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Does crisis matter for European migration governance? A Framework Paper

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MAGYC

Migration Governance and Asylum Crises

Does crisis matter for
European migration
governance?
A Framework Paper

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

Website: www.themagycproject.com



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MAGYC Working Paper

Abstract

This analytical framework aims to study the ways in which European migration governance has been shaped by a 'crisis' discourse. The European Union witnessed an exponential increase in asylum claims in 2015 – registering over 1.2 million, more than double from the previous year. This upsurge was commonly categorised by political actors as a “migration crisis”, embedding what is considered to be an appropriate response in terms of governing solutions. Work Package 3 in this project and a rich literature explore the ways in which political and policy actors have constructed a crisis discourse on migration. Much less is known about the ways in which this crisis discourse has reconfigured European migration governance. To what extent has crisis discourse led to the mobilisation of new actors and new forms of cooperation?

The field for our study comprises three cases of migration governance (economic, bureaucratic and political) expressive of the way in which crisis interacts with a migration assemblage. The case of the economic rationality is premised on the need to bolster development aid to dissuade migrants from leaving. Here we focus on the implementation of the EU's Emergency Trust Fund for Africa, involving German, French and Spanish national development aid agencies, security professionals, funding mechanisms, training manuals, and local infrastructure; second, the bureaucratic rationality calls for governing interventions to apply law and order, to identify legal from illegal migrants and to punish smugglers. We focus on the case of search and rescue in the Mediterranean. The assemblage constituents involve the EU border agency Frontex, NGOs, Libyan lifeguards, smugglers, drones, boats, the sea, stormy weather and migrant bodies (both dead and alive); lastly, the political rationality is centred on the premise that national sovereignty must be protected by limiting multilateral cooperation. Here we focus on the EU relocation and disembarkation mechanisms. On the face of it these rationalities pursue different solutions – developmental, humanitarian and security, and include diverse actors and practices – yet we posit that these rationalities and their component parts (both human and nonhuman) are constitutive of a migration assemblage which is both revealed and reconfigured by the “migration crisis”.

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Introduction

In 2015, the European Union (EU) witnessed an exponential increase in asylum claims – registering over 1.2 million, more than double from the previous year. This upsurge was commonly categorised as a “migration crisis” and as such it is considered to have generated enduring effects on current migration governance *configurations* notably in the Mediterranean (Schmoll et al 2015). Scholarly discussions have been intense on whether or not the “crisis” has been a “migration crisis” building upon constructivist insights and the sociology of political crises (Blanchard & Rodier 2016, Dobry 1987; Lebow 1981). The “crisis” language has had different meanings to and was used differently by different actors, as shown in WP3 framework paper. Some even declared that there was no migration crisis as such, and that Europe was rather experiencing a crisis of migration governance (Akoka et al 2017, Gemenne 2016). The literature illuminating the constructed nature of the ‘migration crisis’ is already rich and it notably examines the ways in which the media, as well as political and policy actors have produced such a crisis discourse on migration¹. Much less is known about the ways in which this crisis discourses and policy outputs deriving from the crisis rhetoric have reconfigured European migration governance. This framework paper addresses migration governing practices and how they have changed, intensified, mutated, continued or ceased in the context of the recent European political crisis around large inflows of asylum seekers and migrants between 2011 and 2017 commonly called the “migration crisis”. The focus of our research asks what the crisis has done to European migration governance. Have crisis discourses led to the mobilisation of new actors and new forms of cooperation? How has the crisis shaped European migration governing interventions?

The field for our study comprises three areas of migration governance which are approached as three types of rationalities corresponding to three realms of policy-making: for the purpose of this paper, we thus analyse economic,

¹ Work Package 3 Framework paper offers thorough discussion of the use of the terminology “migration crisis.”

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bureaucratic and political rationalities as expressive of the ways in which “crisis” interacts with the migration assemblage. The economic rationality is premised on the need to bolster development aid to dissuade migrants from leaving. Here we focus on the implementation of the EU’s Emergency Trust Fund for Africa, involving German, French and Spanish national development aid agencies, security professionals, funding mechanisms, training manuals, and local infrastructure. The bureaucratic rationality calls for regulatory interventions in line with law and order, notably to identify regular from irregular migrants and to criminalise smugglers. We focus on the case of search and rescue in the Mediterranean. The assemblage constituents involve the EU border agency Frontex, NGOs, Libyan lifeguards, smugglers, civil society actors, drones, boats, islands, the sea, stormy weather and migrant bodies (both dead and alive). Lastly, the political rationality is centred on the premise that national sovereignty must be sanctuarised within limited multilateral cooperation. Here we focus on the EU disembarkation and relocation mechanisms. These rationalities pursue different solutions – developmental, humanitarian and security, and include diverse actors and practices – yet we posit that these rationalities and their component parts (both human and nonhuman) are constitutive of a migration assemblage. We propose that each of these cases are expressive of the way in which crisis interacts with a migration assemblage.

We draw on assemblage thinking² to investigate these cases that allow to answer our research question. Assemblage research is associated with the practice turn³ which gained visibility in international relations in the early 2000s

² We draw on Savage’s definition namely “assemblages represent a gathering together of political imaginations, rationalities, technologies, infrastructures and agents towards steering individuals and groups in particular directions” (Savage 2008, 10).

³ As a brief reminder, the practice turn in political science, international relations and more broadly in social sciences seeks to scale down observations on social relations and focus on “what practitioners do, [practice turners] zoom in on the quotidian unfolding of international life and analyze the ongoing accomplishments that,

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(Adler-Nissen 2013; Adler and Pouliot 2011; Buegar and Gadinger 2014; Neumann and Sending 2010; Pouliot 2008) and, a decade later, in migration studies (Côté-Boucher, Infantino and Salter 2014, Frowd 2018, El Qadim 2018). The practice perspective conceives ordinary practices as constitutive of governance (Adler and Pouliot, 2011, pp. 6–7). There is a growing interest for assemblage theory within the practice turn literature (Abrahamsen and Williams, 2011; Bachmann et al., 2014, Bueger 2018) and more specifically for the study of migration governance (Frowd 2018, Tazzioli 2019).

Our research is situated in this growing scholarship. Vukov and Sheller (2013) have offered an analysis of surveillance assemblages arguing that the fit of an assemblage framework crucially allows for a concern for the agentic nature of technology. Social problems are understood as the outcome of an interactive relationship between human and non-human components and to omit the non-human is to inhibit a full understanding of what is going on in a given context. Allen and Vollmer's (2018) e-border security assemblage unpack human relation with non-human technologies and their subordination to human agency in the form of discretionary behaviour. They conclude that their study contributes to assemblage theory by focusing attention on agents' perceptions and practices as manifestations of how they relate and link the conditions and objects present in every assemblage. Jagarnathsingh's study (2019) uses an assemblage approach to analyse a complexity of state actants, private actants and foreign interference involved in bordering in Lebanon. Martino Riveglio (2019) deploys assemblage thinking to make sense of contradictory EU judgments on exclusion and inclusion of migrants in the southern Mediterranean.

In contrast to hypothetico-deductive methods, an assemblage approach is based on in depth, inductive inquiry with the aim of generating thick descriptions of what is going on. In particular, we have identified three

put together, constitute the 'big picture' of world politics" (Adler & Pouliot, 2011, p. 1) and do so by using participant observation, interviews, and discourse analysis as tools of investigation.

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strengths of assemblage research that fit the purpose of our study: i) it is well suited to handling complexity; ii) it foregrounds connections, relationships and associations; iii) it captures fluidity, movement and change.

Understanding migration governance in times of crisis

An exploration of European migration crisis governance should not be read as governance which is driven by crisis simply as a conscious idea. Rather, crisis is also produced *through* governance. Brassett and Vaughan-Williams (2012, 19) propose that 'crisis is governance', by which they mean that the ways in which actors designate an event or phenomenon as a crisis, embeds as common sense what is considered to be an appropriate response. In this respect Pouliot (2008) considers that "most of what people do in world politics is not the result of rational decisions (as realists and neoliberal institutionalists claim), nor simply of norm-following (as strands of constructivism contend), but of routinized practices and know-how that makes the action to be done appear common-sense" (in Bourbeau 2017, 171).

The securitisation approach is useful (Buzan et al 1998) as it points towards the importance of enunciation by treating security as a speech act (Austin 1962), that is to say it frames a given issue as deserving of special attention due to an existential threat that compels us to react quickly – with urgency- and exceptional measures often beyond legality and the realm of normal politics. An issue is only securitised if the frame is accepted by an audience as such. Quite paradoxically, crisis is often understood as a sudden break from routines but its legacy can endure in incremental and cumulative practices. For instance, this is exemplified in the constantly repeated affirmation and bureaucratic determination of tipping points by which the number of migrants is said to destabilise social cohesion. The designation of crisis may also be entwined with a bureaucratic logic of self-serving organisations which aspire to grow their resources, legitimacy and authority (Barnett and Finnemore 1999).

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Crisis, then, is generative of certain kinds of governing interventions and non-interventions. Firstly, crisis is implicitly framed as exceptional. Crisis evokes emergency and the image of a one-off catastrophe “that requires sacrifices in order to surmount it” (Edelman 1977, 44). Secondly, declaring an event or phenomenon as ‘crisis’ also entails a moral judgement. Crisis tells the audience that a particular event is “not normal” and is “bad” (Lindley 2014, 12); Thirdly, crisis summons ‘quick fixes’ and *ad hoc* arrangements which inhibit engagement with structural conditions, treating crisis as a depoliticised phenomenon (Jeandesboz and Pallister Wilkins 2014). Fourthly, as Lindley (2014, 1) proposes “there is a deep well of sedentarist thinking, which in some senses frames migration as crisis, and staying put as the natural, desirable human condition”. Migration as crisis has been discussed in WorkPackage 3 framework paper and has generated debates among social theorists (Sassen, 2015) and political philosophers (Benhabib, 2018). To understand the impact of such broad worldviews on policy outputs, we found the notion of “punctuated equilibrium useful to understand what crisis does to migration governance: Baumgartner and Jones (1993) advanced the notion of ‘punctuated equilibrium’ to express a theory of institutional change and *status quo*. Change is usually slow and incremental because institutional cultures are embedded and ‘stuck’ by nature. The equilibrium that comes of this can be punctuated by moments of radical change, prompted by constructed tipping points or growing public alarm. Institutional stickiness promises a line of inquiry into the tenacity of sedentarialist thinking and the policy outputs that derive from it.

Although ‘crisis’ seemingly evokes discontinuity from the past and ‘exceptional’ actions, it seems that for the large part, the EU responses to the declared migration crisis built upon pre-existing cognitive frames and routine practices (Dobry 1987; Jeandesboz and Pallister-Wilkins 2016). The security paradigm which sees migration as a problem or threat was not created by the crisis narrative (Bigo, 2001). A containment model (Agier 2008, Lavenex, 2006) has driven EU diplomacy with ‘partner’ countries and a sedentary bias which

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sees migrants as better off “at home” has consistently driven migration governance over the last few decades (Guiraudon 2017). It seems that the crisis offers an opportunity to trace back old techniques of governing but with more density, enthusiasm and players. But have the players in European migration crisis governance changed? Has the cartography of actors and their interaction been transformed through crisis?

The governance turn: multiple actors, multiple levels, de/politicizing moves?

Understanding the impact of crisis on migration governance requires an exploration of the notion of governance which emerged as a way to describe social relations and political configurations of state and non-state actors in given organisations or sectors of public life. Since the 1990s a governance turn in social sciences was seen as a response to economic globalisation and neoliberal reforms (Kooiman 1993) putting forth the idea of public private partnerships as new configurations of the polity. The governance literature contends that over the last three decades societies have become increasingly complex – this complexity requires different forms of rule than ‘government’ which amounts to the authoritative power of formal institutions of the state and the monopoly they have over legitimate coercion (Stoker 2018). Traditional governmental goals such as health, education or public security can no longer be accomplished by the centre alone but require “concertation, interaction, networking, piloting and steering in networked configurations” (Walters 2004, 29) of state and non-state actors. More specifically in relation to migration, Hollifield (2011) proposes that global migration governance has the potential to turn migration into a global public good so that all states would benefit from its existence irrespective of their contribution. In practice, power asymmetries between the global north and the global south complicate this potential. Governance both seeks to describe and contributes to erosion of national sovereignty (Prakash and Hart 1999). Indeed, for scholars of governance, a ‘new reality’ requires to move the focus of attention towards the governing contributions of non-state actors and “non-hierarchical modes of governing”

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(Risse 2011, Borzel and Risse 2010). What has been famously conceptualised as “governance without government” (Rosenau and Czempiel 1992) replacing it with “new modes of governance” (Rosenau 2000).

Governance is frequently taken to have a self-evident clarity and analytical efficacy. But as Pierre and Peters (2000, 7) write: “the concept of governance is notoriously slippery; it is frequently used among both social scientists and practitioners without a definition all agree on”. For Rosenau (1995, 15), “governance... encompasses the activities of governments, but it also includes the many other channels through which ‘commands’ flow in the form of goals framed, directives issues, and policies pursued”. Czempiel (1992, 250) defines governance as “the capacity to get things done without the legal competence to command that they be done. Where governments... can distribute values authoritatively, governance can distribute them in a way which is not authoritative but equally effective”. More recent definitions include Le Galès (2014, 301) who defines governance as “a set of institutions, networks, legal and regulatory frameworks, norms, political and social practices, involving public and private actors that contribute to the stability of a society, of a political regime, to its orientation, its capacity to rule and govern, to provide services and ensure legitimacy” or Guzzini and Neuman (2012, 6) who define governance as “the provision of order where the provision can be based on steering capacity, and/or (informal) rule... it looks at the way that order defines and realises the common good or public interest”. What these definitions appear to have in common is a normative direction in which governance is seen to be pragmatic, politically neutral, but goal or efficacy oriented. But beyond these claims to neutrality and depoliticization, governance is a notion loaded with political objectives: maintaining an order and a *status quo*, ensuring legitimacy to rulers and their non-state delegates.

In the context of the EU, multi-level governance (MLG) has become extremely fashionable since the 1990s (Stubbs 2015). The original approach by Hooghe and Marks (2001) was conceptualised as a research tool to take account of the interactions of actors and scales of governance, involving both state and

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non-state involved in European integration. The delegation of European migration governance to a whole host of authorities away from the exclusive domain of the state and its agents to a range of private, local, and transnational organisations (Guiraudon and Lahav 2000; Lavenex 2016) and even to migrants themselves has always been central to the EU's migration policy. MLG attempts to map and understand this crowded terrain. Although there is a certain variation of interpretation over time and amongst scholars in MLG, Caponio and Jones Correa (2018) summarise three basic principles which they hold to be shared among scholars: "(1) the involvement of different levels of government, i.e. the multilevel aspect; (2) the involvement of nongovernmental actors at different governmental levels and (3) the emergence of complex, heterogeneous, and non-hierarchical networks among autonomous and yet interdependent actors". According to the MLG approach, decision making takes place within "complex overlapping networks" (Bache and Flinders 2004, 197). Some have suggested that this has been at the price of transparent and democratic processes (Pierre and Peters 2005). Guiraudon (2000) proposes the notion of venue shopping to refer to the way in which political actors strive to strengthen migration controls through seeking alternative venues for policy making, particularly through the EU level, in a bid to circumvent domestic obstacles (less juridical constraint or room for opposition from other ministries). Critical scholars however have surfaced the political dimension of "migration management" and the recent crisis has unveiled the points of tension and contention despite its depoliticised discourses and technical rhetoric (Geiger & Pécoud, 2010, Düvell 2014).

In policy discourses and expertise in the European Union, MLG has come to be a political or normative project, an ideal policy toolkit rather than a robust research notion. Indeed, the European Union's commitment to MLG is discussed in some literature as 'best' governance. As Stubbs (2015, 69) writes "The slippage from seeking to understand how multi-level governance works to seeking to judge normatively how well multi-level governance works is highly pronounced in the literature". Is MLG a means for the EU to promote its own

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governing model? In this relation what is striking among definitions of (multilevel) governance in much of the literature is a lack of the consideration of power and agency. There is indeed limited examination of power relations across the components of MLG which is presented as a rule without politics and centralised power. Instead it is held to be about process, it is seen to be a progressive and smart force, which favours persuasion and concertation over domination. Walters (2004) aptly notes the difficulties in contesting governance. Its enemies are not political ideologies (communism versus capitalism) but supposedly non-political forces such as corruption, disorder and “bad governance”. Critical approaches emphasise the need to analyse the dispersed, capillary nature of power through a plurality of “sites of government” (Dean 2000; Joseph 2014, Merlingen 2011). Unlike MLG scholars, they do not treat diffuse power as less state, rather more indirect state interventions. The delegation of what has often traditionally been considered the state’s domain to self-proclaimed non-political authorities (eg international organisations) is often justified on the basis of their expertise (Boswell 2009) and judgement to manage populations (Rose and Miller 2008). As such they have grown considerable power through their position in the domain of migration governance.

The example of conflicting policy levels in migration governance illustrates the centrality of power in governing mechanisms: the recent case of solidarity from Barcelona and Palermo in the case of Aquarius illustrate such tensions. While the Italian government refused disembarkation of this boat carrying nearly fifty migrants, keeping them trapped on board for weeks, the mayors of Palermo and Barcelona pushed a migrant friendly, rights-based case. In the end the Barcelona authorities persuaded central government to allow disembarkation in Spain. Such tensions can be understood through what Oomen (2019) describes as the local turn in migration governance whereby city authorities “decouple” from national authorities in favour of welcoming migrants. Decoupling and recoupling allows to capture the dynamics of contestation to

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national government and how distributed governance should be understood, inviting us to consider for alternative frames of migration governance.

While the governance literature is focused on problem-solving, more critical approaches shift their focus to problematisation as integral to governing interventions. In so far as this approach has a concern for how problems are assembled, it has affinities with assemblage theory. Building on insights from the governance and multilevel governance literature as well as more critical approaches, in order to generate light on reconfigurations in 'crisis' and migration governance our analytical framework takes off from assemblage theory.

Governance and assemblage thinking

There is no fixed theoretical perspective or research methodology underpinning assemblage theory (Curtis & Acuto 2014) but there are three characteristics in common, namely the conception of continual flux – components are always in a state of becoming; its turn to relationalism, that is, its concern for how assemblages are assembled through a network of relations (Curtis & Acuto 2014) and a commitment to practice based inquiry that examines "labours of assembly". Assemblage theory is interested in the effects of relationality because they tell us what is going on in a given context through an examination of the links, connections, alliances, authority structures, partnerships, policy dissemination and language in use. In symbolic interactionist terms this is akin to "the interaction order" (Goffman 1974) though relationality is not staged like a still theatrical tableau, it is always on the move. Research questions might include what partnerships are becoming (with humans and non-humans)? How are they configured relationally and with what effect? Where are the fault lines? What possibility for the future do they carry?

Assemblage theory, originated by Deleuze and Guattari (1980) offers a provisional tool (Muller.2015) for holistically researching a constellation of components such as humans, non-humans, discourse, language and policy

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that are held to articulate with each other for a strategic purpose. These elements are not seen to be stable and any one of them could disappear or be replaced, such that the assemblage might fall away or reconfigure into a different one. Indeed, all policies will eventually disappear or change form (McFarlen and Anderson 2011). Beneath an apparent order is an unstable and shifting configuration of elements on the move: “assemblages are provisional and contingent arrangements. The connections between their parts are not guaranteed. Bits are prone to flying off at unforeseeable moments and at unpredictable tangents” (Walters 2009, 132). Assemblage research is particularly concerned with processes and relationality.

Deleuze and Guattari (1980) critique conventional sociological readings of power relations for their inability to account for power disruptions to hierarchies and the disturbance of predictive capacity. They reject the search for hierarchies (which they characterise as arborescent) in favour of a rhizomatic ways of seeing. A rhizome such as that of ginger has shoots spread horizontally, separate yet symbiotically interconnected. Power is distributed, ubiquitous, moving and sometimes subversive. Humans can add to their given scripts in surprising ways such as the British and German soldiers who climbed out of their trenches to play football before returning to battle. The rhizome metaphor can capture unpredictable, different experiences (shoots) of this kind without reducing any one of them to a determinant of the others.

Territorialisation is a process of bringing components together within the assemblage. For instance, Allen and Volmar (2014) define the components of an e-borders assemblage as comprising cameras, trackers, monitoring, border police, policy statements and the surveilled. Deterritorialization is about components retreating or disconnecting and as such they are part of reterritorialization which occurs at the same time as something else happens. Savage (2018, 6) describes these movements: ‘When policy components are assembled in a new context, the components themselves will be contoured by numerous context-dependent factors (i.e., specific conditions of possibility) which will render the components place specific and result in new relations

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being established and maintained between these components and existing components in the new environment". This transformation trajectory has some resonance with the notion of de/recoupling although in the case of de/re-territorialisation change is an integral part of governing configurations whereas decoupling accounts for particular cases such as the one described above.

Some of our discussion centres on EU distancing moves both within Europe and third countries. For instance, the EU Africa Emergency Trust Fund could be seen as an instance of deterritorialization from Europe to non-European countries. The extension of migration governance to the sphere of development aid is an instance of reterritorialization. In researching the effects of these movements, according to Dobry (1987), in non-emergency contexts the independence of sectors is assured by a general ethos of non interference. At times of crisis, however, there is often a turn to multi sectoral solutions. This significantly reduces the independent authority of each sector, in what Dobry calls a de-sectorization of social relations. At the same time, actors will adjust their vision and the means by which it will be reached. We discuss this through the case of the migration-development nexus which offers an example of de-sectorization or in the language of assemblage de-territorialisation.

Recent developments with respect to the migration-development nexus (Lavenex and Kunz 2008) offers an illustration of de-sectorization. Since 2015, migration control objectives have been extended into the field of development aid. The creation of emergency funding mechanisms, through the European Emergency Trust Fund for Africa marks a turn towards a linkage between migration control and development aid. How has this move engaged new actors in migration governance (e.g. national development agencies) and new spatial configurations (e.g. "third countries")?

In a move to relocate and reassign responsibility for governing migration, emergency mechanisms were introduced that were designed to dissuade migration through the deployment of development aid. It was held that migrants need not put their lives at risk by attempting dangerous border crossings but could be persuaded to stay in their country or region of origin.

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The strength of the influence of the discourse on crisis in 2015 contributed to the creation of the EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa (EUTF) following the Valletta summit of African and European leaders. Its declared aim was to: “to promote stability in partner countries and to address in a single instrument the root causes of migration”. For the first time the European Commission brought together EU funding channels for: external relations; home affairs; development cooperation; humanitarian aid; and neighbourhood policy. The EUTF paved the way for the Directorate for Home Affairs to hold an increasingly strong presence in the field of European development aid, notably through an increasing emphasis for projects on ‘return and reintegration’ of migrants and ‘counter-smuggling’.

IOs, notably the IOM, UNHCR and the ICMPD grew exponentially in terms of their funding and authority since 2015. Indeed, the IOM is the top beneficiary of the European Emergency Trust Fund for Africa. There are four key observations to make about the delegation of European migration governance to international organisations: firstly, IO interventions can be seen as not only a response to the ‘crises’ but also a constitutive part of it (Fine and Pécoud 2018). On the one hand organisations like the IOM, through their ‘holistic framework’, call for humanitarian assistance to vulnerable migrants at sea, but on the other hand, they support border security regimes which impel migrants to resort to dangerous crossings to Europe (Geiger and Pécoud 2012). Thus, they are saving migrants within a containment regime that prevents migrants from reaching the EU safely (Cuttita 2015). IOs participate in this regime by variously drawing upon security, development, humanitarianism or rights-based imperatives that together form a ‘mélange des genres’ (Pécoud 2018). Secondly, this mélange pulls interventions in different and sometimes contradictory directions, as with the defining of migrants as both victim and threat; thirdly, they position themselves as neutral experts, operating in a professional, depoliticised realm (Petiteville 2017). Fourthly, they have become a reproductive migration management or ‘illegality industry’ (Andersson 2015). To sustain themselves and prove their usefulness, these agencies are invested in a migration ‘problem’ or ‘emergency’, in supporting calls for

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change and increased international cooperation. They are important actors in the migration assemblage.

Three instances for the study of migration governance in crisis

Inherent in the framing of crisis is the suggestion that it carries with it a given solution for migration governance. The following cases are key parts of the migration assemblage: i) an economic rationality according to which development aid should improve conditions in countries of origin so that prospective migrants do not feel impelled to leave; ii) a bureaucratic rationality according to which governance must identify, dissuade and expel illegal migrants, apply the law and punish smugglers ; iii) a political rationality according to which national sovereignty must be protected by limiting multilateral cooperation and strengthening border security. An exploration of such instances of migration governance in crisis allows for an examination of how the actors, policies and practices emerged, how they are held together and what possibilities for the future they suggest.

The economic rationality

The economic rationality– otherwise known as the root causes narrative - is premised on the idea that most migration to Europe is driven by economic motivations and consequentially more economic opportunities in countries of origin will lead to less migration. EU policies associated with such a narrative, like the European Emergency Trust Fund for Africa, aim to reduce incentives for migration through development initiatives. However, evidence clearly demonstrates that development initiatives which raise capabilities and aspirations has the unintended effect of encouraging migration (Long 2001 and Van Hear, Bakewell and Long 2018). The question then is why has this economic root causes narrative become so embedded in a European migration funding mechanism when its approach is misaligned with the evidence on migration drivers. Perhaps, the root causes narrative (much like other 'emergency' interventions) has a performative function, serving as a kind of 'spectacle' (Andreas 2000, de Genova 2013, Düvell 2012) of control whereby 'border control efforts are not only actions (a mean to a stated

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instrumental end) but also gestures that communicate meaning. Thus, the root causes narrative may function as a kind of “ceremonial practice”, not only a means to an end but an end in itself (Andreas 2000, 11). Might policy makers and politicians be sending a subliminal message to the European public that they are being active and dealing with the problem ‘elsewhere’? Thus, are migration controls in the name of emergency and exceptionalism more about performance than about material impact in stemming unwanted migration flows?

Inherent in the framing of crisis is the suggestion that it carries with it a given solution. Thus, a solution proposed with respect to economic framing is the delegation to non-European countries to deal with the ‘migration crisis’. This has potentially given more leverage to countries of ‘origin’ and ‘transit’ – what some have referred to as a weaponization of migration (Greenhill 2010) whereby non-EU countries use migration diplomacy (Adamson and Tsourapas 2019) as a bargaining chip to obtain more resources (for example aid) or better cooperation deal (for instance on trade or energy). For example, Niger has become the biggest per capita recipient of EU development aid in the world due to its active role stopping onward migration towards Europe. The principle of providing aid in return for reform is long established within the framework of the EU’s neighbourhood policy (ENP). Since the Valetta Summit on Migration in 2015 as a response to ‘crisis’, conditionality and the principle of providing European aid in return for support on migration control has increasingly determined European relationships in African and the Middle East and contributed to desectorization of European migration governance.

Bureaucratic rationality

Bureaucratic rationality presents the migrant crisis in terms of respect for law and order. Thus, migrant flows are to be reduced by the strict application of law separating the *legal* from the *illegal* migrant. An interesting case for study is the bureaucratic framing of migrant deaths at sea, as the unavoidable consequence of legal disorder. States are pivotal for the construction of the legal, humanitarian space (Fassin 2005, Walters 2010). That is to say they create

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the conditions for humanitarian organisations to act, but they also determine (to a large extent this is often contested) the limits of what is considered humanitarian. Smugglers are a case in point; they are not seen as possible humanitarian actors supporting desperate individuals fleeing warzones; rather they are all seen as criminals infringing on the sovereign claims of European states. The humanitarian crises that comprises migrant deaths is then held to be due to unscrupulous, illegal smugglers. According to this narrative if we want to reduce migrant deaths, we need to eradicate smugglers and enforce the law. The ways in which European migration governance render asylum seeking a question of life and death and conditional on embarking on dangerous journeys and breaking the law is concealed from view. It is not only migrant crossings which are illegalised (Bauder 2014) but also humanitarian assistance.

The pull factor narrative frames NGOs as smugglers, despite the fact that there is no evidence on the link between NGO presence and migrant departures. Weather conditions are perhaps far more culpable than NGOs. The criminalisation of NGO assistance towards migrants predates the crisis but it is worth examining whether since 2016 there has been an increase whereby NGOs are framed as smugglers. Arguably, then, migration governance in the name of crisis management has considerably redefined the limits of humanitarianism. A tension is at play whereby on the one hand humanitarian reasoning positions migrants in the Mediterranean as victim and on the other exposes them to security reason, positioning them as threat (Fassin 2005). Increasingly, policies of search and rescue disengagement reconfigure the migrant from victim to “suspect-victim” (Basaran 2015, 59). ‘Research evidence suggests that smuggling is often more improvised and embedded in social relations within migration networks than the image of exploitative and ruthless criminal gangs would suggest’ (Geddes 2018, 3)

The humanitarian crisis in the Mediterranean initially led to engagement, particularly from the Italian government through its search and rescue operation, Mare Nostrum. Yet Italian and European search and rescue

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operations have over the last five years been dismantled. Most recently sea vessels have been replaced with drones. For instance, these surveillance drones are flying over waters off Libya waters, where the EU has not carried out rescues since August 2018. This enables EU states to evade their legal commitment to saving lives at sea; the legal obligation to help someone in distress does not apply to an unmanned aerial vehicle. In parallel to a growing reliance on machines, the Commission and member states increasingly strive to delegate search and rescue to third countries, through funding, training, equipment to countries such as Libya, Turkey and Morocco.

Is part of the ability to “let migrants die” connected to how migration policies are carried out? In his analysis of bureaucratic rationality, Bauman (1989) draws attention to two processes which may help us to understand this dynamic: 1) Mediating policies through chain of disassociated actors and the imperative of a cost benefit rationale; 2) Making the victims physically invisible – governing migration and borders at greater distances from European territories. The first, mediating action, relates to how each link in a long chain of events allows the persons on one end to distance themselves from the final outcome. For Bauman, in a rationalized organization, each person gives an order and takes an order, thus someone else carries out your command, and what you do is a result of someone else's decision. In the case of migration in the Mediterranean we are not suggesting that this is an intended strategy but a possible effect of migration policies. Is there a covert acceptance that a few lives can be lost to ensure dissuasion and a reduction of migrant arrivals in Europe? The second process, making the victims invisible, refers to the physical process of making people hard to see as people. Externalisation ensures that governing practices operate at greater distances, from European territories and increasingly in ‘transit’ and ‘sending’ countries. Migrants deaths in the Sahara Desert are much less visible for Europeans than they are in the Mediterranean.

Political rationality

The third political rationality presents the migration crisis as necessitating the assurance of absolute sovereignty and has led to a retreat from

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Europeanisation. Accordingly, any cooperation (e.g. European, international) for governing migration should be limited. Thus, again this commitment to absolute sovereignty contributes to the shaping of the definition of governing solutions - in this case the quest to avoid multilateral entanglement.

Further, it is worth examining whether the frame of sovereignty limits “global governance” initiatives. Notably, the Global Compact, launched by the UN in 2018 is a normative document which set out 23 objectives about “good migration governance” grounded in values of state sovereignty, responsibility sharing, anti-discrimination, and human rights. It is both a marker of migration becoming increasingly represented as a legitimate object of ‘global governance’ and at the same time this move remains inherently fragile and subject to boycotting. Some ten states have taken the United States’ lead and pulled out of the pact (Australia, Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Israel, Poland, Slovakia, and Switzerland). Their main objection is that the pact threatens their sovereignty and ability to decide their own migration policy. At first sight this objection seems surprising; after all, the pact is legally non-binding and seeks to reaffirm the sovereign right of States to determine their national migration policy. Arguably, as we have discussed with the root causes narrative, the withdrawal of states from the Compact can function as a form of spectacle or impression management for domestic audiences sold on nativist rhetoric about protecting their presumed sovereign integrity. That is to say, these states seemed less concerned about the material impact of the pact on their policies and more on the symbolic function of withdrawing to reaffirm the importance of states’ borders. This manifestation of anxiety about sovereignty is particularly present in relatively young states (such as countries from the former Soviet bloc), states with a tradition of neutrality (Austria and Switzerland), and political traditions that value their “splendid isolation”, their insularity (the present US, Australia) and their commitment to monoculturalism. Thus, it seems that the resistance to the Compact is not simply fuelled by the far right but is also about ideals of absolute sovereignty across

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the political spectrum. Is fear of the Compact not only about fear of migration but also about resistance to multilateralism?

The perceived migration crisis has fuelled many instances of resistance to Europeanisation. Notably, in 2015 the European Commission proposed a temporary relocation mechanism that met with considerable resistance, particularly from eastern European countries. The crisis has given rise to surprising coalitions of actors, such as the Salvini led Italian government, which calls for more European 'solidarity' and the Visegrad countries which refuse to participate in any kind of European 'solidarity mechanism'. The post 'crisis' context surfaces the difficulties of unity across member states of which the emergence of 'coalitions of the willing' is a symptom. In a context in which rescue and disembarkation crisis led to the semi permanency of 'emergency', ad hoc measures in which member states would quarrel over which country will open its ports leaving migrants on ships for extended periods in a state of limbo, four propositions for coalitions of good willing states emerged in 2019. The attempts to create a coalition of the good willing to respond to this fresh emergency attracted uneven support across member states and weak implementation.

As indicated, we know less about whether a crisis imaginary or imaginaries among politicians, policy makers, civil society and media still shapes and sustains European governing interventions. There is also an emerging scholarship which stresses a connection between migrant deaths and migration policies, particularly since the 2015 'crisis'. What we know less about in these instances is the question of agency through associations driving this. Our focus on the above three cases– economic, bureaucratic and political - brings together through strategic relations diverse things, actors and institutions which together have the potential to offer insight into the ways in which governance is shaped through crisis. Assemblage research has the capacity to address complex settings, to foreground agency through associations and networks and to include non-human actants in its analysis. It also has an overriding interest in change as continually mutating. These research

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capacities align with the direction of inquiry in the cases and with our broad research question below.

Defining a research agenda

Research question

To what extent has “crisis” shaped European migration governing interventions?

Broadly, our research question implies looking for links between crisis as a legitimising rationale, and governing interventions. Can we observe movement, mutation, transformation and intensification among actors and practices involved in the ways in which migration is governed in particular spaces and times?

The field

The field for our study comprises three cases of migration governance (economic, bureaucratic and political). We draw on ‘assemblage thinking’ to shape when, where and how we look within and across these cases. The empirical research follows three foci. Each of our three *case study* sites allows us to zoom in on a particular aspect above. Assemblage is not an umbrella under which anything and everything can go, its components have to be in some way strategically related to each other. At first sight, the cases may appear to be loosely connected or even unrelated: one is about development aid in Africa, another about search and rescue in the Mediterranean and another about European asylum law – but an assemblage approach allows us to understand these spaces as entangled – together they do something.

The first concerns the formative or historical aspect of an intervention. Baker and McGuirk (2017, 431) refer to this as ‘genealogical tracing: “In methodological terms, a focus on the processes through which assemblages come into and out of being lends itself to careful genealogical tracing of how past alignments and associations have informed the present”. In this tracing we will include a concern for the tenacity and durability of the linkage between crisis and sedentarialist thinking. The second centres on the formation of associations and relationships through which interventions are held together. Assemblage theorists refer to this as relationality, holding that an

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analysis of this will reveal “how contemporary conditions and actants are crystalizing new conditions of possibility” (Baker and McGuirk (2017, 431). The third direction concerns ‘how diverse human and non-human elements relate and interact such that the whole hangs together in some form of provisional unity’. Anderson and McFarlen (2011). The instance we discuss below relates to the deployment of drones in search and rescue operation

1. Our first case will trace the formation and deployment of the EU funding mechanism, the Emergency Trust Fund for Africa in order to ask whether ‘crisis’ has contributed to desectorization or the appearance of desectorization, or in the language of assemblage reterritorialisation. While the EUTF funds hundreds of projects, we will focus on return and reintegration projects, often led by the international organisation, the IOM. What new communities are emerging under the Trust Fund? Actors within these quickly transforming institutional fields have their own *savoir faire et savoir être*. Where are the shared understandings and disagreements? Are dominant logics challenged?

2. The bureaucratic rationality offers a rich setting for interrogating human and non-human agency regarding migrant deaths in the Mediterranean, paying particular attention to mediating and invisibilising policies. Who or what is held responsible for saving migrants/migrant deaths at sea: stormy weather, makeshift boats, smugglers, drones, NGOs, captains or state agencies? What are the relevant chains of command? Has this “responsibility” evolved and how has it redefined the limits of humanitarianism? Why have technological evolutions leading to more surveillance of the sea been accompanied by an increase in migrant deaths?

3. Assemblage theory sensitises us to power disruptions to hierarchies and the disturbance of predictive capacity. Our third case, the political rationality provides a rich setting for understanding the rhizomatic nature of the crisis assemblage with respect to resistance towards europeanisation. Law is often seen through a pyramidal logic, providing order and stability to societies. Political acts which contest legal solutions and the legal status quo in migration governance will be explored here. More specifically we will seek to understand

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how European member states contest or engage with legally based Europeanised migration governance, notably regarding the impasse of the Dublin reform, relocations mechanisms and the rise of the so-called coalitions of the willing. We will interrogate surprising additions to dominant migration management scripts (for example, when the German Chancellor Merkel decided to open Germany's borders to Syrian refugees countering the spirit of European asylum law, or when Salvini closed Italian ports to rescue vessels, contrary to international law).

Research methods

This research is primarily ethnographic and interpretive, taking the form of documentary analysis, observation and interviews. The aim is to generate understandings rather than search for causal laws. Although we have demarcated three cases, we do not treat them as individually bounded. Indeed, the 'field' cannot be treated 'as a discrete local community or bounded geographical area, but as a social and political space articulated through relations' (Baker and McGuirk 2017). This is a critical point for our inquiry because many of the contexts, actants and places to which we refer (e.g. third countries, Mediterranean) are policy connected to other contexts and places.

An important part of ethnography will be documentary analysis (for example, policy notes, project evaluations, funding bids). As Baker and McGuirk (2017, 434) propose that we need to treat "documentary materials, such as reports and downloadable PowerPoint presentation slides, as ethnographic artefacts that provide windows into the creation, mobilisation, and application of policy knowledge. These artefacts function, on the one hand, as texts that reveal particular ways of thinking and acting, and on the other, as lively objects whose itineraries and effects can be apprehended by following their 'traces' in different contexts". We will set a time frame within which to include documentary sources, selecting those with a key bearing on our inquiry.

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We will strive to conduct interviews dialogically, bearing in mind that 'meaning is not simply elicited by apt questioning' but assembled in the interview encounter' (Holstein and Gubrium 1997, 19). We will make the invitation to informants to make everyday practice 'strange' (Baker and McGuirk 2017) and to explore alternative 'conditions of possibility'. For manageability of analysis, questions will cluster around the case study subjects. We will secure a form of network analysis by asking informants to plot their place within chains of command and according to professional relations. We will ask them to identify the place of key objects within these relations. We will collect critical incidents by asking for an account of episodes that stands out; the aim is to support a narrative inquiry dimension that helps us to examine explanatory framings and positionalities. Where it seems both helpful and practical, observation opportunities concerning everyday practice (such as shadowing) will be conducted.

Data organisation and analysis

In the first instance coding will be thematically distributed across the cases to support an analysis of the different contexts they provide. Coding will include a concern for how informants position themselves and the parameters of their declared responsibilities. We anticipate that some of this will emerge from the critical incidents. We will be alert to metaphors in use, definitions of the problem, expressions of professional identity, opposition talk, problem setting, future visions. The network analysis will support understandings concerning 'relationality'. Coding and memoing within the sites will be followed by a meta-analysis across them to address our research question. Atlasti will be used to support these moves.

Ethical framework

We adhere to an ethical framework which foregrounds the following:

- Securing informant consent and share transcripts with informants
- Share analysis with other researchers

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- Respect respondent confidentiality and do no harm to individuals and institutions⁴

⁴ For more information, refer to the Ethics and Data Management documents for the MAGYC project

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