

## Disorder at the Border: Europe's 'Migrant Crisis' in Comparative Perspective

More than one million migrants and refugees have crossed into Europe since 2015, sparking a massive humanitarian and political crisis as European Union member states struggle to manage the influx of people and the responsibility of resettling them. For many, these voyages have been fraught with danger and peril. Thousands have perished in the Mediterranean Sea, and many more have suffered in the hands of brutal human trafficking organizations. The vast majority of those seeking to enter Europe are fleeing ongoing conflicts in Syria, Afghanistan, and Iraq. Others, looking to escape poverty and economic uncertainty, come from within the borders of Europe, from places like Kosovo, Albania, and Serbia. As tensions over resettlement escalate and violent clashes between asylum seekers and EU citizens become more frequent, the so-called 'migrant crisis' poses one of the most significant threats to the fragile political balance of Europe today.

The articles in this features section address the challenges raised by the continued flow of people into Europe by critically examining public reactions and political responses to the 'migration crisis'. They analyse the conditions that compel refugees to undertake risky and costly crossings, the legal contradictions of the European border regime, and the unintended consequences of the securitization of migration. Taken together, they offer insight into the political, economic, and cultural dynamics of human mobility in desperate times.

In 'Endless Escape', Zümray Kutlu-Tonak provides a comprehensive overview of the situation on the ground for Syrian refugees in Turkey. Like other border countries such as Lebanon and Jordan, Turkey has absorbed a substantial number of displaced Syrian nationals since the outbreak of civil war in 2011. The United Nations High Commission on Refugees estimates that there are currently more than 2.5 million Syrian refugees in Turkey (UNHCR 2015). Drawing on a study of more than two dozen non-governmental organizations working with Syrians in Istanbul, Ankara, and in the border cities of Urfa, Hatay, and Izmir, Kutlu-Tonak chronicles the difficulties faced by Syrian refugees in Turkey in accessing accommodation, employment, health care services, and education. She shows how existing legislation in Turkey limits claims for refugee status to individuals originating from Europe and describes the ad-hoc measures that have been taken to provide temporary protection to people fleeing violence in Syria. With the recent approval of a three billion Euro aid package from the EU to stem the flow of refugees from Turkey into Europe and proposals to label Turkey a 'safe third country' in order to repatriate asylum seekers from Greece, Kutlu-Tonak's article

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reminds us that the precarious conditions faced by refugees in Turkey is a significant factor in motivating them to cross into Europe in the first place.

Fixing his gaze on a different border zone, Giacomo Orsini offers an ethnographic account of the securitization of the Italian island of Lampedusa. With less than six thousand inhabitants and an area of eight square miles, this tiny island has become an iconic site of conflict over the policing of the European frontier. In ‘Securitization as a Source of Insecurity’, Orsini examines how Lampedusan fishermen became unwillingly entangled in the complex web of maritime border management in tandem with the rise of FRONTEX operations in the region.<sup>1</sup> The seafarers’ logic of mutual assistance and reciprocity is subverted by new security measures that target individuals providing support to illegal migrants attempting to enter Italian territory. As Orsini demonstrates, the heightened securitization of Lampedusa has ironically resulted in greater insecurity for its residents as processes of border management undermine the legitimacy of existing political institutions on the island.

According to political theorist Étienne Balibar (2004:3), we must privilege the border when discussing questions about the European people and the state in Europe since the border ‘crystallizes the stakes of politico-economic power and the symbolic stakes at work in the collective imagination: relations of force and material interest on one side, representations of identity on the other’. As Annalisa Lendaro demonstrates in ‘A European Migrant Crisis?’, the differential and uneven application of border control policies in mainland Europe has thrown into doubt the democratic and humanitarian principles upon which the Union was founded. While states of exception and emergency have recently been invoked to suspend the rights of mobility guaranteed by the Schengen Agreement in the wake of terrorist attacks in France, Lendaro shows how member states took steps to curtail access to their territories well in advance of the violent incidents in Paris. These measures, which represent direct contraventions of existing European and international conventions on migration, asylum, and human rights, reflect how the border serves as a powerful and paradoxical tool of governance. The result, as Lendaro argues, is a growing disconnect between the law and its application, as the state of exception around Europe’s border regime becomes normalized.

The final article in this section, Thomas Nail’s ‘Migration and Terrorism after the Paris Attacks’, takes up the twin figure of the migrant/terrorist, arguing that the conflation of the two categories has been an increasingly salient and explicit feature of the public debates surrounding contemporary migratory trends in Europe. Nail argues that the anti-immigrant rhetoric that equates migrants to terrorists is made meaningful through older frames of barbarism and civilization. Comparing the strategies pursued by the United States to scrutinize migrants and curtail civil liberties after the 9/11 attacks in New York and Washington, Nail shows how the political analogy of migrant as terrorist functions as a powerful rhetorical device in justifying the increased securitization of borders and social life in Europe. As incidents of violent xenophobic backlash against migrant populations multiply, Nail’s article reminds us of the dangerous consequences of the entrenchment of nativist tropes in the European popular imaginary.

This symposium sheds light on the difficult political conjuncture in contemporary Europe and raises important and timely questions about its future. Taken together, the contributions offer a multi-level analysis of the ‘migrant crisis’, from the material conditions that compel refugees to flee in the first place, to the legal strictures regulating their entry into Europe, and the public reactions and political responses to their arrival. With no end in sight to the devastating war in Syria and continued violence in Iraq and Afghanistan, the scale of human displacement and movement is unlikely to subside anytime soon. While Germany has displayed strong leadership and taken a determined moral position on the resettlement of refugees and asylum seekers, the responsibility to provide sanctuary to those fleeing danger must be shared equally. Unless European leaders can agree to share the duty of resettling, educating, and integrating refugee populations, political pressures will encourage the sealing of borders and the strengthening of a fortress Europe. In this regard, politicians should worry less about the polls than the history books when determining how to respond to one of the gravest humanitarian crises in recent memory.

#### Note

<sup>1</sup> Established in 2004, the European Agency for the Management of Operational Cooperation at the External Borders of the Member States of the European Union (FRONTEX) is the central body tasked with European border management. It coordinates and implements joint operations (sea, land, and air) with EU member states at the external borders of Europe. See <http://frontex.europa.eu/> (accessed 3 February 2016).

#### References

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