Politics and Space C

Do no harm? The impact of policy on migration scholarship

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Abstract

The mass migrations of 2015 were not merely a watershed moment for 'EUrope' but also for the scholarly study of migration to EUrope. With academic expertise and insights becoming much sought-after in the media and political discourse, migration scholarship has gained in unknown popularity over recent years. This current 'migration knowledge hype' has particularly benefited scholarship that claims to be of relevance for EUropean policymakers in finding responses to 'migratory pressures'. This article critically interrogates the increasing intimacy between the worlds of migration scholarship and migration policy and seeks to unpack how the quest for policy-relevance has shaped the process of research itself. The impact of policy on migration research can be discerned when policy categories, assumptions, and needs constitute the bases and (conceptual) frames of research that seeks to be legible to policymakers. However, with EUropean migration policies causing devastation and undeniably harmful effects on migrant lives, what is the responsibility of researchers for the knowledge they produce and disseminate? Should the 'do no harm' principle prevalent in the migration discipline be expanded to also include the potentially harmful consequences resulting from research made relevant to migration policymakers? This article makes the case for an engaged scholarship that does not shy away from intervening in the contested field of migration with the intention not to fix but to amplify the epistemic and other crises of the EUropean border regime.

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Introduction

What is regularly referred to as 2015's 'migration crisis' can be regarded as a watershed moment for EUrope, triggering a range of dramatic reconfigurations that both threatened *and* rejuvenated the 'EUropean project'.[1] While conflicts among EU member states and institutions continue over the governing of migratory movements and questions of reception or the 'fair' relocation of newcomers, and while the union has shrunk in light of the UK's withdrawal in 2020, the migrant arrivals portrayed and treated as an emergency also reinforced processes of 'EUropeanisation'. Despite all conflicts and EUro-scepticism there appears to be consensus among member states and institutions that 2015's mass intrusions into EUropean space would need to remain a singular and exceptional historic episode, an anomaly never to repeat itself. In order to guarantee its exceptionality, the collective quest to discipline unauthorised migrations and to strengthen EUrope's border architecture as a whole has deepened existing and fostered novel EUropean collaborations, alliances, and spaces (Rigo, 2018; Stierl, 2020a). A plethora of new or reinforced policies on migration have seen the light of day, with Hein de Haas et al. (2019: 901) defining such policies "as rules (i.e., laws, regulations, measures, and procedures) that national states enact with the explicit objective of affecting the volume, origin, direction, and composition of migration." Certainly, in the EUropean context, as elsewhere, not only nation states create or enact these rules but also supra-national institutions, agencies, and international organisations.

The migration movements across the Mediterranean Sea and the Balkans in 2015 and early 2016 not only prompted "alarmist reactions [that] have largely served to justify the necessity of new 'emergency' policies and the deployment of new means of control" (New Keywords, 2016: 7–8), they also prompted a thirst for knowledge on migration. 2015 was thus also a watershed moment for EUropean migration scholarship, with academic expertise and insights becoming much sought-after in the media and political discourse. In an editorial of the journal *Movements*, focussed on "the contested knowledge production of migration", Katherine Braun et al. (2018: 9) speak of a veritable "migration knowledge hype." Hitherto a rather modest academic sub-field, migration and border scholarship has gained in unknown popularity over recent years, with new institutes, teaching programmes, journals, and academic networks surfacing. The 'crisis' prompted a "blossoming crisis industry" (Rozakou, 2019: 80) and has, as Enrica Rigo (2018: 507) observes, "become a tool of knowledge and expertise production" as well as "an object of calls for research funding."

Novel funding opportunities have emerged in particular for research with purported relevance for policymakers who would use such "research when designing or implementing policies or in decision making" (Scholten, 2018: 289). In the UK, for example, the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC, 2015, 2017: 5) provided funding in 2015 as a "response to the on-going migration crisis" and with the aim to "provide evidence to inform the development of policy and responses by governments, European agencies, and charities", concluding two years later that the findings had succeeded in "influencing government and agency responses to the crisis." In Germany also, funding for research projects and institutes increased significantly after 2015, with the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF, 2016) announcing in 2016 to provide 18 million Euro for the "advancement of migration research." Produced research findings, according to the ministry, should be quickly implemented, so that the applicability of research would be of great significance. Entirely new research institutes have come about, such as the Interdisciplinary Centre for Integration and Migration Research (InZentIM) or the German Centre for Integration- and Migration Research (DeZIM) both of which opened in 2017.

On a EUropean level and as a "response to the refugee crisis", the European Commission (2016) announced in 2016 to release eleven million Euro for "new research to understand migration but also to develop effective policies for managing the influx and integrating migrants in the society and economy." *Horizon 2020*, the "biggest EU Research and Innovation programme" (European Commission, 2018a), set out in its work programme 2018–2020 "to address the concerns of the European citizens regarding migration" and called for policy-relevant projects. The research on migration's "flows, drivers, attitudes and behaviours" should "inform evidence-based governance and regulatory frameworks", "contribute to developing migration governance structures, policies and instruments", "assist European policymakers", and "enhance policy responses" (European Commission, 2018b: 7–14).

On a 'global' level, though in reality often referring to "institutes in, and academics originating from, the global North", the desire for academic knowledge on migration has also manifested in the recent "rapid proliferation in the number of research centres, policy institutes, journals, websites, conferences, and workshops" (Crisp, 2018: 641; Banerjee, 2012). The Global Compact on Refugees, affirmed by the United Nations General Assembly in December 2018 and meant to provide "a blueprint for governments, international organizations, and other stakeholders to ensure that host communities get the support they need and that refugees can lead productive lives", declared the creation of

> A global academic network on refugee, other forced displacement, and statelessness issues [...], involving universities, academic alliances, and research institutions, together with UNHCR and other relevant stakeholders, to facilitate research, training and scholarship opportunities which result in specific deliverables in support of the objectives of the global compact. (UNHCR, 2018: 8)

The current migration knowledge hype thus constitutes also a migration policy hype – "academics and other knowledge workers" are recruited, Peter Nyers (2019: 174) notes, in order to provide 'specific deliverables' to migration policymakers.

Certainly, the "progressive hybridisation of science and policy" (Bandola-Gill, 2019: 896) and the desire for policy-relevant research can be observed far beyond the migration discipline. Policy-relevance has become, as Richard Jackson (2016: 124) critically argues, "the gold standard and pinnacle of academic practice". Christina Boswell and Katherine Smith (2017: 2) have shown how doing research that is relevant in the sphere of policymaking has been incentivised through an "emphasis on 'research impact' [which] has been increasing steadily across a number of OECD countries over the past decade." In light of this development and the growth of the 'impact agenda', Harmonie Toros (2016: 126, emphasis in original) worries that "the famous 'so what' question asked about any research has gone from meaning 'how does this contribute to knowledge?' to 'how does this contribute to knowledge *and* how can it have relevance beyond academia, including in the policy world?'" Toros fears "that there may come a dreadful day when the first question is marginalised in favour of the second."

With the growth of the migration discipline, important new insights into the circumstances and dynamics of precarious migration and its governance have been won. As a researcher of migration myself, I would be the last to lament the fact that the question of migration has become of central importance in the social sciences and beyond, generating productive interdisciplinary exchanges, conceptual advances as well as, indeed, novel funding opportunities. What I do seek to critically explore in this article is the growing intimacy between the worlds of migration scholarship and migration policy given the current

migration knowledge hype. What this article proposes is that the, at times, flattering interest of EUropean policymakers in scholarship and the idea of having an impact 'in the real world' has given further rise to a scholarship that risks ascribing to, rather than critically interrogating, "the paradigm of an all-encompassing governance of mobility and [...] the fantasies [it] entails and engenders" (Garelli and Tazzioli, 2013a: 247). In a nutshell, the article wonders whether the migration discipline has succumbed to "the ruling order of policy" (Rancière, 1992: 62) so that the 'dreadful day' has already come where the quest for policy relevance has altered the meaning of the famous 'so what?' question.

The article is organised into four main parts. Part I draws parallels between the scholarly fields of terrorism and migration studies which were both propelled to the forefront of public debate and policy interest in light of unforeseen political events that seemed to challenge the existing political order. Part II explores the impact of policy on migration scholarship and highlights the problematic tendencies in policy-relevant research to adapt a priori to policy categories, assumptions, and needs. Part III alludes to the harm caused by EUropean migration policies and raises the question whether the 'do no harm' principle prevalent in migration research should be expanded to also include the potentially harmful consequences of research made relevant to migration policymakers. Part IV makes the case for different forms of 'impact' through migration research and highlights three ways of contributing through scholarship: epistemic interventions, counter-empirics, and activist engagement.

Learning from the terrorism knowledge hype

The so-called 'crisis' over EUrope-bound migration has generated a rapidly growing desire, and market, for scholarly knowledge on migration, not dissimilar to the way in which the 9/11 attacks in 2001 had elevated the discipline of terrorism studies. Without doubt, in the aftermath of these events, both terrorism studies and migration studies, *as disciplines*, have profited considerably. Migration, since 2015, has become a "growth industry" akin to terrorism after 9/11 when "thousands of new books and articles [were] published on terrorism every year, along with an even greater corpus of cultural texts in the form of novels, media articles, and movies" (Breen Smyth et al., 2008: 1). Though it seems more than questionable to consider the "refugee crisis [...] Europe's 9/11" (Krastev, 2018), similarities do exist in the ways in which events that seemed to radically rupture the presumed stability of the existing political order created the need for scholarly expertise that could be of use for policy responses. Can the migration discipline learn from the experiences made by (critical) terrorism scholars in dealing with counter-terrorism policymakers?

In 2016, around the time when hundreds of thousands crossed EUrope's borders, scholars associated with Critical Terrorism Studies (CTS) debated the "complex relationship" between the discipline and policy-relevance and explored researchers' potentially "unhealthy proximity to the state" (Fitzgerald et al., 2016: 1). From the onset, the sub-field of *Critical Terrorism Studies* had positioned itself against "the (perceived) ontological, epistemological, and ideological commitments of existing terrorism studies" (Breen Smyth et al., 2008: 2). As an intervention within a booming field, CTS aspired to lay open and critically interrogate "the biases and practices currently present in the field", promote greater self-reflexivity in research, and offer a scholarly 'home' for those unwilling to publish in "'terrorism industry' journals." Despite their critique of mainstream terrorism studies' policy-driven nature, CTS

scholars were not necessarily opposed to producing scholarship relevant to policymakers, at least not at first. As Jackson et al. (2009: 236) argued in 2009:

> we feel that the current political and intellectual climate, in which there is growing disappoint-ment with the effects and outcomes to date of the 'war on terror', and where security practi-tioners are actively searching for new ideas and approaches to thinking about counterterrorism, provides a ripe moment for critically-oriented scholars to offer their knowledge and expertise.

Several years later, when looking back at CTS interventions in terrorism studies in a 2016 special issue of *Critical Studies on Terrorism*, some of the founding scholars were divided on what had been, or could be, achieved through policy-relevant terrorism scholarship. The dilemma whether to "*engage, or circumvent*" was examined in the context of "the prevailing research environment in which academics are falling under increasing pressure to demon-strate the societal *impact* of their work which in the social sciences, is heavily tied to dem-onstrating policy-relevance" (Fitzgerald et al., 2016: 2, emphases in original).

In a self-reflective article, Toros (2016: 126) voices concern about the "little institutional discussion of the ethics of impact" and the potential of harm caused by research. Despite such quarrels, Toros (2016: 127, emphasis in original) makes the case that critical research-ers should engage in dialogue with both state actors and terrorists since "*all* agents are capable of change and transformation." In contrast, Jackson (2016: 121) feels it was "a little naïve" to believe that CTS scholars "could balance access to policymakers and having policy relevance with prioritising human security, critiquing the use of violence (including by the state), the promotion of nonviolence, 'outsider theorising', and anti-hegemony." This naivety, for him, rests "on a series of implicit assumptions about states as benign institutions and policymaking as a fairly open, rational process" – assumptions that could no longer be maintained in light of a radical "mutation of counterterrorism from a fairly narrowly-defined set of security measures designed to deal with the threat of sub-state political violence in individual states, to a monstrous global machine." This global machine of counter-terrorism, Jackson suggests, has turned into a regime that "is, in its philosophy, practice, and effects, inherently violent, oppressive, and life-diminishing; it is a set of prac-tices that is deeply anti-emancipatory, anti-human, and regressive." Consequently, it would be illusory to believe that engagements with counter-terrorism policymakers could have emancipatory effects.

Assessing whether CTS has succeeded or failed in balancing access to power and a critical distance to it would go beyond the scope of this article but it is safe to say that the question of policy-relevance remains one of the most pressing, and difficult, issues the discipline faces. The introspections in CTS are relevant for (critical) migration studies as both disciplines experienced a drastic increase in policy-interest after events deemed world-altering crises in the Global North. They also feel pertinent given that (state and media) responses to terror-ism have become increasingly interlinked with responses to migration, and vice versa. Over the past decades, as Jef Huysmans (2000: 760) notes, counter-terrorism efforts have regu-larly coalesced with efforts to counter unauthorised migration, thus producing a "security continuum connecting border control, terrorism, international crime and migration."

In particular since 2015, migrant movements have frequently been depicted as "an amor-phous 'invasion' of migrants or refugees re-figured as potential 'terrorists'" (New Keywords, 2016: 9). Rumours that "Islamic State (IS) fighters are being smuggled into Europe by gangs in the Mediterranean" circulated widely (BBC, 2015). In the aftermath of the 2015 Paris attacks, suggestions by France's prime minister Manuel Valls that some of the terrorists had used the 'crisis' to "slip in" undetected made the rounds (Guardian, 2015), despite the fact

that the attackers were nearly exclusively EU citizens. Nevertheless, border security measures within the Schengen Area and at EUrope's external frontiers intensified in the aftermath of the attacks. In the US also, the figure of the 'migrant terrorist' was conjured up. President Donald Trump, who repeatedly blamed the 'migration crisis' for having "changed the fabric of Europe" (New York Post, 2018), suggested that "We have terrorists coming through the southern border because they find that's probably the easiest place to come through" (Associated Press, 2019).

In view of such security continuum entangling terrorism and migration "as though their association were quite natural" (Walters, 2002: 570), the same individuals and groups racialised as 'other' regularly happen to be targeted by both counter-terrorism and 'counter-migration' discourses and measures (Maira, 2016). Security policies executed in the name of counter-terrorism have led to "increased insecurity amongst migrant and ethnic minority populations in the West, and particularly among those from Muslim majority countries or long-settled Muslim and ethnic minority communities" (Lazaridis and Wadia, 2015: 2). In times where 'the' migrant from the Global South seems to embody all the fears and dangers in the Global North, which appears to justify an increasingly restrictive global policing of racialised populations and where the war on terror has increasingly turned also into a war on (precarious) migration, how does the migration discipline respond to the sudden increase in interest by the makers of migration policy?

Becoming legible to migration policymakers

Even if the aphorism 'a rising tide lifts all boats' may contain some truth, the figuratively used notion of the 'migration wave' has disproportionally lifted a form of scholarship that purports to generate 'actionable' knowledge on migration for 'evidenced-based' policymaking. Engagement between researchers and policymakers is commonly portrayed as a win-win situation where policymakers profit from rigorously produced evidence while researchers profit not merely from the prestige of having their work considered relevant 'in the real world' but also more concretely from gaining access to the realms of policymaking and government, greater funding opportunities, and thus growing research output and readership. Still, this supposed win-win situation has recently undergone some scrutiny, with concerns being raised about the growing intimacy of the worlds of policy and research around the contested issue of migration.

Martin Baldwin-Edwards et al. (2019: 2148) have observed that in light of migration becoming "deeply politicised at the national and regional levels", policymakers would pick research findings *à la carte*, thus only those findings suiting dominant political interests. They hold that the evidence produced in research tends to lose its complexity when incorporated into the policy process due to such "politics of policymaking." While there is no doubt that complexity tends to be lost when research is incorporated in policy processes, which is certainly neither unique for migration scholarship nor a recent phenomenon, I would like to explore what I see as the other side of the problem. Namely, the ways in which the desire for policy-relevance has come to factor into processes of knowledge production on migration. In other words, instead of policymakers simply reducing the complexity of research when drawing from its findings, it feels significant to explore whether migration research is at risk of adapting to what is considered digestible and useable for policymakers. To put it succinctly, this article wonders about the impact of policy on migration research.

It is important to acknowledge the increasing pressure on scholars, many of whom are employed precariously, to "[demonstrate] the relevance and significance of their research,

with the quality of work measured in terms of the extent to which it has an 'impact' on policy" (Baldwin-Edwards et al., 2019: 2140). Making the case for policy relevance seems inescapable in the current research environment in the UK (but also elsewhere) where the impact agenda has led to "the expansion of the production of policy-relevant knowledge into spaces that were previously domains of academic knowledge production" (Bandola-Gill, 2019: 902). Completely omitting the policy dimension would mean to significantly hamper the chances of grant success, and therefore, ultimately, reduce one's 'employability'. Feeling such pressure, I have also pointed to the relevance of my proposed research 'for policy' when drawing up my Leverhulme grant proposal in 2017. Though largely a box-ticking exercise, I noted: "my research promises to be of high significance for scholars working in the field of migration, for practitioners engaging in the Mediterranean, as well as for EU policy makers." Still, while this pressure on scholars is real and not negligible, what is their responsibility for produced knowledges on migration? How is research impacted when it is meant to be legible to policymakers?

Policy's impact on research can be discerned when policy categories, assumptions, and needs constitute the bases and (conceptual) frames of research. This tendency has been observed already in the terrorism discipline where framing research with policy-relevance as its end-point "pushes us towards asking particular kinds of questions and looking for particular kinds of evidence" (Jackson, 2016: 123). In the migration discipline, Richard Black (2001: 63) observed already about twenty years ago that the "relatively uncritical use of a policy-based definition of refugees within academic writing has a long pedigree", while, for Anna Lindley (2014: 8), the privileging of "policy categories [. . .] as a starting point for research" continues to be a main "weakness of migration studies." In his widely cited article, Oliver Bakewell (2008: 434–435) argues "that studies arising too closely from policy concerns can tend to skew the basis for research, constraining the questions asked, the areas of study, the methods used and the analysis." Importantly, Bakewell notes, "the search for policy relevance has encouraged researchers to take the categories, concepts and priorities of policy makers and practitioners as their initial frame of reference for identifying their areas of study and formulating research questions."

That policy categories and definitions, policy assumptions, and policy needs have come to underwrite much of the research conducted on migration appears clear today, five years after the peak of the EUropean 'migration crisis'. This impact of policy on research seems particularly apparent when we enquire into, first, the unproblematised use and (re-)production of migrant and refugee figures in research; second, the reinforcing of a state-centric gaze on migration; and, third, the creation of statistical migration spectacles. While certainly not exhaustive, these three interrelated aspects feel emblematic of the ways in which a policy gaze, directly or indirectly, wilfully or unconsciously, has cemented in the migration discipline and thereby reinforced certain 'truths' about migration. I will briefly outline each of these three aspects in turn.

(Re-)producing migrant and refugee figures

The legalistic differentiation between 'migrants' and 'refugees' constitutes one of the most glaring examples of the problematic acceptance of policy categories and definitions in research. Even if Bakewell (2008: 437, 450) rightly warns against an "over-reliance on policy categories" and makes the case for "policy irrelevant research", he insists on maintaining the "essential difference between refugees and other migrants." Along such seemingly essential difference, two sub-fields of study have evolved and prospered that focus on 'their' respective subjects: migrants who move 'voluntarily', and refugees or forced migrants

who move 'involuntarily' (Stierl, 2020b). Such specialisation into distinct fields of scholarship - Migration Studies on the one hand and Refugee or Forced Migration Studies on the other - has further cemented dominant policy labels and the production of figures to whom reductive motifs for movement and displacement are assigned (Scheel and Squire, 2014; Zetter, 2007).

Routinely, these policy categories are assumed to "simply exist, out there, as empty vessels into which people can be placed in some neutral ordering process" (Crawley and Skleparis, 2018: 49). The division between migrants and refugees, and consequently between the fields of their study, feels emblematic of what R.B.J. Walker (2010: 257–258) has warned against: "analytical procedures that presume a radical dualism as a ground of scholarly credibility." Although offering little to grasp either the complex lived realities of moving and displaced people or the ways in which "regimes of 'migration management'" and accelerating "processes of illegalization" (Mezzadra, 2015: 121) have blurred boundaries between those characterised as migrants or refugees, the a priori adoption of such radically dualist policy categories in research appears to signal credibility to migration policymakers. As Nicholas De Genova et al. (2018: 257) note,

> migration studies, as a professional intellectual field, tends to reify and fetishize epistemic objects such as 'migration' and 'migrants' just as refugee studies similarly cultivates the specialization of an often rarefied and rather technical object of knowledge that is labeled 'refugee'.

For B.S. Chimni (2009: 12), scholars of migration have largely failed to "address the definition issue" and have participated in the "legal fetishism" underwriting the "non-entrée policies" of countries in the Global North. They, Chimni argues, have ignored the fact that "life and epistemology do not imitate legal categories" so that "legal categories most often seek to 'discipline' life and knowledge to realize dominant interests in society." A scholarship that reifies untenable migrant/refugee divisions risks being implicated in the normalisation of seemingly objective, value-neutral, and technocratic labels, and thus risks becoming complicit in the disciplining of migration.

Reinforcing a state-centric gaze

Migration scholarship that seeks to signal its relevance to policymakers tends to perpetuate the assumed naturalness of the nation-state form and its boundaries, which is, after all, the frame in which policymakers predominantly operate. If "thinking about immigration means thinking about the state" (Sayad, 2018: 166), there is a tendency in the policy-relevant migration discipline to see and think *like* the state (Scott, 1999). The lack of scholarly propensity to problematise what Andreas Wimmer and Nina Glick Schiller (2002: 302) famously called "methodological nationalism", namely "the assumption that the nation/state/society is the natural social and political form of the modern world", is starkly evident in migration scholarship.

Certainly, methodological nationalism is detectable throughout the social sciences and not singularly an effect of the desire for policy-relevance. And yet, migration scholarship's inability to break out of such "sedentarist thinking" (Lindley, 2014: 1) is, or should be, of fundamental concern for a discipline that studies cross-border issues and migratory subjectivities. When viewed through a state-centric gaze, 'the' migrant necessarily remains "a distinct category of human mobility (or, mobile humanity)" (De Genova, 2013: 253), an anomaly to be governed and disciplined, "an aberration of the prior norm" (Soguk, 1999: 14). Instead of investigating the ways in which "the refugee is always a reproach to the

formation of the political order or subjectivity which necessarily gives rise to the refugee" (Dillon, 1998: 30), policy-relevant migration scholarship risks turning the figure of the refugee from a "scandal for politics" into a political scandal and problem that needs to be 'solved' by the state.

Even when migration policymaking takes place in a 'global' frame, the naturalness of the sovereign order continues to be taken for granted. As Nyers (2019: 176) shows when commenting on the global compacts on migration and refugees, what underpins these UN agreements is the assumption "that the principle of state sovereignty is unquestioningly the organizing principle of international and domestic politics." This continuous reification of the naturalness of the state has also not been inhibited through processes of regionalisation (and globalisation) in and of EUrope which would, somewhat intuitively, seem to disturb nationalist imaginaries inscribed in methodological nationalism. What has emerged instead is a form of methodological 'EUropeanism' that positions the migrant, arguably more explicitly in the post-2015 era than before, as an anomaly and disturbance not merely of social cohesion within EU member states or of the relations between them, but of the 'EUropean project' as such. In order to appeal to policymakers, much of migration scholarship has not problematised but reinforced "the superimposition of Euro-centred categories and narratives onto any landscape of mobility" (Garelli and Tazzioli, 2013b: 247). Processes of EUropeanisation have thus not broken naturalised state frames in migration research. Rather, we see their reproduction on a larger canvass, something that one could refer to as "methodological continentalism" (Hansen and Jonsson, 2017: 18).

Creating statistical spectacles

In order to be legible to policymakers, migration scholarship is at risk of partaking in the creation of statistical migration spectacles. With numbers becoming themselves "key actors in debates and policy about migration", as Amade M'charek and Julia Black (2020: 87) note, we have recently seen the explosion of migration statistics. These statistics are believed to objectively represent shifting migrant flows, routes, and deaths. However, as Charles Heller and Antoine Pécoud (2020: 482–483, emphasis in original) show by drawing from the writing of Michel Foucault on statistics as "*knowledge of the state*", migration statistics are far from neutral representations of 'truths':

> Migration statistics do not merely 'describe', in an 'objective' manner, a preexisting social reality. They rather contribute to the very existence of 'migration' by making the phenomenon visible and countable by governments. They are both the product of immigration policies and the condition for these polices to exist, thereby constituting the privileged tool through which state policies operate.

Statistics play a pivotal role in the realm of migration as EUropean governments and institutions heavily draw on them when devising strategies to combat migrant movements. Rather than critically investigating "*how, why, by and for whom, and to what ends* these acts of (official) counting are performed", scholarship that seeks policy-relevance feeds implicitly or explicitly into what we have described as the production of a *spectacle of statistics*, a

> numbers game [that is] exploited by national governments, EU institutions, and international organizations, as well as fear-mongering news media and right-wing populist political parties, [which] routinely serve to fortify the more general staging of a spectacle of 'invasion' or 'inundation' conjured by images of seemingly desperate 'foreign' (orientalized) masses seeking entry

to places where they ostensibly do not belong, have no legitimate claim, and are presumably unwelcome. (New Keywords, 2016: 22–24, emphases in original)

The production of statistical knowledge in migration scholarship has coalesced with the production of a wide range of visual representations, such as maps, charts, and graphs that seem to objectively portray migratory dynamics and trajectories. These impositions of truth on space tend to reinforce conceptions of migration as seemingly always-already EUrope-bound (Newhouse, 2018) and as active intrusions into passive EUropean sovereign territory where migration policy and border control measures appear to constitute *re*-actions to migrant transgressions. For Maribel Casas-Cortes and Sebastian Cobarrubias (2018: 30), cartographic representations "deploy the [...] neutrality associated with expertise" but "can have concrete human consequences beyond the maps, giving rise to controversial practices of interception far away from conventional borderlines." What migration statistics and maps rarely represent or account for are the "subjective experiences of borders" (Rigo, 2018: 509), the many attempts undertaken to cross particular borders, the passage of time between different legs of the journeys, the manifold re-orientations, the separations between loved ones, the experiences of blatant or more insidious forms of border violence (Khosravi, 2007).

Harmful migration policies

When "policy friendliness [becomes] a metric for the selection of research methodologies" (Bakewell, 2008: 441), we see how a scholarly field risks reinforcing policy categorisations of people, reproducing a state-centric gaze on migration, and partaking in the creation of statistical spectacles. Although these pitfalls resulting from the desire to become legible to policymakers are not particularly novel in the migration discipline, they have amplified through the unprecedented post-2015 migration knowledge/policy hype. Given the significant increase in funding opportunities in EUrope for policy-relevant migration research, one can observe that scholars of migration (including, or particularly, those who have recently jumped onto the migration bandwagon) are not merely passively "co-opted by political or bureaucratic interests" (Black, 2001: 67) but have actively sought to become 'co-opted'. What cannot be evaluated in this article is the 'real' impact of current migration research on EUropean migration policy but what can be alluded to is the impact of EUropean policies on migrant lives. Over the past five years, EUropean migration policies have turned increasingly restrictive, exacerbating the injurious and deadly violence that we have witnessed already for decades along EUrope's external borders (Steinhilper and Gruijters, 2018). Three policy responses to the 'migration crisis' seem emblematic: EUropean deals and agreements with Turkey, as well as with political factions within Libya and the Sahel region.

EU-Turkey policies: Following the EU-Turkey deal of March 2016, illegal push-back operations from Greece to Turkey via sea and land borders have become systematic, preventing thousands from applying for asylum in EUrope by unlawfully forcing them back to where they had escaped from. Moreover, the Turkish coastguards, incentivised by six billion Euro financial support to Turkey (European Commission, 2018c), have conducted mass interceptions of migrant boats in the Aegean Sea. At the same time, the hotspots installed on the Greek islands as part of the EU's 'Approach to Migration' have turned into overcrowded detention camps where tens of thousands languish in inhumane conditions and where children self-harm and attempt suicide at an alarming rate (MSF, 2019).

EU-Libya policies: Agreements between EUrope and the UN-backed Libyan Government of National Accord have prompted the interception of tens of thousands of migrants seeking to escape via the sea and their return to detention facilities characterised by German diplomats as 'concentration-camp' like (Guardian, 2017). In 2017 and 2018, 91.3 million Euro were mobilised from the EU's 'Emergency Trust Fund for Africa' to support 'Integrated Border and Migration Management', meaning the building up, equipping, and training of the so-called Libyan coastguards who have engaged in systematic forms of human rights abuse, including the killing of returned migrants (European Commission, 2018d). At the same time, EUropean actors such as Frontex, Eunavfor Med, as well as national coastguards have largely abandoned Search and Rescue operations while NGOs have been impeded from carrying out rescue operations.

EU-Sahel policies: The Sahel region has also experienced the violent effects of EU border externalisation policies. By finding "'partners' of their migration policies both in Libya's south, controlled by various ethnic militias, and beyond Libya's borders in the three Sahelo-Saharan states south of Libya", Jérôme Tubiana et al. (2018: 9, 72–73) note, EUrope has "aggravated existing 'militia-isation' policies – the empowerment of militias who can be simultaneously involved in smuggling and anti-smuggling, and whose presence is itself a security threat." This outsourcing of border enforcement not only to authoritarian regimes but also sub-state militias is not a novel development but has been reinforced over recent years, resulting in increasingly dangerous transit routes and a dramatically rising death toll in the Sahara, by some estimated to be higher than in the Mediterranean (UNHCR, 2020).

The adverse effects of EU policies on migrant lives have been extensively documented but, remarkably, the ethical conundrum arising from engaging with the makers of some of these policies has not been sufficiently addressed. Given the fact that death and despair result directly from restrictive EU migration policies, ought the migration discipline not ask itself some hard questions akin to the questions raised by critical terrorism scholars outlined before? Shouldn't the 'do no harm' principle so prevalent in migration research encompass also the potentially harmful consequences resulting from research made relevant to migration policymakers?

The 'do no harm' principle addresses the potential for harm caused to often-vulnerable research participants and has generated greater sensibility around issues of consent, access, confidentiality, asymmetrical relationships, privacy, and so forth. For some, it has become "scholarly consensus" in the migration discipline, even "a golden rule and a framework for analysis" (Krause, 2017: 5). Others, however, have been more sceptical, noting the absence of clear guidelines on how to practically navigate ethical complexities and challenges in migration research (Jacobsen and Landau, 2003) as well as the persistence of "unethical and potentially exploitative" research practices (Mackenzie et al., 2007: 300). How, precisely, one could extend the 'do no harm' principle to engagements with policymakers cannot be fleshed out in this article but raising such proposition intends to prompt debate within the migration discipline where the recent knowledge/policy hype and the boom in funding opportunities for policy-relevant research have largely been viewed positively.

Considering the 'do no harm' principle for encounters with policymakers serves, first and foremost, as a reminder of the *politicality* of knowledge production. Such reminder is needed in view of research projects such as 'Intelligent Portable Control System' (2016a), short 'iBorderCtrl', generously funded by Horizon 2020. Despite connecting several universities with tech companies as well as police and border authorities, and aiming "to enable faster and thorough border control for third country nationals crossing the land borders

of EU Member States", this project presents itself in a wide-eyed manner as "only a research project, researching and developing new technologies", the use of which "at the border in the future is unclear" (Intelligent Portable Control System, 2016b). Posing questions about the potential harmful effects of projects such as iBorderCtrl situates research outcomes inescapably in the "political process which has, over recent years, stigmatised, vilified and undermined the rights of refugees and migrants in Europe" (Crawley and Skleparis, 2018: 50), and has, moreover, led to the deaths of thousands along external EU borders.

Migration research, even if not engaging in projects as dubious as iBorderCtrl, has to consider its implication in the border or illegality industry (Andersson, 2014). That the current migration hype is also a knowledge/policy hype means that scholars are, as De Genova (2013: 252) writes, "'of the connections' between migrants' transnational mobilities and the political, legal, and border policing regimes that seek to orchestrate, regiment, and manage their energies." In the absence of "neutral ground", migration researchers "are 'of' these connections because there is no 'outside' or analytical position beyond them." In view of such implication, posing the question about potential harm constitutes a first step toward acknowledging responsibility for produced knowledges beyond a narrow conception of the 'do no harm' principle, possibly making it harder to portray the knowledge/policy nexus as simply pragmatic, objective, and unpolitical. It could, moreover, open up room for alternative ideas around 'impact'. If, in times of the impact agenda, the famous 'so what' question has come to mean relevance of scholarship besides contributions to academic knowledge, what other forms of impact are there beyond, or even antagonistic to, the realm of policy?

Impactful migration research

Research impact, according to the ESRC (2020), can be defined as "the demonstrable contribution that excellent research makes to society and the economy." Though it is not immediately apparent what sort of contribution is envisaged, it seems clear that the current 'impact agenda' in the social sciences is dominated by often "surprisingly simple and linear ideas about how research can be 'utilised' to produce more effective policies" (Boswell and Smith, 2017: 2). Frequently, in the migration discipline, "policy relevance can be read as a proxy for practical relevance" (Bakewell, 2008: 434) so that the transfer of one's research to the policy realm is equated with its impact in the 'real' world. The purported practical relevance of research can thus be claimed when EU or national policymakers attend meetings and acknowledge one's research findings. As a consequence, migration researchers are at a similar risk as terrorism researchers to engage in a "'slightly incestuous echotalk' [...] where policymakers and researchers are mutually reinforcing each others' claims as authoritative" (Jackson et al., 2009: 25).

In some sense, regarding policy relevance *as* practical relevance is legitimate as research findings transferred to policymakers can have direct, and thus political, implications – something which often remains under-acknowledged, as argued before. Still, the predominant conception of policy relevance *as* impact silences the many other, and arguably less harmful and more valuable, ways of contributing through knowledge production. Three of these other ways of impact are briefly sketched-out in turn. These examples, which signify what I call 'epistemic interventions', 'counter-empirics', and 'activist engagement' were chosen not as ideal types or blueprints for impactful research but simply because they relate to my own scholarly-activist practices.

Epistemic interventions

Given the impact of policy on research and the adaption of scholarship to the needs of policymakers, state-centric gazes on and policy categories of migration have become perpetuated. Despite this perpetuation, often irresolvable contradictions and tensions remain in efforts to govern mobility, not least due to migration's complexity and dynamism. For example, attempts to neatly label people 'on the move' along pre-existing categories or to distinguish between flight help, smuggling, and trafficking often fail, highlighting an "epistemic crisis [. . .], the crisis of nomenclatures and taxonomies" (Mezzadra, 2015: 125). This epistemic crisis likewise underwrites policy-relevant migration research and generates ruptures and frictions where more critical research can intervene. Intervening epistemically by following material struggles of migration has been one of the main aims of the 'New Keywords Collective'. Under this collective name, critical scholars have sought to 'hijack' dominant migration terminologies and concepts, including 'migration crisis', 'European values', or 'alien/foreigner'. In our latest writing project (New Keywords forthcoming), we note: "our task here is to de-sediment these apparently banal and routine fixtures of the dominant political language in order to subject them to critical reflection, to de-naturalize their apparent transparency, and re-politicize the de-politicization that ensues from their mundanity." Rather than ignoring the crisis of knowledge and knowledge categories, epistemic interventions in the migration discipline can challenge taken-for-granted ideas, definitions, and 'truths' – not necessarily to establish other finite and fixed ones, but precisely to draw out "the heterogenous struggles and contestations that constantly unsettle and redefine their meanings."

In my own work, I have followed Sandro Mezzadra's (in Garelli and Tazzioli, 2013c: 310) call "to locate and consolidate the possibility of ruptures" by considering migration struggles as analytics that allow to scrutinise the exclusionary, violent, and division-making practices and policies that underpin the EUropean border regime (Stierl, 2019). Following such material struggles enabled me to interrogate the epistemic crises of the border regime and the many ways in which state sovereignty is "profoundly unsettled by all sorts of social and political movements" (Nyers, 2019: 176). For example, the struggles I traced exposed a central dilemma at the heart of the border regime: The ever-more drastic ways in which EUropean migration policies curtailed possibilities for legal migration were productive of what they were ostensibly designed to curtail, unauthorised movements. These unauthorised movements could not be contained, revealing crises over EUropean state sovereignty, particularly in 2015 and 2016, when they effectively dismantled, though only temporarily, one of the world's most militarised regimes of population control. In light of such historic and hitherto unimaginable rupture, the ungovernability of collective migratory movements brought into crisis (rather than constituting a crisis itself) what we knew, or thought we knew, about the governability and 'management' of migration.

Counter-empirics

In contrast to mainstream migration studies' perpetuation of statistical migration spectacles and the mapping of migration routes and dynamics through a state gaze, a type of scholarship has emerged that explicitly aims to produce 'counter-empirics' in order to expose EUrope's violent migration policies. As Lorenzo Pezzani and Charles Heller (2013: 294, emphasis in original) note, such scholarship is underpinned by a

> 'disobedient gaze, which aims *not to disclose what the regime of migration management attempts to unveil – clandestine migration: but unveil that which it attempts to hide – the political violence it is founded on and the human rights violations that are its structural outcome.*

Research-activist networks such as WatchTheMed or Forensic Oceanography have used such disobedient gaze to localise pressure points in the EUropean border regime and have produced a range of counter-empirics in the form of reports, maps, and documentaries to both reveal and denounce the drastic violation of migrant rights in the Mediterranean region. Forensic Oceanography has turned EU surveillance 'against itself' (Heller et al., 2017) so as to counter-monitor border enforcers and to exert democratic control "on the controllers of borders" (Balibar, 2002, 85). As Pezzani and Heller (2019: 57–58) note:

> By combining testimonies of human rights violations with digital technologies such as satellite imagery, vessel tracking data, geospatial mapping, and drift modelling, Forensic Oceanography has exercised a critical right to look at sea [. . .]. [U]sing surveillance means 'against the grain', it has produced spatial analysis that has been used within existing legal and political forums, supporting the quest for justice of migrants and their families in legal proceedings, parliamentary auditions, human rights, and journalistic investigations.

Through the production of counter-empirics, notorious 'left-to-die' practices in the Mediterranean, the intentional production of a rescue vacuum after the end of the Italian humanitarian-military operation Mare Nostrum, the criminalisation and de-legitimisation of rescue NGOs, and the deployment of Libyan militias or private actors in 'push-back by proxy' operations could be uncovered.

Activist engagement

Acknowledging that as a researcher on migration and borders I am "part of the field of struggle and a participant therein" (De Genova, 2013: 252), I have opted to engage in activism that seeks to directly counter and ideally prevent the devastation produced by EUrope's violent border enforcements. Although my activist engagement preceded my research, it has intensified over the past six years during which I have participated in the Alarm Phone (2020) project which runs a hotline that supports people in distress in the Mediterranean Sea. Since October 2014, our activist network composed of over 200 members situated in EUrope and Africa has assisted over 3,300 migrant boats seeking to escape from Turkey, Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Egypt, or Libya. Besides offering such direct support in real-time, often in collaboration with NGO rescuers, the Alarm Phone has turned into a crucial witness at sea and uncovered manifold human rights violations, ranging from acts of abandonment and refoulement practices to violent assaults of people in distress at sea. The activist project has also inspired others, such as Alarme Phone Sahara (2020), which seeks to counteract the effects of EUrope's externalised borders in the Sahel region.

Activist engagement in EUropean and African borderzones has produced insights that mainstream migration research, and certainly policy-relevant research, could never have produced. With regards to the two Alarm Phones, the knowledge emanating from activist engagement, often co-produced with people considered migrants and their families and friends, has shed light on the effects of EUropean migration policies in largely inaccessible spaces. Without this (and other) activist engagement, much of the actual bordering processes in the Mediterranean and the Sahara would remain unknown. In numerous instances, EU authorities and international organisations were forced to respond to revelations of human rights violations which demonstrates the impact activist interventions can have. Nevertheless, and despite such impact in the 'real' world, activist engagement as a way to produce critical knowledges on migration is widely frowned upon in the migration

discipline, consistently accused of failing to constitute 'real' research, whereas policy-relevant research rarely faces such accusation, not least due to its claim to objectivity and value-neutrality.

Conclusion

Inspired by Marx's eleventh thesis on Feuerbach, Giorgio Grappi (2013: 323) writes: "migration researchers have only interpreted the migration regime, in various ways; the point is to change it." In view of this article's discussion, one could wonder whether migration scholarship has indeed 'only interpreted the migration regime' or whether, in fact, some strands of this scholarship have helped consolidate it. Thus, rather than advocating for a move from 'interpretation' to 'practical change', the question seems to instead be: what change, what sort of 'impact' can migration scholarship initiate or produce?

This article has enquired into the current knowledge/policy hype around migration and the high demand for research that appears to produce actionable 'evidence' for policymakers. The impact of policy on research can have several adverse effects, including the (re-)production of migrant and refugee figures, the reinforcing of state-centric gazes on migration, and the creation of statistical migration spectacles. The desire to become legible to policymakers often entails "conforming to the way that policymakers view reality" (Jackson, 2016: 123) and thus means remaining confined in policy frames and categories which curtails a priori what questions are asked and what issues are explored. The "ruling order of policy", Jacques Rancière (1992: 62) notes, is concerned "about 'right' names, names that pin people down to their place and work." Reproducing these policy categories and identities through research, and in the name of policy relevance, thus risks complicity in the disciplining of migration through restrictive policies that intend to, quite literally, pin people down to particular places.

Seeking impact on EUropean migration policy often means seeking to partake in a political process that is driven by the overwhelming desire to govern, contain, and deter human movements from the Global South. The implementation of EUropean migration policies has caused widespread harm, not merely in the Saharan desert or the Mediterranean Sea but also within, throughout, and far beyond of what is considered EUrope's nominal space. Though often portrayed as such, scholarly knowledge production is not outside of these harmful processes. The pressure on knowledge workers to produce output of relevance for policy does not erase the responsibility of scholars to consider the implications of produced findings. There is a need to acknowledge that researching migration is never a neutral, objective, or unpolitical undertaking. Only once this is accepted, and once harm resulting from research is considered a real possibility, can the migration discipline really consider the ethics of impact and the 'do no harm' principle its 'golden rule'. The introspections within Critical Terrorism Studies can prove a useful guide, not least given the progressive securitisation of migration and the targeting of particularly racialised individuals and groups through both counter-terrorism and counter-migration policies.

In view of the atrocities that result from what Étienne Balibar (2004) calls 'global apartheid', of which the EUropean border regime is part and parcel, the migration discipline needs to enquire into both the blatant and more insidious forms of violence that EUropean migration policies produce and critically assess the role of scholarship in the border industry. This article has pointed to some scholarly-activist practices that go further, toward an ethos of avoiding and averting harm, underwritten by a commitment to critique and challenge structures of power and segregation. Of course, given the "constant drainage of critical knowledge towards a policy-oriented approach" (Grappi, 2013: 321) in the contested field of

migration, it is not always possible to predict what scholarly knowledges may "be reabsorbed by the 'deportation regime'" (Garelli and Tazzioli, 2013a: 303). This at times unpredictable risk does not absolve the researcher but, to the contrary, compels more critical and reflexive awareness about one's political implication in the border industry and the need to locate possibilities to counteract tendencies in migration scholarship that facilitate such drainage of knowledge or that even outrightly advocate for its co-optation. Maybe the 'do no harm' principle needs to not merely be expanded to include engagements with the makers of migration policies, it may need to be reversed. *Do harm* could be the motto for a critical and impactful scholarship of migration that locates, and expands, ruptures in the EUropean border regime.

Note

1. This article speaks of 'EUrope' throughout. In this way it seeks to problematise frequently employed usages that equate the EU with Europe and Europe with the EU and suggests, at the same time, that EUrope is not reducible to the institutions of the EU.

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