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At the end of November 2016, in Hungary, a Syrian man known only as ‘Ahmed H’ was sentenced to 10 years imprisonment on terrorism charges. These charges amounted to throwing stones at Hungarian police and inciting others to do the same at Röszke on the Serbian-Hungarian border in September 2015. To the authorities, Ahmed H was a part of a ‘migrant crisis’. The narrative of crisis simplified and depoliticised the movement of people through Hungary and across Europe and was for the most part narrated as Europe’s (meaning, variously, a crisis for European culture, for European women, for European religion, for European political systems).

In some ways, Ahmed’s trial was the climax of a spectacle which made tangible a hyper-visible, hyper-real migrant crisis (Cantat, n.d.). The migrant crisis as spectacle spelt out a threatening migrant that at once enraptured and repelled. The state was put forward as protector of a community and a public from this spectre. The spectacle gave the impression of a community directly and urgently involved in a problem, ‘migration’, where migration was represented in images and narratives, of movements and threats of movements, whose emergence or genealogy has been obscured. The spectacle makes migration a curiously isolated and self-contained phenomenon, obscuring those processes of control and exclusion that produce and structure migrant mobility and its ‘illegality’ (Cantat, this volume; De Genova, 2015; 2012; Rajaram, 2003; Mainwaring and Silverman, 2016).

Ahmed H was one of 11 individuals arrested for acts of terrorism following a standoff and clash with Hungarian police at the Röszke border crossing. At the end of the summer of 2015, the Hungarian authorities made crossing the border ‘illegally’ a punishable offence. This was one of a number of measures adopted towards the end of the ‘crisis’, including declaring Serbia a safe third country, constructing a ‘border fence’ straddling the Hungarian-Serbian border, and making damaging that fence a criminal offence. These measures effectively contained the movement of people, with hundreds trapped in grey zones between Hungary and Serbia.

In September 2015 just as the fence was erected and Hungarian police and border guards were closing off other crossings into the country, people scared of being stuck surged towards lines of police and border guards and were met with water cannons and tear gas. A riot ensued which some of the Hungarian media gleefully called ‘the Battle of Röszke’, and during which Ahmed H. allegedly incited people to throw stones at the police. Ahmed H was called a terrorist. In her ruling, the judge could not quite manage to conceal the tortuousness of equating throwing stones with terrorism. The judgement rested on Ahmed H’s acts being tantamount to an attempt to force the police to allow him and others entry to Hungary (Index, 2016) The force of law (Derrida, 1992) creates legal fictions that code reality, and this coding reflects, in this case almost to stereotypical proportions, the interests of power (Pottage, 1992; Genovese, 1976). In most cases, legal fictions have difficulty reflecting in a straightforward way the interests of an elite because the presumptions of any single law

can be and are regularly contested by those who feel unjustly treated by them. The ruling against Ahmed H. is also possibly contestable, but contests over law are not simple linear engagements between pre-formed, unitary, and coherent agents such as the state who implements the law, and those who feel its force.

Contests over law are social processes in which groups try to mobilise resources and capital to sketch a subjectivity that may distort or re-code the way the law operates. The issue then is the capacity of groups to mobilise such resources and capital. Economic, political and cultural relations that structurally pattern society influence the relative access of individuals and groups to capital and resources. The capacity of groups to mobilise against a law reflects to varying degrees embedded cultural and social accounts of privilege and hierarchy. Race and gender as well as class positionalities play a role in determining the extent to which groups can mobilise such resources and capital. Migrants like Ahmed H. are thus, importantly, not anomalies or externalities to territorial power; they are one of many commonly marginalised groups who are in similar positions with regard to the structures that determine capacity to mobilise resources and capital, and thus be politically active. The commonality of this marginalisation is evident when we think about who is able to operationalize resources and capital to make their subjectivities resound publicly. In Hungary, migrants' positionality before the structure of social-cultural-economic power bears similarities to that of racialised groups like the Roma (von Baar, 2016). The spectacularising narratives of crisis externalises 'migrants', making them out to be distinct others to national societies (the othering of Roma took on new forms during the crisis)¹.

If the question whose crisis this is arises at all, it is because the spectacularising narratives and images, coupled with the force of law and an overdetermining, foreclosing political-economic structure, displaces violence. The crisis is the crisis of those people on the move.

History

We must qualify what we mean by 'crisis' when we say that it is migrants whose crisis this is. The narrative of crisis is juxtaposed against 'normality'; in this case, normal and orderly movements of people against chaotic and disorderly migration. As Kallius and Cantat both note in this volume, the 'crisis' is not new. Common asylum policy and the cultivation of a 'Fortress Europe' mentality and policies have led to deaths at sea numbering in the thousands over the past two decades. The eruption of the migrant crisis in the summer of 2015 was not new or exceptional, but the effect of European border management policies and the logics of exclusion and inclusion that they perpetuate.

¹ The Hungarian government's spectacularisation of the 'migrant crisis' gave vent to free associations, including connecting migrants with Roma. Victor Orbán noted the following in September 2015 in response to a proposal for a quota system to distribute refugees among EU states: "Hungary's historical given is that we live together with a few hundred thousands of Roma. This was decided by someone, somewhere. This is what we inherited. This is our situation, this is our predetermined condition ... We are the ones who have to live with this, but we don't demand from anyone, especially not in the direction of the west, that they should live together with a large Roma minority." (Rorke, 2015)

These border management policies focus on regulating mobility. The contrast to the perceived disorderliness of migrant mobilities is the EU mobility regime enabled by the Schengen Agreement which created a space of free movement for certain recognised subjectivities. This enabled certain practices of citizenship and denoted an unruly externality to be kept at bay: individuals not yet processed for entry into the political model of the EU. This is what Etienne Balibar has called “biopolitical processing” - the distinction between legitimate and illegitimate forms of mobility and then the use of the conceptual labels (more legal fictions) ‘economic migrant’ and ‘refugee’. As Apostolova explores in this volume, the distinction between economic migrants and refugees points to a ruse or deception that structures liberal politics which maintain an untenable discursive distinction between political and economic realms. The capitalist market is represented as ‘economic’ and distinct from the political. The economic/political distinction is mirrored in the economic migrant/refugee differentiation, with refugees belonging to the political realm, and economic migrants governed by the logics of the market. The political and economic are of course intertwined. The market is not a space of freedom where an agent sells his or her labour under clear contractual conditions, but a space rife with coercion in which one’s race and gender influence how one is employed. This brings us back to the earlier point: individuals make their agency resound to the extent of their capacity to mobilise resources and capital, and such capacity is overdetermined by hierarchies of race and gender.

Attila Melegh in this volume traces the development of a cultural discourse about economic migration. The Hungarian Prime Minister, Viktor Orbán, after the Charlie Hebdo attacks and then again during the height of the crisis in the summer and autumn of 2015, mounted a critique of liberal politics, arguing that the economic indeed must not be separate from the (national) political. Orbán meant that cultural considerations must enter into any assessment of economic migration, and not just cost-benefit calculations, meaning that European states should be careful about allowing people different from ‘us’ to enter our nations because of the stressors on social cohesion and security. This is of course a different rendition of the ‘the economic is not distinct from the political’ argument, but the two arguments taken together point to what I think is one of the most important consequences of the migration crisis in Europe, and it is a point touched on by many of the authors in this Special Issue. This is the argument that the discourse has enabled the re-emergence of an absolutist idea of European culture, absolutist because it locates agency, belonging and virtue to this culture, while juxtaposing an undesirable other. The othering of migrants has long been central to the EU project (Cantat, this volume), but it is perhaps the case that the crisis has contributed to the growth of a culturalist perspective on economy and society that entrenches as commonsensical somewhat nativist ideas of right and belonging.

Melegh (this volume) argues that at its core the culturalist rendition of the economic posits a desirable population whose national virtue (indeed, European virtue) is a bulwark against an undesirable threat. Edward Said, discussing Gaston Bachelard’s poetics of space, argues that imagined geographies “dramatize the distance and difference between what is close to it and what is far away” (Said, 1978/1985: 55). The imaginary geography being deployed here has two aspects. One

is generative (indeed, transformative), recasting Europe as victim while reminding us of the familiarity of its orderly forms of mobility (and the conception of belonging that this validates) while casting mass movements of migrants as disorderly, the undesirable counterpoint to order. As regards the second, as Said notes, an imaginative geography “can be entirely arbitrary ... because the imaginative geography of the “our land-barbarian land” variety does not require that the barbarians acknowledge the distinction” (Said, 1978/1985: 54). The evocation of European culture and values is one that must remind us of the foreclosing violence of colonialism. A telling consequence is that ‘Europe’ is established as a space to be cherished by those who belong, helping foster a project that locates agency and subjectivity exhaustively in ‘Europe’, in ‘European history’, in its languages, and increasingly in its political organization. There is a sense of fullness about the imagined geography of Europe, contrasted – actively contrasted – with the lack that is seen in the others it names; Said’s barbarians, or migrant others.

Cantat (this volume) argues that the development of capitalism in Europe operated hand in hand with the development of discourses of nationalism. Cantat argues that nationalism was deployed to stabilise the institutional bases for determining access to rights or privileges, such as private property, and as a means of containing the expulsions and upheavals caused by the production of a capitalist economy (for example, the migrations caused by enclosures and the strategic underdevelopment of certain areas). But, as Cantat shows, state and capital are not naturally in line with each other; the state has consistently put a block on capitalism’s requirement for cheap and malleable labour. While necessary for the reproduction of labour, the state does not readily square its interests with those of capital.

The contradiction between state and capital centres on the state’s production of legitimate and illegitimate subjectivities. This may appear on the face of things to hamper capital’s quest for malleable labour, but in practice in Europe it has fostered the growth of a surplus labouring population. This surplus population consists primarily of groups of people who are cast as illegitimate subjectivities with the consequence that they become employed in a shadowy economy marked by coercion and violence. This inclusion-through-exclusion of migrants as surplus populations is fostered then by the rhetorics and narratives of cultural belonging, such as those put forward by the Hungarian government. The aim is to remove the possibility of solidarity.

Zsafia Nagy (this volume) describes how the Hungarian government attempted to foster anti-migrant sentiment using a large billboard campaign, but she notes also that this gave rise to counter-movements; groups that started their own poster and billboard campaigns. The culturalist narrative promoted by the Hungarian government, as well as other governments in Europe, may be intended to remove the possibility of solidarity between citizens and ‘othered’ migrants, but as Nagy, Kallius and Cantat all show in this Special Issue, solidarity campaigns connecting European citizens and illegalised migrants remain a feature of the European political landscape.

If a key consequence of the narrative of crisis has been the normalisation of a culturalist rhetoric that determines legitimate and illegitimate subjectivities, then another consequence has been the growth of solidarity movements. Hamman and Karakayali (this volume) explore the growth of a discourse on the ‘welcome culture’ in

Germany and its real impacts on social space. The authors show how volunteers worked to cultivate and promote a 'society of migration' centred on the everyday. Volunteers worked with migrants beyond the heightened temporality of the 'crisis' in everyday life to assist their incorporation into society. Bhimji (this volume) conducted ethnographic work with asylum-seekers in Germany with a view to seeing how people negotiated the restrictions of the Dublin agreement which prevented asylum seekers from working. Bhimji studies political activism by migrants who contested the law and also individual and family-centred attempts to restore dignity and a sense of personhood in the face of restrictions: effectively attempts to be perceived as people equal under the law, regardless of status. Kallius (this volume) shows how combinations of migrant and citizen agency led to temporary ruptures in the structure of EU asylum policy, when protests and marches led to migrants being allowed to move from Hungary to Austria and Germany in contravention of Schengen and Dublin agreements governing migrant mobilities. Such counter-movements tend to be reactionary, and can become overdetermined by the institutional and infrastructural strength of the European Union or individual nation states (the ruptures caused by migrants being allowed to move - in Kallius' example - were quickly closed over when the border fence between Hungary and Serbia was built and national, culturalist migration policy gained precedence again).

Cantat and Nagy, however, point to the possibility of different political communities emerging. These are communities in Cantat's example that point to alternative imaginations of Europe, going to the core of the cultural-national narratives that produce legal and illegal subjectivities and posit different modalities of solidarity; modalities that re-imagine Europe.

Concluding thoughts

The papers in this Special Issue all reflect in one way or another on the normalisations of a culturalist approach to the political that has been directly enabled by the narrative of crisis. This narrative of crisis, and the spectacles that have emerged, enabled the sovereign European state to increase its legitimacy as key political actor. The narrative of crisis deployed culturalist arguments throughout Europe, othering migrants, and presenting them as a threat to an increasingly cohesive European culture and subjectivity. The onus came from Eastern Europe, perhaps most tellingly in the form of Viktor Orbán's insistence that Hungarians workers in the United Kingdom should not be called 'migrants' (Melegh, this volume). 'Migrant' came to be associated with illegitimacy and threat, a counterpoint to a virtuous European culture. The aim is the erosion of the possibility of solidarity between European citizens and those called 'migrants'. However, papers here also describe persistent solidarity campaigns. Those that centre on different imaginations of political community, and of 'Europe', question the imagined geography of separation (of which Edward Said) that helps embed the dismissal of migrant subjectivity. It is this project that this Special Issue furthers: understanding how such geographies of separation are maintained, and the coercion that is thereby enabled in capital-labour relations particularly, while also exploring how other communities are imagined in a politics of hope.

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