convention has even been discussed. Indeed any mention of the Convention by European policymakers involves suggestions to roll back the protections which it guarantees, and refugee advocates have wisely steered this off the policy agenda. What, then, distinguishes the current legitimation crisis from earlier concerns around mass arrivals? Four possible features of the current European response are apparent:

- the withdrawal of the state from all forms of public provision;

- the broader economic and political crisis experienced in the EU, particularly since 2008;

- the re-imposition of controls at borders within Europe; and

- the change in the nature of migrants' and refugees' journeys to reach EUrope.

Each of these has exacerbated the sense of a crisis of legitimation within the EU and, although the focus on migration has sought to redirect attention from this broader crisis, the continued failure of policy responses has only intensified.

Neoliberalism involves an extension of the role of state institutions in the management of the economy and a simultaneous reduction of state involvement in all forms of social provision (Harvey 2007). These two processes are central to what Habermas (1988) referred to as an economic crisis and a legitimation crisis. They are closely related and help to explain why the 2015 mass arrival has been framed as a crisis, whereas similar events over the last few decades have not. As state institutions responsible for basic services to support new arrivals have failed, citizen activists have frequently stepped in to fill the gap. This has been particularly apparent in countries such as Greece and Italy, which were particularly hard hit by the dramatic reductions in state expenditure associated with the 2008 financial crisis. It has also been the case in Germany, where volunteers have come forward to help with reception activities and language support, and even in the UK where, despite the very small number of arrivals, there has been substantial mobilization to provide support to the few thousand destitute refugees camped outside the Channel ports of Calais and Dunkirk. The provision of services is not the only migration-related activity that state institutions have slowly withdrawn from. The process of border control itself is now very significantly outsourced to private companies providing equipment and services (Andersson 2014). International coordination of border control activities is undertaken by EU agencies, particularly Frontex, but also Europol (Carrera and Guild 2016).

The changing role of EU institutions is the second important contribution to the current legitimation crisis. Over the last few decades the European Union has become much more involved in both the broader management of the economy, through the common market, and the coordination and regulation of associated social provision. The entry into force of the Treaty of Amsterdam in 1999 also significantly extended the role of EU institutions in managing and legislating around border control, and marked the final incor-poration of all legislation related to the Schengen area of free movement into EU treaties. The additional responsibilities of EU institutions became much more apparent during the 2008 financial crisis, which generated widespread resentment of the EU amongst EU citizens, particularly those in the countries the most affected. The limited contact between most European citizens and EU institutions has allowed national governments to avoid responsibility for unpopular decisions, blaming them directly on the EU. This tactic has only exacerbated the legitimacy crisis, fueling an impression of the fading power of national governments whereas, in many cases, the EU has provided national governments with an ideal forum for passing legislation that would otherwise be difficult to pass. This process has been referred to as 'venue shopping', and it is particularly apparent in the field of migration (Guiraudon 2000). In the UK, for example, the current government has repeatedly framed its failure to reduce net migration as a result of the policy of free movement within the EU, failing to highlight that UK citizens are some of the greatest beneficiaries of this policy. This fuels opposition to the EU at the time of the very genuine risk of the first departure of a member-state.[2]

The final two characteristics of the current legitimacy crisis focus more particularly on the changing practices of border control and on the evolving nature of movement itself. Over the last decade or so, analysis of border control has begun to consider the border as a process, rather than as a linear location. Individuals wishing to cross a border must pass through a diffuse array of processes that are physically dispersed and often managed remotely. Yet, at the same time, border walls and fences have become increasingly common as material realities. Recent analysis in *The Economist* (2016) highlighted that 40 countries have built new border walls since the end of the Cold War; 30 of those were constructed since 9/11 and 15 in 2015 alone. Of these latter 15, eight were in Europe. As Reece Jones (2012) has argued, such concentration of often hugely expensive constructions cannot be explained entirely by their often limited effectiveness at deterring crossing. Crawley (this issue) uses

2   The referendum which may result in 'Brexit' is scheduled for 23 June 2016.

the excellent example of the publicity campaign for the new border controls in Hungary, which involves posters printed in Hungarian. This clearly highlights how policies are not designed to address migration or migrants, but to calm the concerns of electorates. They are essentially costly performances of statecraft. Further problems arise when the policies prove ineffective at reducing migration, as they so often do. This heightens the impression that the state is out of control and further exacerbates the legitimacy crisis.

These three developments – the ongoing neoliberal scaling back of the state, the continued impacts of the financial crisis in the EU, and the more performative approach to border control – are all interrelated with developments in the processes of migration themselves. Over the last few decades the geography of migration to and within Europe has changed very considerably (King 2002), and these changes are ongoing, involving new routes and access-points. The growing preponderance of dangerous overland journeys is a significant element of this change. As it has become increasingly difficult, and therefore expensive, to gain access to Europe directly by air without authorization, longer land journeys have developed as an alternative, even before the southern or eastern shores of the Mediterranean are reached. These journeys are typically not linear. They result from a succession of attempts to gain greater safety and security, with often long stops in locations on the way in a characteristic fragmented pattern (Collyer 2012). Fragmented migration involves journeys that are not directly from a point of origin and only appear as journeys to anywhere in particular in retrospect. This more complex geography of migration has significant implications for control and regulation. Individuals are typically not traveling directly from their country of citizenship, so changes in the political and economic conditions in those countries will have limited influence on their further patterns of travel. This new geography of migration has further impacts on any explanation of the crisis.

Explaining the 'crisis': the role of political geography

The observation that geography is central to the current crisis has become commonplace in media discussions. Newspapers have published many maps of access routes and border regions, and journalists and news reporters have repeatedly stated in their dispatches from the field that 'geography is vital' in understanding the unfolding dynamics of migrants' and refugees' constantly shifting routes and border crossings. It is true, of course, that the South and East of Europe have received larger numbers of migrants and refugees than the rest of Europe. This is a banal interpretation of political geography, since it is fairly obvious that migrants and refugees crossing from Turkey or Libya will arrive in large numbers in Greece or Italy. It is also not entirely accurate, since it does not explain why people come in the first place, or why Germany received far more asylum applications than any other member-state in 2015; nor does it account for the astonishing inventiveness of refugees who seek new opportunities whenever more-established opportunities fade. In August 2015, stories began to circulate of Syrian refugees crossing the Russian–Norwegian border. The *Independent* reported that, since border regulations prohibited crossing on foot or as a passenger, 151 individuals crossed on bicycles in the year to August 2015 (*Independent* 31 August 2015). More-substantial interpretations of political geography involve the central geopolitical nature of EU migration governance and the perspectives of relevant migrant and refugee groups. These two points help to highlight the nature of the legitimation crisis.

Both Crawley and Lulle (this issue) argue that the crisis is a geopolitical one rooted in more-fundamental divisions in Europe. This is certainly true but the geopolitical approach applies particularly clearly to strategies of migration governance at EU level, which have traditionally failed. Bojadžijev and Mezzadra (2015) argue that it is a crisis of European migration policies and there is much to substantiate this view. The Dublin Convention, incorporated most recently (2013) into EU legislation as the Dublin III Regulation,[3] is a prime example. Dublin-related legislation was designed to ensure that each asylum-seeker would have his or her claim considered by one member-state, but only one. The Regulation seeks to identify which member-state should hear that claim, drawing on a slightly modified formulation in which

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3   Regulation No. 604/2013 of 26 June 2013.

states bearing the greatest responsibility for an individual's presence on EU territory are obliged to consider the claim. This system has resulted in highly regressive movements of individuals seeking refuge in the North and West of the continent, where arrival is the most difficult, towards the South and East, where there is the least money to pay for an effective response. In an interesting sleight of geopolitical hand, the legislation treats the EU as 28 member-states for the purposes of the eventual location of the refugee but only as a single state for the purposes of complying with the 1951 Convention. Although the Dublin principle of country of first arrival has long been criticized, it is significant that this system finally began to collapse in August 2015, when Germany suspended all returns of Syrians to Greece under the Dublin convention (Dernbach 2015).

There is another way that geography – in its elemental forms of spatial analysis of point, line, and area (cf. Cole and King 1968) – enters into the mechanics of migratory movements and of control over those movements. The Dublin legislation is part of a shift from point to areal forms of migration management that has driven EU migration legislation over the last few decades. Most international migration is regulated through point forms of control, at ports or airports. The increasingly rapid construction of border walls or fences marks a change to a line-based system, where the border itself is reinforced along its entire length. Finally, systems of control have moved to areas, which may be maritime zones – as in the case of the Mediterranean – and extending beyond the EU, as in the discussion of 'partnerships' with neighboring non-EU countries. On the other side of the areal control coin, the combination of Schengen and Dublin seeks to facilitate and regulate movement within the EU. Each of these different systems of point, line, and area has different implications for strategies to control migration and for the EU's relationship with its neighbors. Point is the easiest to manage and this is the form of control that the EU's response in the Mediterranean has taken most recently, through the establishment of 'hotspots' – centers that provide administrative support to new arrivals.

More-individual calculations of geopolitics inform the origins and continued fragmented movements of migrants and refugees. The levels of despair and hopelessness that many people report in relation to their future prospects in their place of origin highlight a particular geopolitics of home. In one of the most powerful testaments to the current situation – Warsan Shire's 2015 poem 'Home' – Shire writes 'no one would leave home/unless home chased you to the shore'. The rich geographical literature on geographies of home (Blunt and Dowling 2006) highlights situations in which the ideal of home is undermined, resulting in displacement. The journey provides an alternative ideal which allows individuals to replace this geopolitics of home with what Erciyes (this issue) refers to as a 'geopolitics of hope'. Hope, for anyone traveling in such hazardous ways, is located in the imagined destination. The processes by which this hope is generated, the implications of the fragmented journeys that it generates, and the consequences for the broader narrative of 'crisis' in Europe are an important focus for research which we explore in this special issue.

What role for analysis? The papers in the special issue

We round off this scene-setting paper by walking readers through the papers which follow: an appropriate metaphor since most of the journeys undertaken by the migrants and refugees themselves are made on foot. Even for the able-bodied, these journeys are made under great duress, in extremes of heat and cold, in snow, wind and rain; they are even more challenging for the lame, the sick, the old and children. The papers provide a series of thematic and geographic snapshots along the trajectories of these often epic journeys. They do not constitute the full story, but from origins in Syria, Afghanistan and Eritrea, through Turkey and Greece, and onward through the Western Balkans to Hungary and, for most, ultimately Germany, the papers provide critical analytical portrayals of some of the steps along the way.

In the paper following this one, **Heaven Crawley** makes a powerful deconstruction of the European response to the so-called 'migration crisis'. She first

enlarges on the key point raised above in this introductory paper, namely that the migration crisis is not really about the numbers of refugees and migrants arriving on the shores of Europe over the past year and more, but is, rather, a crisis of political solidarity, which has been so comprehensively lacking. In short, it is the EU itself which is in crisis due to its failure to find a solution to a humanitarian and organizational challenge which, on the basis of both historical precedent and geographical parallels elsewhere in the world, should be manageable. Surely a European Community of 500 million people, mostly living in wealthy countries, can create the means to accommodate 1 million refugees and migrants – or even 2 or 3 million if the flow continues in the next few years, as seems highly likely? That the failure to do so has been so palpable is due to several factors, according to Crawley. The lack of a common political will across the EU countries is obviously one, and this fracture between East and West within the EU is further analyzed in a later paper by Lulle. Other factors include a lack of regard for the results of research, and a failure to understand the changing nature of the forms, processes and routes of migration. Crawley also points out the unhelpful role of 'cascading border closures' and the way in which EU-level agreement on migration policy is repeatedly stymied by national governments' apparent need to placade their respective electorates and reassure them that they will not be 'overwhelmed' by refugees and migrants 'flooding in' and claiming benefits. Instead, EU money and resources are thrown at the wider strategic issue of controlling the external borders of the European 'fortress'.

The next paper, by **Jade Cemre Erciyes**, focuses on the plight of the 2.5 million Syrians in Turkey and employs the instructive but controversial binary of 'paradise' vs purgatory' to speculate on their current living conditions and their future life. The future is constructed as bi-directional – either a return to the paradise of the peace-restored Syrian homeland (an unlikely scenario at present) or an onward migration to the imagined paradise of Germany or some other North European country. Meantime, they are stuck in the 'purgatory' of Turkey, where they are labeled as 'guests' staying in 'temporary protection centers'. They have limited access to properly paid work and to education, healthcare, and other support systems, and suffer from discrimination and stigmatization. This is the general picture, but Erciyes also reports 'good conditions' in some refugee camps and also some cases of 'well-off' Syrians who have set up cut-price shops.

Our next stop along the migrant trail is the Turkish-Greek border and the dangerous attempts to cross the relatively narrow but often stormy stretches of sea to the nearest Greek islands, especially Lesbos. This island-dotted maritime border at the outer edge of Europe is the subject of the paper by **Ioanna Tsoni**, who mobilizes a range of anthropological and geographical concepts to understand what has been going on in this maritime and insular 'borderscape'. Tsoni sees the migrant and refugee transit across the sometimes calm but often rough and dangerous stretch of sea as a 'rite of passage', not just from one place/country to another but also as a passage from one life to another. Her mobilization of the concept of liminality refers not just to the liminal spaces occupied and transited by the asylum-seekers but also as a life-stage between their traumatized recent past and an aspired-to future. But – and this is her key point – this liminality risks becoming a prevalent, semi-permanent state given the impasse that the migrants have unwittingly entered into: unable to stay, unable to move on, and unable to further their life ambitions, which are often simply to survive and have a better life. Through autoethnography and participant observation on Lesvos, the author is also able to examine the complex interactions between the arriving refugees, the local population, the 'authorities' and their (non-)policies, and the array of disparate volunteers and media personnel who congregated together on the island.

The focus of the world's media on the Turkey-Greece-Balkan route for Syrian and other Middle Eastern refugees aiming for Europe over the past year has taken attention away from the Central Mediterranean route from Libya to Sicily – a much longer and potentially more hazardous sea crossing which has continued to operate, and to claim lives. The paper by **Milena Belloni** looks at this crossing from the perspective of another of the world's major refugee-producing countries, Eritrea. Belloni's paper introduces a range of interlinked actors into the analysis of these mostly

'irregular' migrant journeys and border crossings: not only the migrants/refugees themselves but also their family members who may (or may not) finance the move and the smugglers who facilitate the complex journey from Eritrea through Ethiopia and Sudan to Libya and then on to Italy and perhaps beyond. The result is a complex 'game' of moral pressures, risks and dilemmas, in which the migrants gamble that kinship and emotional solidarity on the one hand, and the fear of smugglers' retributions on the other, will lead their relatives to send money despite their initial refusal to do so. Belloni shows that the successful migrants are those who are willing to take risks and who can mobilize economic resources from their transnational kinship networks by exploiting shared moralities and emotional capital.

Ceri Oeppen then takes us to Afghanistan, one of the major and longest-running source countries for refugees applying for asylum in Europe and elsewhere. Her focus is on so-called 'information campaigns' launched by migrant- and refugee-receiving countries to discourage potential migrants and asylum-seekers from coming. The messages conveyed by such campaigns – Oeppen makes a case study of the 'Rumours About Germany' campaign launched by the German government in Afghanistan – are decidedly duplicitous. Ostensibly they convey a 'realist' message to inform would-be migrants of the physical and financial dangers involved, and hence purport to have a protective, even a humanitarian, function. But they are also, more cynically, a tool of migration control, designed to stop migrants before migration even occurs. And their message is not just intended for migrants; it is also an instrument of appeasement for the German host population, to demonstrate that 'something is being done'. Even more cynically, such a campaign shifts responsibility for the risks of the journey onto Afghans themselves, rather than admitting that these risks derive from the increasingly restrictive border-control regimes of the EU. Moreover, the campaign comes at a time when the field research evidence shows that Afghanistan is becoming less, rather than more, secure.

At the northern end of the Balkan route into Europe stands Slovenia, the subject of the article by **Toby Applegate**, who carried out field observations on the southern, Slovenian-Croatian border and on the northern, Slovenian-Austrian border. Like most of the post-socialist countries of Central and Eastern Europe, Slovenia is ethnically homogenous, nationalistic, and neoliberal in ideology – not great credentials for dealing with the social and humanitarian challenges of migration and asylum. The care and transfer of refugees has brought into sharp relief fundamental questions about Slovenian identity and the country's place in Europe, and Applegate shows how these tensions and ambiguities are played out at the border crossings, where landscapes and performances of control are enacted.

Moving on to Northern Europe and the main destination country for Syrian refugees, **Sophie Hinger** examines the culture of welcome and support that characterizes the German reaction to the 'refugee crisis'. Hinger shows how the celebrated *Willkommenskultur*, articulated at the European and global levels by leader Angela Merkel and resonating down to civil society, local support groups and individuals, was accompanied by episodes of xenophobic violence and protest in some towns and cities. For a time, in summer 2015 and beyond, Merkel's Germany claimed the moral high ground in confronting the refugee emergency, opening the German border to Syrian refugees and thereby suspending the Schengen and Dublin Conventions. In this paper, the empirical analysis focuses on one local example of a welcome initiative in a typical middle-sized German city and the local municipality's setting up of accommodation centers for refugees. At a broader discursive level, Hinger analyzes the dual framing of the recent and current refugee movements into Germany as both a 'humanitarian crisis' that needs to be responded to by collective solidarity and compassion, and as a 'threat' which requires management and control, for instance through policies of dispersal and 'burden-sharing' and the selective deportation of failed asylum cases.

One important effect of EUrope's reaction to the migration and refugee emergency has been to open up a geopolitical schism between what **Aija Lulle** calls 'old' and 'new' Europe – respectively the pre-2014 EU15 and the eight Central and Eastern European

(CEE) countries which joined in 2014. Following Paasi (2015), Lulle utilizes the broad and multi-layered notion of 'independence' to interrogate the specific neoliberal political mentality that has developed in the CEE region, along with a resurgence of ethno-nationalist sentiments. According to Lulle, the CEE countries have 'a long and necessary journey ahead' in terms of their relationship with migrants, refugees, and cultural diversity. The journey is two-pronged. The first challenge is to address and negotiate the reality of their own internal social, cultural and ethnic pluralities, which have been overlooked in their rush to join the 'EU club'. Examples of these pluralities are the position of the former-Soviet-citizen russophones in the Baltic states, and the Roma populations of Hungary and the Czech and Slovak republics. The second challenge, more immediate to the theme of the special issue, is to overcome their seeming inability to show solidarity and empathy for the human suffering of others; it seems that their sharp neoliberal turn has wiped away all consciousness of their socialist past in favour of their inward-looking patriotic independence.

In the final paper, **Daniela DeBono** challenges the notion that the return and deportation of irregular migrants and 'failed' aslyum-seekers constitutes any kind of practical or moral solution to the so-called 'refugee crisis'. Whilst DeBono does not question the legal right of states to send back 'irregularly resident migrants', she describes the labeling of this policy as a 'solution' to the 'crisis' as 'abominable'. First, it is unethical and, second, it can lead states to increase the rate of returns by operating below minimum human rights standards. Further difficulties surround the distinction between forced repatriation and so-called voluntary return, in which the true element of voluntariness is often debatable. Detailed knowledge of the effects of deportation is scarce, but that which does exist, including research by the author on Sweden (DeBono *et al.* 2015), shows that deportation often places deportees in a state of increased vulnerability both materially and in terms of their physical and psychosocial wellbeing. It is, DeBono concludes, 'a biopolitical process of migration management … and embodied state violence'.

The insights offered by the papers collected in this issue give little clue as to the end-game. Despite repeated emergency meetings of EU leaders, there is no sustainable solution in sight. Both the unfolding events, and the refugees and migrants, move around, or get stuck, like an elaborate geopolitical and humanitarian board game in which politics, symbolism and hard bargaining take precedence over the lives of those on the move or halted in makeshift camps on islands and at borders. Pope Francis' 16 April 2016 visit to Lesbos had considerable symbolic and media significance, as did his initiative in giving sanctuary to a few refugee families in the Vatican. But there remain thousands confined by barbed wire within the main detention camp on Lesbos, as well as on other Aegean islands.[4] Another camp of 11,000 refugees-going-nowhere has emerged on the Greek-Macedonian border at Idomeni. Nowadays, Lesbos is no longer the theater of water-borne drama that it was in recent memory. Instead two other, wider processes have taken over. First, a kind of 'grand bargain' (but in reality more like a trade in the movement of bodies) has been struck between the EU and Turkey. Turkey receives 6 billion euros of aid to deliver humanitarian assistance to the 2.7 million Syrian refugees in that country, in return for Turkey's commitment to control the onward flow of refugees to Greece and, perhaps more controversially, to take back from Greece those who are deemed irregular migrants. This ruling, which came into force on 20 March 2016, was greeted by protests from migrants on the Aegean islands who declared that 'We'd rather die than go back to Turkey'.[5] The other side of the bargain, visa relaxation for Turks to travel to the Schengen area, is still being hedged and the latest news chronicles a stand-off on this crucial issue.[6] Meanwhile, the second process reactivates itself: as Lesbos and the Western Balkan route closes down, migrants and smugglers reactivate the Libyan route to Sicily and Malta as the Mediterranean waters, never fully reliable, resume their early-summer calmer period.

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4   See the reports by Helena Smith in the *Guardian*, 8 April 2016, p. 17 and the *Observer*, 3 April 2016, p. 21 and 10 April 2016, p. 27.

5   Helena Smith in the *Guardian*, 8 April 2016, p. 17.

6   See Peter Kingsley's extensive report in the *Observer*, 24 April 2016, p. 21.

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