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Disaster depictions and geopolitical representations in Europe's migration 'Crisis'

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the geopolitical framing of migrants in Europe through an analysis of the discourse and imagery shared by both the mainstream and social media. Employing a critical discourse analysis of a corpus of material collated between January 2015 and December 2016, we suggest that migrants have been subject to three temporal representations that are linked to a European geopolitical vision of the world. While they were initially described as humans migrating into Europe, some parts of the media quickly equated the arrival of migrants with natural disasters, and then, finally, as geopolitical threats to security. This intensification of representations of migrants as the 'Other' and eventually as non-human threatening entities, reveals European geopolitical conceptualizations of belonging and sovereignty that are often at odds with the principles and values to which the European Union subscribes.

1. Introduction

As a result of economic instability and political unrest in war-torn countries, 'migrants'[1] began arriving in Europe in late 2014 in unprecedented numbers. Inconsistent responses to their arrival by European Union (EU) member-states have resulted in confusion and increasing tension across a variety of geopolitical scales. Photographs, interviews and news reports covering the rising number of international migrants reaching Europe's borders, or documenting the plights of those who died trying, as part of what the media labelled the migration 'crisis' are now ubiquitous. They are shared and discussed on and offline, polarizing public opinion and fuelling political debate. While states like Germany altered their asylum policies to accommodate those seeking refuge, others such as Slovenia, declared that this 'flood of migrants' could herald the end of the EU (Millar, 7 September 2016, *The Express*). Public reception and reaction in Europe oscillate from welcome rallies and outreach events to demands for anti-immigrant border walls and stricter controls over movement. Moreover, there has been a significant rise of the xenophobic right and ultranationalist sentiments in several European countries. The stories of how migrants reach Europe and how they are subsequently received are largely constructed via the media, and this in turn shapes how the public understands and perceives the 'crisis'. It is therefore important to analyse how such outlets frame the migration narrative for public consumption. As Cooper et al. (2016: 18) note, 'The media has a privileged social-cultural position, able to legitimize particular truths and shape public attitudes'. Media discourse, as Dell'Orto (cited in Hickerson and Dunsmore, 2015: 116) attests, 'informs how citizens understand their communities, from the local to the international level'. Through an analysis of the key images, narratives and geopolitical representations through which the media-labelled 'crisis' is constructed and portrayed, evidence of a Eurocentric vision that equates this influx of migrants to a natural disaster as well as efforts to protect an established system of geopolitical signification and power in Europe is revealed.

In a globalizing world, where fences and border walls were once predicted to disappear, we are witnessing a world that is not universally 'borderless' (Ohmae, 1990), but rather one that is increasingly paradoxical. While the ease with which many goods and materials are able to cross international borders grows, the movement of bodies - especially those deemed 'politically undesirable' - are increasingly facing

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[1] It is important to note that labels hold great power in regards to human migration. 'Migrant' refers generally to an individual in transit, on the move, as well as those that have not yet begun or completed the official asylum process. This umbrella term includes individuals fleeing wars, who are likely to be granted refugee status, as well as those who are hoping to find better jobs or lives in another country. In contrast, the specific terms, 'refugees' and 'asylum seeker' are categorized through international laws that govern state responsibilities towards these individuals (Maillet et al., 2016). We further unpack this term in the conceptual framework.

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hardened borders and territorial closures. Rosiere and Jones (2012) argue this is a result of efforts by the privileged few who veritably benefit from what globalization purports to offer to protect that privilege; often through the employment of narratives about terrorism and smuggling as rationale for increased policing of international borders. In the regards to Europe's migration 'crisis,' the narrative of disasters or baseline fear of terrorism is a very powerful and emotive driving force that alters the dominant discourse in the media and within the public overtime. It has arguably helped underpin a rise in populist politics and fuelled a resurgent right-wing politic across Europe (Middleton, 2016; Muis and Immerzeel, 2017).

We suggest that the manner in which much of the media has framed the 'crisis' has played a critical role in cultivating what de Koning and Modest (2017) refer to as 'anxious politics'. Thus, how a very diverse group of migrants (e.g. age, gender, country of origin, religious and educational background, etc.) is framed within geopolitical representations is noteworthy. For as Foucault (1978) argued, perspective discourses can be explained by practices that prove to be effective in exerting power. Through an analysis of the manner in which the media describes and reports about the migration, we argue that the various natural disaster-focused representations dehumanizes migrants and renders them as objects or forces of nature instead of human beings. For example, many of the European states' discriminative responses to the 'crisis' reveal efforts to justify particular political alliances or foreign policies through the articulation and construction of migrants as a natural disaster, such as a 'flood', 'tidal waves' or 'swarm', which helps to establish a conceptual construction of these individuals as non-human and as the 'Other' in Europe (Haldrup et al., 2006). In addition, geopolitical representations of migrants insinuate that these non-human, foreign bodies are also threatening entities and their presence within Europe is equated to a form of invasion.

Describing or equating migrants' presence in Europe as a security threat works to homogenize a heterogenic group of individuals, but it also reinforces a geopolitical driven 'us' versus 'them' dichotomy between the migrants and non-migrants in Europe along perceived cultural and national lines. This form of 'Othering' has distinct religious overtones and possibly intersects with the 'global islamophobia' identified by Morgan (2016). Indeed, the geopolitical articulations of space and people corresponds with conceptions of territoriality and the coercive socio-political ordering of space is anchored by states which have the power to render certain people as 'in' and 'out' of place. As Adamson et al. (2011) argue, state structured immigration policies, governance and hardening of national borders fosters 'boundaries of belonging' that reinforces a sense of cohesion and shared national identity for citizens. The thickening of state-bound territorial spaces increasingly renders international migrants and non-citizens as foreign bodies that are 'out of place' through territorial governance laws and exclusionary rhetoric. These perceptions of belonging and alienation become evident (and in some cases bolstered) by media portrayals, particularly in regards to how the descriptions of migrants are reported and framed, as well as how geopolitical responses to their presence in Europe are reported. In furthering our understanding of how this 'crisis' is being navigated, represented and understood in the public realm across Europe, the aims of the paper are threefold: first, to ascertain the power of the media to present specific narratives and attitudes through print and imagery as 'truths'; second, to examine the ways in which the media can shape and influence discourse regarding migrants as well as their own communities in a 'nested' scalar fashion; and finally, to consider the ways in which the framing of migrants intersects with geopolitical representation and objectification. The intention of this paper is to open up what might be regarded as a difficult and complex conversation on how responses to migration are shaped within wider European geopolitics. While we adopt something of a pan-European and thematic approach in order to highlight key commonalities in this paper, future studies will engage in a more nuanced critique of the ways in which media representations in individual states are influenced by their own specific geopolitical experiences and ambitions.

The paper is then divided into three parts. We begin by outlining the conceptual framework, exploring the geopolitical production of labels and focusing on the media's powerful role within geopolitics and its ability to tap into and foster 'anxious politics'. We follow with a note on the research design, discussing our methodological approach and data sources. The remainder of the paper discusses the three key thematic depictions that emerged through an analysis of the data. These significantly follow a temporal pattern and begin with human migration as humans migrating, then are equated to natural disasters, before evolving to human migration depicted as a geopolitical threat to security.

2. Conceptualizing geopolitical representations

Geopolitical representations according to Dijkink (1998: 247) 'evolve slowly on the basis of a multitude of facts that can be moulded into a meaningful configuration'. These representations are inexorably linked to labels or definitions that construct ways of knowing and understanding. Labels as Zetter (2007: 173) aptly observes 'do not exist in a vacuum'. They are the product of intense negotiation and manipulation and are sensitive to political and global processes. Bakewell (2008), reflecting on Zetter's 1988 definition of refugees, suggests that the term 'refugee' was initially understood as a starting point through which to open up a discussion, rather than a fixed or static definition. In the 1980s there was a more homogenous and collective understanding of what a refugee was. Zetter (2007) argues that the labelling of refugees or forced migrants as a distinct social category has undergone a significant transformation through the decades, influenced in no small way by the forces and influences of globalisation.

In his seminal work 'More labels, less refugees', Zetter (2007) argues that the labelling of refugees has undergone three distinct iterations: forming, transforming and politicizing. The formation of the refugee label, he notes, were framed principally through an analysis of the origins and mechanisms of forced migration. These have however become much more complex through time. These complexities have led to a reimagining or transformation of the label, as states and governments attempt to manage 'new' migration. Governments, representing Northern interests, Zetter (2007) observes, are now the key vehicles through which the label of refugee has been transformed. The term asylum seeker has become a normative label that has been 'institutionalised' by the majority of European states and the label of genuine refugees abounds. The transformation of the refugee label has been achieved in part through the creation of a plethora of 'extra-territorial instruments' that prohibit migrants from claiming the ever more elusive refugee status (including off-shore holding centres, bilateral return arrangements). This process has been mimicked within state boundaries with stringent policies prohibiting access, enabled by the politicisation of migration through geopolitical interactions and 'embedding the wider political discourse of resistance to migrants and refugees' (Zetter, 2007:180). As Malkki (1995: 511) argues, states desire essentialized, normative categories through which they are able to typecast a diverse range of individuals, predicated on the production of the perception that migrants can be classified as a single 'tribe' with universal 'condition of nature'.

Indeed, these acts of discrimination are built upon bureaucratic and exclusionary practices that serve state interests. Thus, as states responded to pressure to curtail or eradicate the rise in irregular international migration, they also redefined the normative conditions of refugees and established a network of legislative barriers to circumvent refugee rights, even if migrants succeeded in entering their state (Zetter, 2007). Labelling migrants not only provocatively marks these individuals as foreign within a state, but the practice can also foment hierarchical and xenophobic rhetoric that reinforces perceptions that categorise migrants as threatening entities. The way in which both the media and social media intersect with labelling processes can be a useful tool and analytical lens through which we can examine the socio-

political environment in Europe (Dempsey, 2016a; McDowell, 2016). Much attention has been paid to the role of the traditional media and its use of 'media framing' in order to invoke or shape public perception(s), particularly in regards to politically charged issues (e.g. Cottle and Lester, 2011; Dempsey, 2016b; Iyengar and Kinder, 1987). This intentional selection or highlighting of particular elements from an event or description of a subject in order to promote a particular image, perception, or representation is a powerful method that can render increased attention towards or help frame particular political debates and narratives. As Dittmer and Dodds (2008: 249) note, 'Tabloid geopolitics is perhaps the latest manifestation of a growing interest in the role of public/popular culture informing and shaping debates about global politics'. It also can work to reinforce or dispute territorial discourse and geopolitical codes. Indeed, substantive framing has the ability to 'define effects or conditions as problematic, identifying causes, conveying a moral judgment and endorsing improvements' (Entman, 2004: 5). This can, in turn, be an analytical lens through which we can examine the role of the media in reporting on migration into Europe.

Despite the fact that the media's influence on individuals and topics varies, studies suggest (e.g. Iyengar and Kinder, 1987) that the media has a large bearing on public opinion and perception of political debates, discourses, and interpretations of events. In regards to migration, the media can play a key role in the public's cognizance of migrants, how locals respond to the presence of migrants, as well as how they interpret migrants' actions and opinions. Representations of migrants become 'truths' that direct behaviour. Much of human behaviour is dictated by our emotions, and as Albertson and Kushner (2015: 1) note 'emotions matter in politics'. Emotions, they suggest, are 'motivating'; they inspire us 'to act' in particular ways (2015: 9). While empathy and sympathy can play important roles within specific political contexts, anxiety or unease can 'push citizens toward trusting the government in times of crisis'…yet this can pave the way for manipulation (2015: 2). As well as seeking information and placing trust in governance, 'anxious politics' makes it much more likely that the public will support protective or restrictive policies (Albertson and Kushner, 2015: 10). de Koning and Modest's (2017: 9) assessment of the type of 'anxious politics' that exists in many European cities, suggest that the phenomenon can only be understood against a 'background of a particular affectively charged narrative about the present and future of the nation in various European states'. While these narratives are not necessarily understood, consumed and supported by a homogenous public, they do have traction. Imaginings of the nation become bound up in anxieties in belonging and hegemony, which are underpinned by the media.

Since the beginning of the 21st century, critical analysis of political representations in the media have examined the practices of geopolitics and paid close attention to the media's production, utilization, circulation, perception, and influence on geopolitical images, narratives and representation(s). As Hughes (2010) suggests, by focusing on these geopolitical practices, we can examine how the creation and employment of geopolitical image(s) is intrinsically a geopolitical action as well. Indeed, influencing how a social group (e.g. migrants) is perceived, categorized, and represented is an action laden with hierarchical power (Dempsey, 2018; Maillet et al., 2016; Spivak, 1999). As Kirkwood et al. (2015: 14) argue, 'Categorization is not (merely) a process of allocating people to a relevant social group, but rather a more constructive one that is designed to accomplish one of a range of social outcomes'. Such outcomes are inherently political and inexorably linked, we argue, in this particular instance, with a vision of Europe that is seemingly at odds with what the EU hopes to portray. We identify three key thematic representations that emerge from an analysis of media coverage of the crisis.

3. Research design

The data for this paper was collated through a detailed critical discourse analysis of European mainstream publications between January 2015 and December 2016. For our analysis of media coverage of migration, we selected the platform Nexis because of its extensive archive spanning more than 20 years. We conducted an advanced search of the term refugee and migrant within our timeframe through three searches: one of UK national newspapers, one of the English editions of major world publications (with a European focus), and one targeting some specific publications (representative of different political viewpoints) in particular European countries in order to concentrate on specific examples which generated a large amount of media interest such as Germany. By examining a large number of European media sources, the goal of this search was to identify major trends and mechanisms relating to media reporting of the 'crisis'. Critical discourse analysis of the media can bring us closer to understanding the political, social and cultural processes that are involved in constructing migration narratives and discourses. In order to construct such narratives Berkowitz and Zhengjia (2014) contend that the media engages in three interconnected processes. The first is the creation of what they term as 'mythical narratives' that are not necessarily fabricated, but revolve around 'predictable plots, recognizable characters and societal morals or values'. These narratives are embedded in the text and alluded to through the use of specific visual images. The second is focused on tapping into some type of collective memory where journalists work to provide either some kind of historical lineage that gives the story meaning and offers what they refer to as a 'recognizable schema' to help the public interpret what is happening. The third part of the process is the use of particular key words or discourse that function as an 'ideograph' (Berkowitz and Zhengjia, 2014). It is here we find the propagation of ideologies and specific worldviews.

These processes can be detected, we argue, through adopting Carvalho's (2000) methodological framework. Her approach to a discourse analysis of media outputs, which is informed by the seminal work of Van Dijk (1980, 1988), Fairclough (1995), and Gamson and Modigliani (1989), advocates pursuing both a textual and contextual analysis of the material. Textual analysis for Carvalho (2000) involves a consideration of six dimensions of the text: surface descriptors and structural organization; objects; actors; language and rhetoric; discursive strategies; and finally, ideology. Surface descriptors are the building blocks of the analysis: they include the date of the publication, the name of the newspaper, the author/journalist's name, the location and the length of the article in the paper (or online). The structural organization refers to the headline and the orientation of the text. Together this basic information offers a glimpse into the political, social and cultural factors at work to shape or frame a narrative.

Objects, according to Carvalho, are the themes or issues that emerge from a reading of the text. She suggests these themes or topics bring the reader closer to understanding the issue at hand. Actors refer to the subjects being discussed and represented. Carvalho (2000: 22) refers to actors as 'social agents and or characters' that are being framed in a 'staged story', that is, the newspaper article or report. Clearly the language and rhetoric adopted in the text is crucial to discourse analysis. Language conveys specific ideas, concepts and values that are inherently related to wider 'cultural and ideological frameworks' (Carvalho, 2000: 23). Rhetoric is fundamentally important in driving and shaping emotional responses to something or someone and this is detectable in much of the discourse surrounding migrants. Discursive strategies for Carvalho relate to the ways in which a newspaper navigates an issue to achieve some sort of effect or fulfil a goal. Journalists pursue a specific angle that frames the way in which a narrative is presented. These discursive strategies often involve the legitimization, politicization, narrativization or positioning of specific events or groups of people. The sixth and final dimension of textual analysis relates to ideology, which relates to the ways in which the text serves to propagate or sustain specific moral judgments or values.

In addition to the textual analysis of the newspaper articles on migration, we also conducted a contextual analysis. Carvalho suggests that this approach to the text may take two forms: comparative-synchronic

and historical-diachronic. We focus on the latter, which emphasizes the 'temporal evolution of discourses' (2000: 23). We wanted to ascertain how the dialogue about migrants was changing through time and how those changes were indicative of a rapidly changing environment across Europe. The period (January 2015-December 2016) was chosen to reflect the growing media interest in the volume of migrants travelling to Europe. A two-year window represented a significant opportunity to detect and analyse thematic, contextual and temporal patterns. It should be noted that although we refer to 'the media' throughout this paper we do recognise that it is in no way homogenous. Reportage varies dramatically, from state to state, as well as from outlet to outlet. Each media outlet has its own style of reporting, sets its own political tone, speaks to a particular audience and will operate both within states with individualized experiences of migration and within specific institutional frameworks.

4. Human migration depicted as humans migrating

Beginning in early 2015, most mainstream print and online media sources' reports focused on the push/pull factors that were driving asylum seekers into Europe. They described the experience of migrants arriving in Europe and/or in the asylum camps, and included some stories about people who had died trying to arrive in Europe. Overall, migrants were framed as humans, victims of war and brave survivors. To quote an article published in the liberal, left-leaning (British) *Guardian* from November 2015, thus published weeks before the Paris attacks: 'The brave politicians who welcome the refugees, like German chancellor Angela Merkel, take a stand of basic human decency. These people are fleeing for their lives from terror and war. To deny them asylum would violate the most basic standards of compassion' (Sachs, 2015). While this article does then acknowledge how challenging it is for Europe to receive so many asylum seekers, it asks its readers to work together to support these fellow human beings. Similar reports that frame migrants in a positive light or highlighted these individuals' arduous journey appeared in a 7 September 2015 *Der Spiegel* article (a centre-left German news source) after the discovery of the death of 71 migrants in a smuggler's van in Austria. Those who perished by suffocation were described as 'people' as the article carefully details the number of men, women and children who perished and described them as individuals 'who sought to flee war and suffering'. This article labelled their deaths as 'a horrific incident' and referred to the site where the truck was discovered as 'Ground Zero' for Europe's 'refugee catastrophe'.

The intentional inclusion of age and gender helps to humanize these victims for the reader. Additionally, the provocative use of 'Ground Zero', even in Europe, was an effort to evoke images of innocent victims of violence. Perhaps to remind people that many of these migrants are fleeing the exact violence and terrorism that many Europeans fear in their own lives. The article continues in a scolding tone when the mother of the truck driver explained that it is just good business for 'poor Bulgarians' to smuggle the 'rich Syrians' into Europe, and ultimately blames Europe for this event, because 'Europe is failing' to help the migrants. The article then reminds readers of Aylan Kurdi, the Syrian boy whose body washed ashore after his family tried to reach the islands of Kos in September 2015. The toddler had drowned alongside his four-year-old brother and mother whilst making the treacherous journey in an overcrowded boat between Greece and Turkey. The family, like so many others, were fleeing worn-torn Syria, seeking refuge in Europe following a failed asylum application to Canada.

In the days after Alan's death, the United Nations claimed that migration had become a 'defining moment' for the European Union. For the many millions of people who saw and shared the image of Aylan online, this had also become a defining moment in the 'crisis'. As Castells (2007: 239) notes 'what does not exist in the media does not exist in the public mind'. The poignant and shocking image was reported by both left and right leaning outlets not only in Europe but across the globe, bringing the horrors of warfare in Syria to what Loader and Mercera (2011: 758) labels the 'dinner table' of Europe within hours of it being published. D'Orazio's (2015) detailed analysis of social media analytics, suggests that Alyan Kurdi's death produced a sharp increase in activity online reaching 20 million screens worldwide within 12 h of being published. Twitter's own synopsis of the key events of 2015 attribute the growing interest in migration to the circulation of Kurdi's image through a variety of social media in September.

The image, through the media, had a profound impact on civic society-if only momentarily. NGOs across Europe reported an unprecedented rise in charitable donations and pledges to help in whatever way possible. Small grass roots fundraising organisations also reported an exponential rise in members. Facebook groups like the Norway branch of Refugee's Welcome saw their membership of 200 rise to 9000 within 48 h of the image's circulation (Mayblin, 2015). The Charities Aid Foundation according to Mayblin (2015) estimated that one in three people in the UK had donated to the relief effort. The discourse surrounding the crisis also began to change. When the Visual–Lab in Sheffield University in the UK tracked the use of the words migrant and refugee in Twitter, they found that they were used almost interchangeably until September 2nd. D'Orazio (2015) contends that this changed dramatically with more Twitter users using the term refugee than migrant.

The impact of the image, popularized through the media, occasioned something of a sea change in public discourse and behaviour. In an example of what Della Porta (2006) might refer to as transnational activism, rallies organised through Twitter and Facebook were held in the cities of London, Copenhagen, Munich and Stockholm as protesters urged their governments to act. Petitions lobbying governments to open the borders spread rapidly online, forcing debates into centre stream politics in many European states. Two days after the image, over 235,000 people signed an e-petition in the UK urging the British Prime Minister David Cameron to take in more refugees. Bowing under pressure Cameron agreed to take 20,000 (having only accepted 216 Syrians at that point). Outpourings of welcome images at football matches across Germany in the weekend following Alyan's death were shared widely, showcasing Germany and its chancellor Angela Merkel's commitment at that point to opening its borders to refugees. This particular example underscores the power of the media to frame and direct public discourse.

Merkel's humanistic approach to migrants in the wake of Aylan Kurdi's death was covered extensively by a largely sympathetic media in the short term. Some of this reporting began to include interviews with migrants offering a new perspective on the crisis. Migrants like Monzer Omar, a Syrian asylum seeker, who explained that 'His wife and two small daughters are in hiding back in Syria, waiting for him to receive asylum and send for them… and he gratefully thanks Angela Merkel for her support, referring to her as 'Mama Merkel, the mother of Syrian people' (Shapiro and Kakissis, 2015). In essence, the dominant discourse framed migrants not only as survivors, family members and victims of war – but more importantly as humans. While giving a voice to migrants through mainstream media was critical in fostering a more sympathetic tone, it also raises the fundamental question asked by Crawley et al. (2016: 24) of 'who gets to speak 'about migration, or on behalf of migrants in the media'. In their analysis of media coverage of migration in 2015 before the UK General Election, only 15% of all newspaper articles included a migrant 'voice or perspective'.

However, as the arrival of migrants into Europe continued, some of those who opposed the presence of the migrants increasingly became more vocal about their distrust of 'the foreigners' and the various European governments' management of this situation, which the media labelled as a 'crisis'. While tragic, the EU had been warned about such a reaction. According to the 2012 European Migration Policy Report on predictions for migration into the EU after the Arab Spring which, focuses solely on Arab migrants rather than the larger diversity of ethnicities included in the migration 'crisis', the report warned that while a

'well-managed migration may foster progress and welfare…mismanagement may put social cohesion, security and national sovereignty at risk' (Rationale: 1). This final example reveals a subtle, but notable shift in the rhetoric; while it still describes migrants and refugees as humans, there is also a hint of fear regarding potential damage that could result from their presence in Europe.

5. Human migration depicted as natural disasters

Overtime the term 'mismanagement' and 'chaos' became increasingly common descriptions in media reports on the 'crisis' particularly by the end of 2015. This shift in the rhetoric coincides with a marked increase in descriptions of migrants or their arrival in Europe with terms used for natural disasters such as 'flood,' 'swarm' or 'tidal wave'. The symbolic description of their movement, presence and the landscapes through which they travel purports Europe's loss of control to a natural disaster. Such comparisons are notable. While natural disasters can be extremely dangerous and even life threatening, many have a predictable and highly political character as well. However, many members of the general public share the misleading assumption that natural disasters are entirely unpredictable, frightening and unresolvable forces. Such misgivings cannot only cripple an individual's sense of agency or personal safety, but one's belief in their government to be able to safeguard them from harm. Therefore, when the media equates irregular immigration to fear-triggering cataclysmic forces it is compounding psychological trepidation of 'unstoppable' catastrophes with xenophobic perceptions and mistrust of persons unknown and their subsequent impact on society.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the overall tone of politicians' rhetoric and the public response to the presence of the migrants also changed. Indeed, in light of the Eurozone financial crisis, the larger global economic crisis, growing xenophobia, and construction of razor-wire border walls, the geopolitical imaginings of migrants shifted to geographed descriptions (Coleman, 2003) that lumped a diverse group of migrants into a single universal description and one that often likens their arrival or presence in Europe to a natural disaster.

A series of articles published by both left and right leaning media sources across the UK and even the US led with stories discussing the 'tidal wave' of migrants arriving in Europe. For example, in September 2015 the *Express* (British) led with the headline 'Euro dream over as border controls return in face of tidal wave of EU migrants'. The *Economist* (American) suggested that Italy was struggling to cope with a tidal wave of immigrants. Similarly, an article published in the conservative British newspaper the *Daily Mail* on January 8th, 2016 (Afzal, 2016) led with the headline, 'Why Britain should be worried by this flood of young migrants'. In a particularly scathing and highly gendered editorial, the author suggested that the 'influx was having a detrimental impact not only on Britain but also on European society. As the song says, it's raining men. But it is no cause for hallelujahs. Far from it-the influx of young, male migrants from the Middle East and North Africa is tipping the whole balance of society'. The *New York Times*, writing about the deal struck between Turkey and the rest of the EU to regulate migrants from travelling into Europe in exchange for advancing talks on EU membership, ran with a story suggesting that Turkish President Erdogan was threatening to 'let the migrant flood into Europe resume' (Timur and Norland, 2016) after talks between the EU and Turkey became more contentious in November 2016. These descriptions suggest that migrants are passive objects that lack agency and are analogous to climatic natural disasters such as a 'flood.' The tragic irony of labelling the presence of migrants in Europe with the term a 'flood' insinuates that their bodies have now become part of the very ocean that has swallowed many who tried to arrive on European shores.

It is important to note that it is not just the media that is shaping migration discourse. In many instances, the media has taken the path propagated by world leaders and highly respected figures in governance. In October 2014, Michael Fallon, the then UK Defence Secretary came under fire for his use of the term 'swamped' to describe the impact migrant workers were having across British towns and cities. He added that coastal communities in the South of England felt 'under siege' (Elgot and Taylor, 2015). Fallon's comments echoed those made by the conservative Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher in the late 1970s. In 1978 she too used the term 'swamped' to describe fears over immigration. 'People are rather afraid of being swamped by people with a different culture and, you know, the British character has done so much for democracy, for law and done so much throughout the world that if there is any fear that it might be swamped people are going to react and be rather hostile to those coming in' (Channel 4 News 17th October 2014).

In a similar vein, David Cameron occasioned a fury of controversy after he used the term 'swarm' to describe the number of refugees crossing the Mediterranean. The Refugee Council of Europe immediately tweeted 'Awful, dehumanizing language from a world leader' while the Director of Medecins du Monde, a charity working alongside migrants in France noted that the use of swarm not only was dehumanizing, but sought to portray migrants and refugees as some kind of 'coordinated threat'. In the same week as Cameron's controversial use of 'swarm', a series of UK newspapers lobbied the government to send in the army to deal with the escalating number of migrants attempting to cross the Mediterranean (Elgot and Taylor, 2015).

Terms, descriptions and re-articulations of migrants depicted as disastrous forces of nature work to (re)produce and reinforce political semiotic discourses that render migrants, and particularly Muslim migrants, as the foreign 'Other' and this becomes the 'truth' for cross sections of society. In 2015, David Shariatmadari wrote a piece for the UK Guardian newspaper on what he called the 'toxic metaphors of the migration debate'. As Triandafyllidou (2002) and Haldrup et al. (2006) argue, European concepts of nationhood and belonging, particularly after the Cold War and subsequent inclusion of many of those Eastern European nations into the European Union, were multiscalarily renegotiated at the transnational, national and regional level. However, these newly constituted identities 'are accompanied by an increasing hostility towards different groups of immigrants' (Haldrup et al., 2006: 174). This is particularly prominent in regards to Muslim migrants in Europe. Delanty (1995) postulates this reflects fifteenth and sixteenth century notions of European identity that formed as result of its struggle with Islam, which was labelled as the 'savage' 'others' or what Said (1995) identified as the 'oriental'. This lineage has important implications for the construction of Berkowitz and Zhengjia's (2014) 'mythical narratives' in which Muslims are typecast as the threat.

While the Cold War provided the US and Europe with an easily identifiable Other through the reification of 'the Soviet', the collapse of the USSR and eventual expansion of the European Union via many of the former soviet Eastern European countries resulted in a political vacuum for a 'new Orientalism'. Indeed, with the expansion of Europe's border further east, beyond which 'Otherness' lay, the political semiotics of 'Othering' returned to the discourse and hostility that once focused on the Orient. More specifically, as Haldrup et al. (2006: 174) explain the renegotiation of European nested identities and its discourses that (re)produce the Other through 'the Orient', which 'has given way to both a new orientalism in politics of Europe towards it external 'Others' and a re-emergence of aggressive nationalism directed against Muslim, internal Others at the national level'. The danger of this alienating discourse and representations of Muslims as the 'Other' is that as Gregory (1994) reminds us, representation is indeed not innocent. Discourse, including how we describe and label others, cannot only contribute to the production of stereotypes, but also can be deceptively interpreted as justification for conflicts and/or violence against this 'Other' (2004).

Thus, the aforementioned discourse that David Shariatmadari's suggests in his Guardian article is deeply problematic, principally because it is so engrained in our language that we sometimes fail to recognize its potency in directing our thought (Lakoff and Johnson cited

in Shariatmadari, 2015). Numerous publications have used the metaphors of floods and waves to describe migration flows-this conveys ideas of inundation and saturation. For example, 'A plague of insects destroys crops and spoils foods. Invading armies burn down towns and commit acts of genocide. Floods wreck properties and drown people. Migrants do not do any of these things' (Shariatmadari, 2015). Overall, the objectification processes inherent in these conceptualizations foster the perception that these individuals are non-human forces of nature or foreign bodies that are temporarily traveling through European bounded space. Through the employment of such detrimental rhetoric, migrants are framed as potentially threatening and perceived as existing in violation of geopolitically framed quotidian life within 'fortress Europe'. Such opinions can bolster exclusionary narratives centred on the belief that these individuals do not belong within the borders of Europe and can even embolden articulations that migrants must be a legitimate geopolitical threat.

6. Human migration depicted as a geopolitical threat to security

On June 26th, 2016 the eve of the Brexit Referendum in the UK to determine its future in Europe, the *Daily Mail* ran with the following headline, 'Forget the Greek Crisis or the British Referendum: This tidal wave of migrants could be the biggest threat to Europe since the war'. As discussions and descriptions of migrants as natural disasters or objects that do not belong in Europe pervaded the European media, questions and suggestions of migrants as immediate threats of security and terrorism became more common in reports and interviews with the general public as well. The same reports that describe how the public began questioning why so many of the migrants were men who were arriving alone (insinuating that single males are a security threat to Europe), no longer mentioned how migrants' journeys into Europe were extremely dangerous and expensive. Reports also failed to explain that due to these considerations, families who need to leave their home country are commonly forced to only send the young(est), most educated, and/or most likely to survive the journey before applying for family reunification. These factors are among many that contribute to the prevalence of young, single, migrant males making the challenging journey to Europe (EC Eurostats, 2017).

Rettberg and Gajjala's (2015) analysis of gendered representations of the 'refugee crisis' suggest that there are two dominant categorizations of Middle-Eastern men in the media. The first relates to their masculinity. A number of reports portray male refugees as largely threatening, typecasting male aggression and sexual predatory behaviour (see also Amar, 2011; Alhayek, 2014). This mode of analysis was compounded over the media's coverage of New Year celebrations in Cologne, which talked of mass attacks of young women. The second categorization emanates from what Rettberg and Gajjala (2015) refer to as a colonial framing that typecast Middle-eastern men in somewhat effeminate roles. They cite multiple articles that have portrayed male refugees as cowards, arriving en masse on boats without their wives and children. Such articles furthermore have juxtaposed these images alongside images of women soldiers (the Kurds in particular in Syria) who have tackled ISIS fighters along the Turkish border.

Additionally, reports describing that fact that migrants owned smart phones increasingly drew international attention. This not only revealed a shared suspicion regarding the presence of the migrants within Europe, but also the geopolitical framing from a privileged standpoint (i.e. Europeans) that endeavours to protect their territorialized cultural and economic hegemony within Europe.

However, key events in Cologne on New Year's Eve 2015 proved to be the catalyst for a radical change in the reception of migrants throughout Europe. In the wake of a series of sexual assaults against women, an article published in the German conservative paper, *Die Welt* ran with the headline 'Why closed borders also mean freedom', suggesting that Germany had a right to curb immigration to protect values, implying that those responsible for perpetrating the attacks did so because they were opposed to European values and ideals. In essence, this event was the 'justification' for some Europeans' long-held stereotypes and xenophobic fears that are distinctly racialized. As Weber writes (2016: 79) 'The origin of violence is seen as external to Europe, and located in countries whose otherness is invoked through the existence of patriarchal influences, obscuring the presence of sexual violence in Europe'.

For example, initial police reports at 21:00 on the evening described the perpetrators as 'drunk refugee men', in essence lumping an extremely diverse group (i.e. refugees) into one single category. This classification, with its strong racial overtones, is extremely problematic. To immediately identify perpetrators as refugees suggests a racialized optics that was based on skin colour. Subsequent police reports at 23:00 stated they were of 'African origin'; only later did the police clarify the initial reports by stating that the 'attackers were from Morocco, and in one case, tried to steal a mobile phone from a male Iranian refugee' and that 'several people asked for police escort from the attacks, many who themselves had 'immigration backgrounds'' (Spiegel Staff, 2016). This report's implication suggests that simply wanting a better life in Europe is an act of terror in itself. While the final report was a much more nuanced description of the attacks and distinguished different groups of refugees and migrants based on different ethnic backgrounds, that was not what was reported in the ensuing media frenzy. Germany's largest daily newspaper *Bild* was forced to apologize and retract a false story in the wake of the Cologne attacks which stated that something similar had taken place in Frankfurt with 900 women allegedly attacked in the shopping district of Freegrass by migrant men. This false story was subsequently picked up and shared in two British tabloids on a large scale but not before right-wing parties like the controversial Nett-Werk Koln, which has called for vigilante justice against migrants, lashed out against the presence of all refugees in Europe via social media.

While the Cologne attacks occurred in Germany, reactionary responses against the presence of recent migrants radiated throughout Europe. Finnish militia groups began patrolling asylum camps within their major city centres, one of the regions in Italy approved a law making it difficult for the construction of new mosques, and Swedish protestors demanded the deportation of all migrants in urban areas (Yardley, The *New York Times*, 13 January 2016). This also provided an opportunity for many far-right politicians, parties like Germany's far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD), France's National Front (FN), and the Dutch anti-Islam Freedom Party (PVV), as well as right-wing tabloids to garner support and/or capitalize on the frenzy. For example, right-wing tabloid headlines, such as *The Express* (28 January 2016) proclaimed 'Islam is incompatible with Western life' and 'Czech leader warns of more Cologne-style attacks'. The Conservative paper, *The Daily Telegraph* ran with the headline: 'Why the migration fiasco spells doom for Project Europe' and even the liberal *Guardian* newspaper, which had previously included the aforementioned article stating that it was a good thing to accept asylum seekers, ran an article with the headline: 'Pressure to resolve migration crisis could tear EU apart' (January 2016), thereby revealing how the migration 'crisis' is entangled within larger, pre-existing geopolitical tensions between various EU member-states and the status of the future of the EU.

Some of the subsequent rhetoric became so extreme that the German right-wing party AfD leader, Frauke Petry, demanded that police should be able to shoot illegal migrant children: 'suggesting police should have the right to shoot illegal migrants at the border 'if necessary'. After the outrage over these comments spread across Europe, the AfD's deputy leader, Beatrix von Storch, modified the previous statement stating, 'The use of firearms against children is not permitted,' before adding, 'women are a different matter' (Kroet, 2016). This statement is particularly telling in that it frames migrants, who were once described as victims, as a threat to Europeans and/or criminals, who could/should be punished, perhaps, by death for their presence within European borders. It is important to note that the emphasis on the presence of migrants as potential terrorists obscures

Europe's own 'homegrown extremism' such as the fact, for example, that most of the terrorists involved in the Paris attacks (November 2015) were French and Belgian citizens. This is also true of the attacks on Manchester and London in June 2017 where each of the attackers were British citizens. Ultimately narratives of migrants-as-threats became so ubiquitous for right-wing nationalists in Europe that the UK Independence Party (UKIP) began referring to the presence of migrants in Europe as the 'migrant 'security crisis'' (BBC July 30, 2016). Even many left leaning media outlets are playing important roles in re-conceptualizing dominant stereotypes and the false framing of refugees and migrants as well.

What permeates the depictions of migrants as geopolitical threats to security or likens their presence to natural disasters is a discourse that has its origins in deep-rooted racism that upholds a Euroscentric world vision that is overwhelmingly White and predominantly Christian. Weber (2016) is highly critical of this vision and suggests that there is a silence within human rights discourse about 'race and racism'. She suggests that the ideologue of 'European human rights' are the preserve of European citizens and a minority who can be 'rendered inoffensive' by those in Europe and North America. Despite the persistent challenges to the European project exemplified by Brexit, separatism, right wing populism and economic instability, the framing of migrants as geopolitical threats by parts of the media is a 'truth' that unites a specific populace across borders. De Genova (2017: 8) agrees that race and racism is at the crux of the migration 'crisis'. Europe's borders, he adds, are haunted 'by an appalling proliferation of almost exclusively non-European/non-white migrant and refugee deaths and other forms of structural violence and generalized suffering'.

7. Conclusion

This paper has made a number of important contributions. Within the context of the European migration 'crisis', we have documented how parts of the media have contributed to representations that underpin a view of Europe that is highly racialized and geopolitically insular. This is perhaps best illustrated in an editorial from the UK's *Daily Mail* which laments the 'insidious problem of illegal immigration' and suggests 'It also raises the questions of whether one can simply uproot people from entirely different cultural universes and expect them to thrive in societies that may subscribe to other values, with radically different expectations of their citizens' (*Daily Mail*, 26th June 2016). As we have seen in this paper, the media in all its guises plays a key role in mediating how the public navigate, understand and respond to migrants and refugees. We have argued that these characterizations can hold great power and may influence how many in Europe perceive migrants, feeding the type of 'anxious politics' identified by Koning and Modest (2017). We also identified how representations and selected reporting by the media has the ability to manipulate how an individual (e.g. a migrant) or an event is framed, which could be different than what an individual intended or how an event may have occurred. Through our analysis, we identified three key representations employed in media reports of migrants in Europe that reflect both a temporal evolution concomitant with unfolding political events as well as Europe's own pre-existing geopolitical codes. Initially, most media reports described migrants as humans striving for safety and/or the hope for a better life in Europe. Some reports included uplifting or hopeful interviews with asylum seekers who gratefully thanked their host nation and its leaders as they began the asylum process.

However, media representations of migrants soon took an unpropitious tone, consociating the arrival of migrants with natural disasters. Headlines describing 'floods', 'waves', and 'swarms' of migrants worked to dehumanize and alienate these individuals, highlighting them as 'the Other' in Europe. These representations were presented as 'truths' to be consumed and shared. Ultimately, representations of migrants were framed by geopolitical codes that underpin European conceptualization of supra-national and national sovereignty, safety, and belonging and where migrants are described as geopolitical threats to security. Building on these findings, we anticipate future investigations to examine the role that complex geographies within Europe, such as Brexit or the economic hierarchies of EU member-states, play in geopolitical framing of migrants to provide a more detailed understanding of the interconnections between an individual state's media representations, politics, and geopolitical aspirations.

The EU's supra-national migrant agreement with Turkey, known as the 'EU-Turkey Refugee Deal' also exposes this shift as evidenced by the EU's proposal to force back all 'irregular migrants' that arrive after 20 March 2016 through Greece by sending them to Turkey to be processed before entering EU borders. This is not only a violation of pre-existing treaties on refugees, which requires that they are processed in a safe place, despite Turkey's history of human rights violations against some of its own citizens, but the proposed plan states that for each person pushed back into Turkey, one will be allowed into the EU after they are processed. In return, the EU promised substantial funding for this agreement and to shorten the processing period for Turkish nationals' visa application for the EU. However, this proposal dehumanizes migrants, essentially converting them into bargaining chips in a large geopolitical dialogue between the EU and Turkey. This agreement also exposes the hypocrisy of the EU's flouted democratic character; after decades admonishing other states for failing to reach the EU's asylum standards, they are now manipulating their own laws to accommodate their agreement with Turkey. Ultimately, the aforementioned representations, geopolitical narratives, and political actions all reveal EU member states' efforts to stabilize systems of signification and power as well as protect the privileges that Europeans enjoy behind their once 'borderless' supra-national entity's increasingly militarized borders.

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