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Migration Narratives in Policy and Politics

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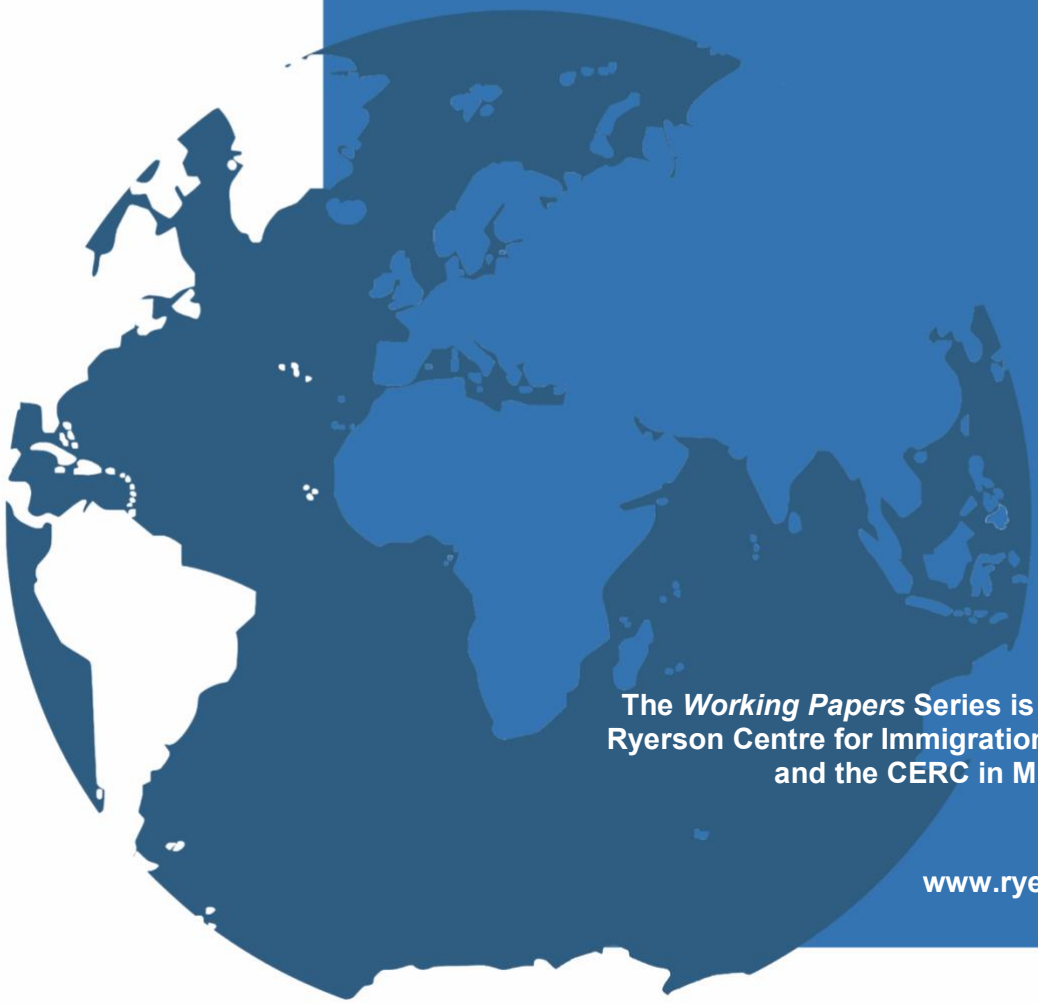

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Abstract

Migration narratives dominate political debates, traditional print media and social networking sites across the globe. It is neither new nor surprising that hegemonic migration narratives focus on negativity and threats, while political actors often rely on narratives for communications purposes. However, in recent years they seem to have become increasingly aware of the power of storytelling in politics and migration's attractiveness as a unifying topic. This working paper addresses the following questions: What do narratives mean and what is distinct about political and policy narratives? What are the characteristics of migration narratives? Who are the actors constructing the migration narratives? What are the impacts of narratives over migration policies and politics? Answering these questions, the paper provides a possible analytical framework for understanding the construction and roles of narratives in migration policy design and politics. By mapping existing migration studies using narratives as a concept, theory, and method, this working paper examines multiple migration narratives produced by policymakers, political parties, media, international organizations, non-governmental organizations, and migrants. It defines migration narratives as stories developed through communicative practices in order to offer a specific view on migration and/or migrants or a country's migration history. The paper illustrates how migration narratives carry out multiple functions, including structuring knowledge, drawing boundaries between "us" and "them," shaping public opinion, producing exclusionary policies, legitimizing actions, and providing a better understanding of migrants' experiences and identities. The paper contributes to highlighting ways in which narratives are both deeply embedded in knowledge production, policymaking, politics, and power as well as shaped by them. It also illustrates how migration narratives are entangled with narratives on identity, citizenship, and politics.

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Introduction

In recent years, migration has dominated traditional print media, social networking sites, and political discourses across the globe. Narratives relate what migration is and what should be done to manage, control, or reduce it; their implications are felt at the individual, societal, policy, and political levels.

This paper examines the literature on migration narratives by focusing on how they function in policy and politics. It starts with two propositions. First, that narratives are deeply embedded in politics and policy but also shaped by them. Second, that narratives have multiple types and dimensions which influence their functions. To unpack these arguments, the paper addresses the following questions: What are narratives about? What are the characteristics of migration narratives? Who are the main actors behind the narratives? What impacts do narratives have on migration policies? Answering these questions, the paper provides a possible analytical framework for understanding the role and power of narratives in migration policy design and politics.

Mapping the existing migration studies using narratives as a concept, theory, and methodology, this working paper examines narratives produced by policymakers, political parties, media, international organizations, non-governmental organizations, and migrants. It illustrates how narratives take multiple roles ranging from structuring knowledge to drawing boundaries between "us" and "them," shaping public opinion, producing exclusionary policies, legitimizing actions, and providing better understanding of migrants' experiences and identities.

The paper limits its scope to narratives about international migration, that is, the movement of persons or a group of persons across an international border. It shares the approach that views migration as "a population movement encompassing any kind of movement of people, whatever its length, composition and causes" (WHO2020) such as migration of refugees, economic migrants, transit migrants, seasonal workers, family migration, and return migration. Among these types, the study focuses on migration policy narratives that do not explicitly differentiate between types, but implicitly and dominantly target migration of asylum seekers and irregular migration to, or migrants with irregular status in, the European Union and North America. For this purpose, irregular migration refers to the "movement of persons that takes place outside the laws, regulations or international agreements governing the entry into or exits from the state of origin, transit or destination" (IOM, 2019); asylum seekers are those individuals seeking international protection due to fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinions in their country of citizenship or residence (ibid.).

This paper is structured as follows. It first provides broad definitions of narratives. Then it moves to introduce policy narratives and political narratives by highlighting multiple types and dimensions. The next section examines the functions of migration narratives in policy and politics. It differentiates three main functions, including 1) structuring knowledge about the policy problem; 2) drawing boundaries about "us" and "them" as well use of narratives by political parties to advocate exclusionary perspectives; 3) imposing upon policy actions what to do next and what is the solution. After these discussions about narratives, the paper reviews how non-state actors become involved in producing and disseminating narratives and which roles they take to construct counter-narratives. This section addresses migration narratives predominant in the media, international organizations, NGOs, and among migrants, respectively. The paper concludes with recommendations.

Definition of Narratives

Narratives are considered a "basic mode of understanding, component of meaning and sharing of experience, and one of the most constitutive genres of human linguistic communication" (De Fina & Tseng, 2017, p. 381). They give meaning to what 'is' as well as to what 'ought to be done' (Roe, 1994; Rein & Schon, 1994). As Robert D. Newman writes

> *through narratives we engage our world and ourselves. We do so by drawing on patters that evoke what is personal and necessary to sustain and broaden our fragile sense of continuity between who we were, are, and wish to be. As a creative act, the process of narrative engagement is both dynamics and subtle*. (1993, p. v)

The concept of the narrative has travelled from literary theory to other disciplines and gained increasing popularity in social sciences. It first made its way to sociology to define 'self' and 'other' in identity construction as well as to elaborate on othering practices (Somers & Gibson, 1994). It was also adopted in political science, psychology, legal theory, gender studies, social work, anthropology, and media studies as a concept, theory, and method known as narrative analysis.

Despite its popular usage, narrative is a contested concept and is often used interchangeably with terms such as discourse, story, or frame/framing, and defined accordingly (Bradby, 2017; Rein & Schon, 1991; D'Angelo & Kuypers, 2010; Wodak & Meyer, 2009). Hinchman and Hinchman define narrative as a discourse "with a clear sequential order that connect[s] events in a meaningful way … thus offer[ing] insights about the world and/or people's experiences of it" (2001, p. xvi). Patterson and Monroe (1998) describe narratives as a subclass of discourse. The main difference between narrative and discourse is that while a discourse comprises all the discussions on a topic, regardless of the form they take, narratives mainly comprise stories about the topic (Hagström & Gustafsson, 2019). More than being a mere story, narrative is a system of stories "that relate to one another with coherent themes forming a whole that is greater than the sum of its parts" (Halverson et al., 2011, p. 1). Narratives are also understood to be "based on frames, meaning a general plot based on 'aspects of a perceived reality' and developed through a communicative interaction among different actors" (Castells, 2009 in D'Amato & Lucarelli, 2019; see also Entman, 1993; Miskimmon et al., 2015). For some scholars, narrative indicates a broader phenomenon than the category of frames that later become repertoires assembling political positions, ideas, arguments for communication of actors to the outside and to the inside as observed in social movements or diaspora organizations (Sökefeld, 2006; Collyer, 2008).

Narratives are complex and relational. They are produced and reproduced in a web of narratives in relation to the actors, audiences, and agendas. They are developed, codified, revised, and diffused through the mechanisms of crafting, selecting, and omitting certain parts of the issue while emphasizing or exaggerating some other parts (Subotic, 2016). The producers of narratives construct a meaning, taking audience into account and leaving space for manoeuvring; hence narratives emerge as dynamic and contextual. Narratives are also interrelated as they implicitly or explicitly refer to, invoke, and are empowered by, other narratives known as internarrativity (Hagström & Gustafsson, 2019). Ambiguity and equivocality are inherent to narratives, giving them power (Polletta, 1998, p. 139f).

Besides their construction process, narratives' functions are important. Narratives affect personal and communal identities (e.g. self/us versus other/they), emotions (e.g. frustration, uncertainty, fear, hate, and empathy), attitudes (e.g. understanding, acceptance, rejection, xenophobia), and behaviours (e.g. solidarity, discrimination). Narratives affect the attitudes of the audiences in complex ways, rather than in a linear and direct way. For example, in migration narratives "people's attitudes to migration reflect their overall 'world view,' thus some narratives will resonate more than others" (Crawley & McMahon, 2016, p.

18). Both speakers and audience experience immersion in a narrative and engage in processes such as emotional involvement, generating imagery, and suspension of disbelief (Green and Brock, 2000). Narrative transportation occurs as a "mental process in which people become absorbed in a story and thus transported into a narrative world where they temporarily lose access to real world facts" (Kruglova, in Green & Brock, 2000, p. 701). Aside from their impact on social psychology**,** narratives also impact knowledge production, policymaking, politics, and power, which will be discussed in detail below.

Narratives in Policy and Politics

For a deeper understanding of narratives' functions at the individual, societal, and policy/political levels, it is worthwhile to review multiple types and dimensions of narratives. Somers and Gibson offer four interlinked dimensions of narratives. The first is the **conceptual narratives** that **"**have drama, plot, explanation, and selective appropriation" (1994, p. 61). Conceptual narratives ascribe meaning through: "a) inclusion and exclusion; b) the lexical choices made when depicting settings, occurrences and characters; and c) manipulation of the relational distinctions that ascribe identities" (Hagström & Gustafsson, 2019). Second, **ontological narratives** are used by individual actors in a broader sense to comprehend their existence, to know who they are and how to act. Ontological narratives can also be called micro-narratives or individual narratives such as stories about migration both among migrants and among members from various sectors of host societies. The third type, **meta-narratives,** are grand or universal narratives in which we are embedded as social actors and as social scientists. They can include the 'epic dramas of our time,' such as barbarism versus civilization, as well as progression/advancement and the envisioned triumph of international liberalism. Usually operating at the 'presuppositional level,' that is, beyond our immediate awareness (Somers and Gibson, 1994, p. 63), meta-narratives can become so ingrained as to be difficult to recognize as organizing concepts. Meta-narratives can be communicated in public and political discourses and can be institutionalized and sedimented. The fourth type, **public narratives,** are attached to larger cultural and institutional formations, including the family or church, but also the government and the nation. Public narratives, also called as master narratives, refer to "stories that reflect a community's identity and help community members to understand who they are and what they stand for, and make sense of the developments around them" (Monitor 360, 2014, p. 3).

Narratives, such as those mentioned above, are deeply embedded in politics and policy as well as shaped by them. Firstly, "politics and public policy are understood to take shape through socially interpreted understandings" (Fischer, 2003, p. 13). This justifies a focus

> *on the crucial role of language, discourse, rhetorical argument, and stories in framing both policy questions and the contextual contours of argumentation, particularly the ways normative presuppositions operate below the surface to structure basic policy definitions and understandings,* [echoing conceptual and ontological narratives]. (ibid., p. 14)

Narratives have significance in policymaking processes, promoting certain practices while restricting the possibility of others (Subotic, 2016). **Policy narratives** "[set] out beliefs about policy problems and appropriate interventions" to shape policy debates and policymaking (Boswell et al., 2011). They offer suggestions about which policies are "reasonable and realistic" to adopt and support (Shanahan et al., 2011). In the words of Silvia D'Amato and Sonia Lucarelli,

> *Policy narratives work as cognitive devises which provide an interpretation of a complex event by making empirical claims on the causes and dynamics of the phenomenon and by pointing to causal relations between political actions and events. Such narratives do not necessarily make all relations explicit: they embed these causal relations cognitively in an implicit form*. (2019, p. 4)

Nevertheless, policy narratives are more persuasive than analytical arguments because people become absorbed in them (Escalas, 2007). They depict events and consequences for characters in contrast to informational and expository communication that presents reasons and arguments in favour of a focus aimed at affecting behaviours. The impact of narratives over policies is studied by utilizing the research approach of narrative policy analysis (Roe, 1994) and narrative policy framework (Jones & McBeth 2010; Jones et al., 2014; Jones & Radaelli, 2015; Shanahan et al., 2011, 2013, 2014).

When we dive further into the analysis of policymaking processes in any field, it appears that politics play an important role. Thus, it is necessary to look at narratives' links to politics. Like policies, narratives are also part of politics, conveyed in the concept of **political narratives** (Fenton & Langley, 2011; Halverson et al., 2011; Gadinger et al., 2016). Echoing the narrative types mentioned above, Stefan Groth (2019) offers three perspectives about political narratives: 1) narrative as practice and ontology, that is, the view that telling and receiving stories are universal modes of mediating (political) views; 2) narrative as strategy, that is, the intentional or automatic use of narrative to further relatively specific goals; 3) narrative as method, that is, as an analytic approach to study socio-political realities in academia.

Narrative as a strategy has received particular attention from the Political Science discipline. The term of **strategic narratives** (Miskimmon et al., 2014) is utilized to describe "compelling story lines which can explain events convincingly and from which inferences can be drawn" (Freedman, 2006, p. 22). Strategic narratives aim to influence public opinion and mobilize resources for gaining public support, for instance, for a military mission abroad (Freedman, 2006; Ringsmose & Børgesen, 2011). Strategic narratives compete with counter-narratives to succeed **narrative dominance** or become **dominant narrative** (Dimitriu & de Graaf 2016). Narrative dominance – or, in other words, the success of a certain narrative – depends on several criteria such as being "cognitively plausible, dramatically or morally compelling and, importantly, they chime with perceived interests" (Boswell et al., 2011). **The power of narratives** lies in their effects: "If the dominant narrative makes sense to and therefore resonates with most of a target audience, the exercise of power can be so effective that it goes largely unnoticed" (Hagström & Gustafsson, 2019).

Narratives About Migration and Migration/Migrant Narratives

The policy field of migration stirs strong emotions and controversies (Moore et al., 2012). Narratives are part and parcel of this policy field. **Migration narratives** are stories developed through communicative practices including framing, codifying, selecting, omitting, and silencing in order to offer a specific view on migration or migrants or a country's migration history. Narratives incorporate values, interests, knowledge, and claims (including rival ones) explaining the causes and impacts of migration but also legitimizing certain sets of policy preferences.

Migration narratives are not solely about migration; instead they share threads with the other narratives. The twentieth-century African American migration from rural to urban areas or South to North combines migration narratives with slavery narratives (Griffin & Griffin, 1995). The narrative on Canada's successful immigration history neglects "the colonial and discriminatory practices against Indigenous peoples and racialized minorities"

(Pellerin, 2019, p. 13). Accordingly, administrative programs and policies on immigration generated the continuous marginalization and invisibility of Indigenous peoples over time (ibid.). Narratives on migrants and migration intersect with the narratives of the religious self and religious journey in many traditions such as the Christian, Islamic, Hindu, and Chinese religious/Buddhist traditions (Wong, 2014).

Narratives are how migration is discussed and debated on several platforms such as in society, media, politics, civil society, and business, among others. Various actors are involved in creating, mobilizing, diffusing, and contesting migration narratives. The narrating actors range from states to sub-state entities such as regions, cities, or inter-state actors such as international organizations. At the supranational level, the International Organization of Migration (IOM), United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), United Nations (UN) Security Council, and European Union (EU) become prevalent, while at the regional level, the EU (for migration and asylum), African Union (for displacement), North American Free Trade Agreement (for migrant labour rights), Organization of Islamic Conference (for refugees), Arab League of Arab States, Court of Justice of EU (CJEU), and the ECtHR (European Court of Human Rights) (via legal texts, case-law) can be mentioned as some examples of actors engaging with migration narratives (Gabriel & McDonald, 2020; Mencutek, 2016, 2019). Within a state, politicians, parties, office holders, administrators, judicial bodies, and others take a role in migration narratives. As non-state actors, NGOs, faith-based actors, social movements, unions, media, and individuals (e.g. experts, migrants, opinion leaders, activists) participate in the narrative construction processes, each one shaping the narratives with competing or complementing positioning. Policymaking officials and the polity they target are active constructors of policy and agency meanings (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2011). Local policy actors – mayors, integration commissions, refugee boards, and consultative forms (named differently in each country), for instance, in the integration field of urban contexts – also become involved in narrating migration (Scuzzarello, 2015).

It should be noted that although politicians, policymakers, international organizations (UN agencies, EU), and mass media appear as the main developers and disseminators of popular public narratives, non-state civil society actors (including scholars) cannot be considered as completely isolated from, or independent of, this process; they, too, may reconstruct narratives. So, regardless of who constructs or reconstructs the narrative, "the representation of migration experience depends on the genre and form of the narrative as well as the historical and political moment of the production" (Griffin & Griffin, 1995, p. 3). Hence, there is no static migration narrative; these narratives are as diverse as the people and institutions, the times and contexts that create them (ibid., p. 4)

At the state and international levels, meta- and public narratives defined above, can be referenced in categorizing migration narrative types. However, the most frequent usage in Migration Studies is the hegemonic narratives, also known as dominant narratives. **Hegemonic narratives** are prevalent discourses on migration that are in circulation universally or in a specific geographic space. Hegemonic migration narratives are socio-historically grounded and institutionally tied to power, shaping the particular views and attitudes. Originated and evolved in relation to key historical developments such as colonialism, nation-state building, and post-colonialism as well as underlying world orders/ideologies (for instance, nationalism, racism, globalization, neo-liberal governmentality, securitization, and populism), they are also influenced by the meta-narratives of the time. For example, in the last century, the state's discretionary admission of migrants and its freedom to control migration have been routinely justified within the broad notions of nation/nationalism, securitization, and neoliberal governmentality in (Honohan, 2014). Although the larger socio-historical dynamics help shape narratives, incidents or unprecedented events affect the development and intensive use of certain hegemonic

migration narratives, thus rendering them dominant (e.g. the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks; the Danish cartoon controversy of 2006; the Lampedusa migrant ship wreck of 2013; the 2015-2016 mass irregular migration movement to Europe). Political calendars such as election circles (national elections or referendums) may influence the direction of and engagement with narrating migration in the given country. Nevertheless, we still do not exactly know the mechanisms (causal and relational) linking political narratives and policy outcomes (legislation, institutions) and practices in the migration field.

Functions of Migration Narratives in Policy and Politics

Narratives have broad functions. In relating narratives, series of clauses are linked temporally and causatively in a structure for a reason (Bradby, 2017, p. 206). They have moral, social, political, economic ramifications for individuals and for wider society at the local, national, and global levels. They serve to give "meaning to practice by constituting an overall sense of direction or purpose, refocusing identity, and enabling and constraining the ongoing activities of actors" (Fenton & Langley, 2011, p. 1171).

Migration narratives set out beliefs about migration as a policy problem, ascribe meaning, and identify the desired interventions to solve this problem (Boswell et al., 2011). To develop an analytical framework for examining narratives' functions in migration, I benefit from the interlinked narrative dimensions elaborated by Somers and Gibson's (1994) and Groth's (2019) perspectives about political narratives. The framework consists of three overarching related functions.

Ordering/structuring knowledge

Deeply institutionalized narratives, such as meta-narratives, fundamentally order international politics, including migration politics and governance. They permeate and structure knowledge embedded in them. This knowledge may play a constitutive role in policymaking and practices having interpretative and discursive dimensions.

Actors ascribe social and policy meanings to different types of mobility, label the people on the move, and describe the situation using linguistic practices. Public and scholarly narratives play a role in categorizing mobile people as legal, illegal, irregular, clandestine, refugee, or asylum seeker, creating dichotomies such as legal versus illegal migrant; deserving versus non-deserving migrant; essential versus non-essential migrant worker; forced versus voluntary migration. As critical migration studies illustrate, contested negotiations occur around these definitions and categories (Scheel, 2020; Crawley & Skleparis, 2018; Baldwin-Edwards et al., 2019). Naming and authorizing "who is accepted as one of 'us' or shares 'our' humanity and who does not" are discursive practices of bordering (Chouliaraki & Zaborowski, 2017, p. 615). Bordering functions to rhetorically and psychically identify and control mobility as well as renegotiate the boundaries of 'our' own communities of belonging (ibid.).

Mobility and migration itself are also depicted in policy and political fields through descriptors and metaphors such as 'crisis,' 'flow,' 'threat,' and similar. These characterizations are detrimental to the situation's definition as a policy problem or not, as well as for deciding the type of problem it is. Migration has been discussed as an example of 'wicked problems' or global challenges in scholarly fields (Sigona, 2018). These descriptions are supported by numbers and visuals that weigh heavily in migration narratives as they hold authoritative power, speaking for themselves and triggering the cognitive branch of the audience's brain (Unrau, 2020).

All these categories, labels, numbers, and visuals communicated through narratives structure knowledge about migration and contribute to simplifying the question of migration. This simplification is accepted as truth in constructing migration as a policy problem by different actors such as politicians, the media, and international organizations who act upon simplifying models to contribute to the solution, as Boswell points out:

> *Politics and the law develop highly simplifying models of the dynamics they are seeking to steer, resulting in various problems of distortion and counterproductive effects. A number of cognitive, social and political factors place pressure on policymakers to adopt highly simplifying models of these processes. The implication is that policy interventions have a structural tendency to 'short-circuit' the complexity of the migratory processes they are attempting to steer.* (2011, p. 12)

Sarah Scuzzarello discusses how the simplification mechanisms work in migration narratives:

> *Through processes of selective appropriation of a few salient features and relations of an otherwise complex reality, actors in a policy community describe what is wrong with the present situation in a way that shapes its future transformation. Policy solutions are affected by how actors specify a set of claims about a policy problem that needs addressing, the causes of that problem, and the extent to which the problem should be addressed*. (2015, p. 58)

The narratives may play some direct role over knowledge production at different scales. Drawing from the multiple narratives in circulation in the European media during the 2015 'refugee crisis,' Chouliaraki and Zaborowski illustrate their role:

> *How these stories were told and who spoke for or about the refugees was thus instrumental in highlighting the causes and circumstances of their arrival as well as the implications of their reception. These news narratives are considered to be, as the European Commission itself claims, a key source of knowledge through which the continent's collective perceptions of refugees emerge*. (ibid., p. 614)

Migration narratives shaping knowledge and opinions are often constructed through the cooperation between media and policy implementers. For example, Musarò (2017) illustrates how the narratives produced by soldiers serving in the military-humanitarian operations targeting migrant flows and smugglers aim at influencing public discourses. He argues:

> *Since the start of the operation* [Mare Monstrum]*, Italian soldiers on ships began producing photographs and videos about the operations on the high seas that were immediately distributed by mainstream media. As such, press releases, images, videos and films produced by the Italian Navy during the 12 months of the operation (October 2013-October 2014) might not be considered only as material or digital artefacts. Rather, they are institutional nodes in the European public sphere and actants whose visibility impacts public discourses, collective ways of thinking, and the decision-making processes around the 'migration crisis.'* (ibid., p. 14)

Narratives not only simplify policy problems about migration, they also treat the given country or region as a singular entity, thus shaping public debates about 'us' in a simplistic manner. Many problems of 'us' – unemployment, precarious jobs, poor housing, crime rates, or challenges in accessing adequate social welfare, health and education services – can be reduced to the threats, insecurity, and problems caused by migrants in narratives. Rather than focusing on the root causes of these problems, many politicians have increasingly resorted to anti-immigrant views, turning migration into a "touchstone that symbolizes or signifying a broader range of concerns or anxieties in society" (Crawley & McMahon, 2016, p. 1).

Narratives place who 'we' and 'they' are, defining policy problems and the communities targeted in any intervention and the actors involved in creating or authorizing 'solutions.' In

addition to politics and policy, narratives affect behavioural and pre-behavioural outcomes, public policies, and attitudes by triggering emotional and cognitive engagement, identification, reduction of counter-arguing and imagery (Green et al., 2002; Moyer-Guse, 2008) as elaborated below.

Narratives for drawing boundaries

Narratives of 'us' and 'them'

Migration narratives, particularly political and policy-related, are embedded in the issues of nation- and state-building. As Collyer (2013) pointed out, nations are eminently constructed, resulting from conscious processes of nationalism or efforts at state-building. In these processes, national identity builds on the concepts of 'us' and 'others' and furthers boundary-drawing, thus producing othering practices. In this frame, migrants are often represented as the 'other' against which the nation imagines, affirms, and strengthens its identity (Anderson, 1991; De Fina & Tseng, 2017). Political forces cast the 'other' as an outsider who is both alien and inferior to the nation's insiders, that is, natives or hosts (Sniderman et al., 2000). They show "'a sense of speakers' cognitive maps' of themselves and others as well as 'a sense of time and a sense of place'" (Patterson & Monroe, 1998, p. 316; also Subotic, 2016, p. 612; Turner & Nymalm, 2019). Nations having a state, but also stateless nations aiming to gain greater autonomy, can use certain forms of migration narratives. For example, the Welsh media constructed and disseminated a tolerant and inclusive national image based on the treatment of Italian immigration after the 1997 devolution to Wales (Giudici, 2014).

This construction around 'us' and 'others' leads to policy outcomes of acceptance (or lack of) and inclusion (Fine, 2014). The othering also has implications for the perception of migrants as an economic and security threat (Alexseev, 2006). On the other hand, new migrant flows such as irregular migrant arrivals to European frontline states challenge the political and cultural order of the nation-state because they may lead to identity transformation processes in which the host community seeks to redefine its national identity in an exclusionary way in order to place symbolic, if not material, boundaries between 'us' and 'them' (Triandafyllidou, 1999).

Narratives about 'us' (as a nation, country, community, ethnic group, etc.) are not only sequential but typically end with a lesson about what 'we' must do to deal with regards to 'aliens,' triggering heated discussions about migration and migrants in the public and media domains. Narratives may offer new understandings or manipulate reality, which may conflict with real interests. At the institutional level, this leads the construction of policy alternatives preceded by narratives. Policy/political narratives in general play a role in shaping agendas (Iyengar & Simon, 1993), promoting or restricting policy solutions as well as deflecting and redirecting public attention away from criticisms.

The core of migration narratives, as pointed out above, is the drawing of boundaries (Barth, 1969) between 'us' and 'others,' between citizens and immigrants/non-citizens. Othering (Somers & Gibson, 1993) and national identity construction(s) (Triandafyllidou, 2001) can draw references from shared cultural values, memory, and history (Kirkwood, 2019). The references are strategically selected to support or oppose migration or design a specific migration policy field like integration. For instance, the role of memory and national history became very prominent in responding to mass migration, which is often narrated as an existential 'crisis' for the nation and state; in Jordanian and Lebanese reactions to Syrian refugee arrivals, for instance, this stemmed from the protracted hosting of Palestinian refugees for decades (Lenner, 2016). Historically, there are several cases in which the same

narratives were put in circulation when closing borders for refugee flows such as Turkey/Northern Iraq in 1991, Macedonia/Kosova in 1999, Kenya/Somalia from 2007 to 2011. Katy Long points out mechanisms behind the direction of narratives:

> *the language of crisis was deliberately invoked not because the imminent entry of a mass refugee flow posed any imminent threat to life within the state, but because it served the interests of governing elites to securitize migration and asylum, and in so doing to construct a 'national' political crisis that could mas sub-national conflicts and discontents.* (2014, p. 158)

On the other hand, history and memory may also serve to lay the ground for liberal policies. Politicians may refer to the country's historical role in providing refuge to certain groups fleeing persecution in order to galvanize support for refugee-receiving, such as partially observed in the UK response to the 2015 refugee influx (Kirkwood, 2019) and Turkey's welcoming approach to Syrians from 2011 to 2015 (Mencutek, 2018).

Use of narratives by populist and far right parties to construct exclusionary perspectives

Aside from continuing traditional entanglements between identity and migration narratives, a strong push for hegemonic migration narratives has come from the recent rise of populism. It is neither new nor surprising that migration is presented as a crisis while immigration news predominantly focused on negativity and threats. Political actors often rely on narratives for communications purposes but seem increasingly aware of the power of storytelling in politics and migration's attractiveness as a unifying topic.

As Jackie Hogan and Kristin Haltinner (2015) argue, parties representing right-wing populism or the far-right in the Western world – indicatively, the British National Party (UK), the One Nation Party (Australia), the Tea Party Patriots (US), and the Minuteman Civil Defense Corps (US) – increasingly focus on the perceived threats posed by immigration. Although the direct electoral impact of these parties retains relatively small, "they have the potential to substantially reshape broader political discourse and public policy" (ibid., p. 520). Similarly, Ferruh Yılmaz argues that "the far-right not only presented immigration as a cultural threat to the future of European nations but also succeeded in moving immigration to the centre of political discourse" (2012, p. 368), thus creating a hegemony over immigration. He also contends that:

> *European populist right movements hijacked and culturalized public discourse and thus achieved unprecedented influence on how societies conceive of themselves. The international dimension involves the ideological and organic connections between right wing forces, and the agendas that they are constantly pushing onto the public debate*. (Yılmaz, 2011, p. 5)

Moreover, in cases such as the Freedom Party (Austria) and Lega Nord (Italy), radical right populist parties may have directly influenced immigration policy, being "instrumental in passing more restrictive immigration policy, limiting the flow of immigrants and the ability of non-EU-labour to live, work, and settle permanently in either Austria or Italy" (Zaslove, 2004, p. 99). Political actors from parties of the extreme left also frequently address migration than more moderate political players across several European countries including Spain, the UK, Germany, Poland, Sweden, and Austria (Heidenreich et al., 2020). With pushes from extreme right and extreme left parties, negative rhetoric on immigration might gradually move into the mainstream political narrative, shaping an anti-immigrant environment, migration's collective securitization, and the launch of restrictive policies thus signalling the end of multiculturalism (Crawley & McMahon, 2016, p. 20).

Both speakers (for instance, politicians and the media) and audience (in this case the public) experience immersion in the anti-immigrant political narratives because they partially respond to people's anxieties about their socio-economic present and future. Populists conflate legitimate concerns about access to services, employment, and political representation with an anti-immigrant agenda. Examples include Donald Trump's election campaign in 2016, the Brexit referendum campaign in 2016, and the rise of far-right parties' in France, Germany, the Netherlands, and Italy which all share anti-migration rhetoric (Halikiopoulou & Vlandas, 2019). Politicians, policymakers and even the public do not just talk about migration, they link it with other issues such as the economy, security, crime, welfare benefits, culture, development, and public health. Political leaders use anti-immigrant narratives as an instrumental strategy to either escape the responsibility of addressing the root causes of these problems or to mask them. Migration narratives enable redirecting attention and deflecting criticism. Foreign workers (as well as ethnic minorities) or refugees in general are scapegoated for unemployment, economic failures, housing problems, weak infrastructure, rise in crime rates, and socio-economic inequalities in relation to the perceived competition for resources (Esses et al., 1998; Arzheimer, 2009). Being powerless, migrants serve as the easiest target for the aggression of the majority/dominant group/citizens. However, anti-migration narratives carry the risk of prompting discrimination and attacks targeting migrants, on the one hand, and migrants' alienation, marginalization, radicalization and inter-group tensions and conflicts on the other hand.

Narratives to impose what to do next, what is the 'solution'

All these dynamics, the 'us' and 'them' distinctions, and the rise of populism and the far-right established the context for defining the 2015-2016 migration movement towards Europe as a 'crisis' by normalizing anti-migration narratives.[1] A recent special issue of a scholarly journal featured a collection of European case studies analysing narratives of migration between 2014 and 2018 shows that "an increasing normalization of extreme and anti-immigrant claims in all cases. The only rather frequent counter-narrative is 'humanitarian,' yet, it predominantly depicts migrants as victims, hence denying their subjectivity and actorness" (D'Amato & Lucarelli, 2019, p. 1). The media played a critical role in this as it is the key communication platform for conveying narratives to the broader audience including citizens, states, and institutions (ibid.) European media depicted migrants as both victim and threat, making different claims to the humanity of refugees. As discussed by Chouliaraki & Zaborowski:

> *News stories systematically misrecognize refugees as political, social and historical subjects; on the other, in so doing, it simultaneously calls up largely 'communitarian' publics: publics willing to consider the humanity of 'others' only in order to affirm 'our' benevolence but not in order to consider including 'them' into 'our' communities of belonging.* (2017, p. 619)

Pierluigi Musarò summarizes the function of this crisis narrative as follows:

> *considering that Europe's intake of 1 million refugees in 2015 amounts to only 0.2% of its total population of 500 million, crisis narratives are, in fact, a form of appropriation by policymakers – a means by experts and institutions to manage the land and resources they deem under crisis while justifying their interventions*. (2017, p. 13-4)

[1] Refugee 'crisis' is placed in quotation marks once here to indicate a critical stance towards Eurocentric uses of the term.

This process of 'collective securitization' in which speech and practices portray migration as a threat has emerged through recursive interactions among different actors, including states and EU institutions (Ceccorulli, 2019). Besides normalizing, this process has also served to legitimize and justify regulations and policy actions. Legitimacy can be sought in both an objective sense (e.g. judicial, procedural) and a subjective sense (e.g. political, public, ethical). To legitimize liberal policies, actors refer to migrants' human rights, fairness, and equal access to opportunities. For launching positive immediate responses to migration flows, terminology of humanitarianism, welcoming culture, religious/cultural duty is put into circulation. On the other hand, negative hegemonic narratives are used to legitimize restrictive policies through discourses citing security, stability, or citizens' welfare. Potentially severe consequences of these narratives include hampering admission, access to rights and resources, integration of newly-arrived migration, as well as relationships within and between communities, a common sense of identity and solidarity (Crawley & McMahon, 2016).

Narratives exercise legitimizing power, depending on how receptive audiences are of discourses on a certain issue and which frames are mobilized (Scheibelhofer, 2017). From a positive perspective, it can be claimed that narratives have the potency to place loosely-structured practices into participatory, inclusive, and goal-oriented actions such as protests, political campaigns, and the rise of social movements (Lahusen, 1996). Some studies suggested that the photograph of migrant toddler Alan Kurdi lying dead on a beach in Turkey radically transformed the predominant framing of the European migration crisis by European newspapers because it touched the audience's emotions (Klein & Amis, 2020). However, the impact of visuals does not last long enough to fully destabilize dominant narratives. For example, even against the emotional backdrop of Alan Kurdi's dramatic image (Klein & Amis, 2020), the underlying threat narrative circulating for years was powerful enough for the UK to legitimize its opposition to participating in the EU's scheme for redistributing refugees arriving in the frontline countries (Bejan, 2019; Kandal & Massey, 2002); immersed in the anti-immigrant environment, the British public was quite receptive of this discourse.

The mobilizing power of narratives varies according to topic, cultural codes, intersituational person-related factors, characteristics of public and political institutions, and other factors (Beyer et al., 2020). To illustrate, migrant women, especially Muslim women, have figured prominently in the political agenda of various European countries with regards to issues such as headscarves/face covers, forced marriage, and honour killings. There have been cases in France and the Netherlands where migrant women are constructed as a political problem (Roggeband & Verloo, 2007; Freedman, 2017). This construction implicitly imposes the dominant policy frames of emancipation and individual responsibility. The core of the narrative is cultural, recalling the conceptual and meta-narratives around a dichotomy between 'us' (liberated, secular) and 'them' (unliberated, religious). In this way, the dominant group's position and power over migrants is preserved in one way or another.

Non-State Actors' Engagement with Migration Narratives: Opportunities and Limitations

The role of the media in (re)producing migration narratives

As Triandafyllidou (2013) noted, an important actor behind migration narratives is the media, which produces and reproduces hegemonic migration narratives and shapes public opinion. Both traditional (print and broadcast) and social media set the public agenda through framing and meaning-making. The media shapes the agenda through its coverage,

defines the issues with discursive and visual information, and assigns salience to topics (D'Angelo & Kuypers, 2010; McCombs & Shaw, 1972; Fourie, 2007). It plays the gatekeeper role for voices by either highlighting or ignoring story elements. It gives voice to certain actors and ideas as well as silence or makes some actors invisible, helping build narratives or manipulate reality through its authority as provider of news and information (Entman, 2007).

Research into the media is important for tracking migration discourses and narratives disseminated by multiple actors. Chouliaraki and Zaborowski's (2017) media analysis of 1,200 news articles on the European refugee crisis at its 2015 peaks (July, September, and November) provides empirical evidence for three commanding actors of migration narratives: politicians, the media, and EU. The study showed that the "voices carried in the European press were not those of citizens or refugees but national politicians and EU officials" (ibid., p. 620) whose "authoritative speech normalized the bordering practices, exerting the power to control and creating a structure of exclusions" (ibid., p. 630). Three linguistic strategies were detected for consolidating authority and excluding others in the dominant narratives:

> *1) silencing, or the omission of voice altogether; 2) collectivization, or the incorporation of refugees into collective referents, such as nationality, in ways that eliminate their status as unique individuals; and 3) decontextualization, or the severing of individual lives from the historical conditions within which their requests to be hosted derive their legitimacy and justification.* (Ibid.)

As Buonfino claims, there are "the mutually conditioning relationships between public opinion, mass media, identity politics in the evolution of immigration policy discourse" (2004, p. 23) that might be beyond to the facts about migration. Empirical studies, particularly content analysis of trends in immigration news coverage across countries, show that "there is limited evidence for a close relationship between news and *real-life* developments; hence, trends in immigration news seem largely unaffected by trends in society" (Jacobs et al., 2018, p. 473). Framing does not necessarily use accurate facts, but rather misinterprets them or presents migrants across a range of public genres that oscillates between victim and threat (Chouliaraki & Zaborowski, 2017, p. 616).

Nevertheless, the media holds power to evoke and construct meaning in narrative formation. It has a capacity to influence the public agenda and public opinion. Narratives have a role in delineating what are considered publicly-acceptable opinions and behaviours, and who does – or does not – have a voice. Narratives not only shape how the audience receives the 'problem' or issue, but also promote particular sets of viewpoints, solutions, and policies (Valkenburg et al., 2016). Hence, they impact mobilization for, and design of, certain policy choices (McCombs & Shaw, 1972; Iyengar & Simon, 1993). For example, public opinion affects integration policies, from resource allocation to social acceptance. In turn, integration policies already in place shape public opinion – for instance, hostile perceptions about social welfare distribution may spur anti-immigration discourses.

The mechanism of these interactions is not straightforward as narratives go through processes of negotiation and contestation. The media may provide sudden shifts in narrative direction and influence narrative competition. Social media platforms are able to challenge the government's strategic narratives in a way that empowers counter-hegemonic narratives, but the media's power in creating counter-hegemonic migration narratives remains quite limited (Hellman & Wagnsson, 2015). For example, personal stories about migrants illustrated by powerful and disturbing photographs – the drowned body of Alan Kurdi in the Aegean Sea or Salvadoran Oscar Alberto Martinez and his daughter trying to cross the river on the US-Mexico border – may activate public attention by putting a face on migrants' and refugees' severe sufferings and the dramatic human consequences of strict border policies (Leurs et al., 2020). These types of highly-mediatized events and strong images may trigger worldwide reactions and mobilization particularly in digital social

platforms like Twitter. However, they do necessarily change the dominant media and political representations of refugees but are only "incorporated into preexisting discourses on and representations of refugees" (Bozdag & Smets, 2017, p. 4046).

Narratives of International Organizations

While states remain central actors in migration policies and politics, international organizations (IOs) also emerge as important actors in the design and implementation of migration policy. IOs are not fully independent because they operate at the "intersection of nation-states, international human rights regimes, and neo-liberal governance" (Ashutosh & Mountz, 2011, p. 21; Boucher, 2008, p. 1461; Pécoud & de Guchteneire, 2007). Like states, IOs engage in producing and disseminating migration narratives and shape how issues are framed and addressed; their narratives reflect their vision on how cross-border or internal mobility should be governed or managed as well as their views on migrants' access to rights.

> Historically, the IO landscape in the migration field has been fragmented, by *at least three different policy/legal categories, and in a kind of division of labor between IOs, p. migrant workers' rights (promoted by the International Labour Organization (ILO)) and later by the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)), refugees and asylum through the UNHCR, and logistical and other practical services to governments by the IOM*. (Geiger & Pécoud, 2014, p. 868)

The ILO, as the oldest agency with experience in migration, propagated a comprehensive narrative in addressing the rights and protection of all those on the move, but lost its relevance over time (ibid., p. 867). As Gil Loescher (2001) discusses, refugee movements gained political importance for the IOs in the 1990s when UN Security Council and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, along with global media, began discussing the security importance of refugee movements. Thus, "refugees are viewed as posing threat to international security"; this assumption was taken as the base for action in "international interventions across borders and in the domestic affairs of states as observed in Iraq, Somalia, former Yugoslavia, Haiti and others" (ibid., p. 13). Beyond securitizing refugees, IOs have expanded their role and activities in the field of migration through

> *the substantial growth of certain agencies like the IOM, the establishment of new organizations (e.g., the International Centre for Migration Policy Development, ICMPD, in 1993), and the creation of novel patterns of cooperation between agencies, such as through the Global Migration Group (GMG in 2006), the UN High-Level Dialogue on International Migration and Development (HLD, in 2006, followed by a second dialogue in 2013) and the Global Forum on Migration and Development.* (Geiger & Pécoud, 2014, p. 868)

In 2016, the UN General Assembly's meeting on migration at the global level led to the New York Declaration and then the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, and the Global Compact on Refugees in 2018.

IOs' narratives have thus far been studied in the context of the politics of international migration (Geiger & A. Pécoud, 2010, 2012, 2014), the geopolitics of forced migration (Chimni, 1998), and the politics of humanitarianism (Hyndman, 2000). There has been a growing body of literature on the narratives of EU institutions about migration (Boswell, 2008; Carling & Hernández Carretero, 2011; Ceccorulli & Lucarelli, 2017; D'Amato & Lucarelli, 2019; Walters, 2010). Studies focusing on the migration policies and practices of specific IOs such as the ILO (Amaya-Castro, 2012; Böhning, 1991; Haseneau, 1991), UNHCR (Scheel & Ratfisch, 2019), or the IOM (Andrijasevic & Walters, 2010; Ashutosh & Mountz, 2011; Caillaut, 2012) also addressed the narratives, discourses, and frames in indirect ways.

IOs produce narratives which "constitute and construct the social world" around some key elements (Geiger & Pécoud, 2014, p. 875-6). These elements include:

> *the construction of cross-border movements as a 'global' issue to be addressed 'globally'; a positive appreciation of migration as a 'normal' process that should be managed to benefit sending and receiving societies, and migrants alike ('triple-win'); an emphasis on cooperation between states in handling migration, and on the linkages between migration and other policy fields (like development); an adherence to universal principles, including human rights, but also to free-market beliefs, through the recognition of the need to facilitate the 'circulation' of labour in a globalising world*. (ibid., p. 876)

In fact, certain political agendas on migration drive these global discourses such as

> *(1) the security concern with border surveillance and the control of unauthorised migration, (2) the labour market preoccupation with economic migration and employers' need for foreign labour, and (3) the humanitarian imperative to foster development in sending regions and to protect migrants, 'victims' of human trafficking, asylum seekers, refugees as well as (to a lesser extent) left-behind populations*. (ibid.)

Studies focusing on the discourses and practices of specific IOs explore the relevance of these key elements in the organizational discourses and political agendas behind them. In one prominent study taking narratives as a starting point, Stephan Scheel and Philipp Ratfisch (2019) examine ways in which the UNHCR propagates narratives about refugee protection and mixed migration flows in a strategically complex way. The narrative of mixed migration flows expresses the assumption that "asylum-seekers tend to travel along the same routes as other migrants do" (Scheel & Ratfisch, 2019, p. 931) and stresses the need and ability for making distinctions between two categories. In fact, the central piece of this narrative contradicts with the research findings and arguments of most contemporary migration scholars who claim that the motivations for migration are always mixed. In turn, at the level of practices, as observed in Morocco and Turkey, this narrative of 'mixed migration flows' legitimizes the perfection of border controls with techniques such as fingerprinting or biometrics. This narrative also justifies the enlargement of UNHCR's field of activity to include all aspects of migration management procedures. Thus, the narratives to a certain extent serve the UN agency's institutional needs and objectives (Scheel & Ratfisch, 2019) In another study on the UNHCR's narratives, Tor Krever (2011) pays attention to the "humanitarian actor narrative," which assumes assistance is provided to internally displaced persons. With this narrative, the UNHCR "extends its activities into "countries of origin." As Krever discusses, the use of a humanitarian discourse "masks what is fundamentally a shift to policies of containment – and the pursuit of State, not refugee, interests – which have undermined UNHCR's protection mandate" (ibid., p. 587).

Like the UNHCR, the IOM is involved in the production of narratives, such as the promotion of what it calls "better border management" (Andrijasevic & Walters, 2010, p. 977). The IOM contributes technical expertise to border control and managerializes policies as observed in countries as different as Armenia, Ethiopia, and Serbia (ibid.). In specific policy fields such as "voluntary returns," the IOM also uses a narrative that appropriates the language of human rights but prioritizes "the control and orders migratory flows in the interests of nation-states" (Ashutosh & Mountz, 2011, p. 21; Koch, 2014).

In EU organizations, predominant migration policy narratives centre on security, co-operation, and migrant protection. These narratives led to the implementation of policy measures such as direct control, deterrence, and dissuasion (Carling & Hernández Carretero, 2011). For example, the narrative of protection is often aligned with direct control measures as observed in maritime migration from West Africa to Spain's Canary Islands (ibid.).

One IO narrative in the migration field, particularly in refugee governance, increasingly reproduced by UNHCR, IOM, and the EU is "international solidarity" and "responsibility-sharing." These discourses have implications for resettlement programmes and policies (Garnier, 2014). Moreover, these three organizations show a certain degree of discursive alignment and policy convergence (or cooperation) when it comes to migrant returns, including deportations and voluntary returns (Koch, 2014; Korneey, 2014).

Narratives in which the subordination of human rights to other priorities such as the economy and state sovereignty have also been observed in the labour migration field (Cholewinski, et al., 2009). Gerard Boucher (2008) examined six global policy reports produced by different IOs. He showed that global policy discourses on managing international labour migration or skilled migration advocate solving migration problems by "increasing legal temporary labour market programmes for immigrants, particularly of highly skilled migrants" while fully respecting these migrants' human rights as well as managing "remittance flows from, and diaspora organizations of, these temporary migrants for the development of their origin countries" (ibid., p. 1462). Such a narrative results from the fact that "skilled migration is characterized by some of the clearest political trade-offs between stakeholders" and that "global narratives attempt to speak to all parties and conciliate contradictory arguments about what should be done to discursively overcome policy dilemmas and create a consensus" (Levatino & Pécoud, 2012, p. 1258). No doubt these narratives are mainly shaped by the policy context. Tanya Basok and Nicola Piper's (2012) research on global governance institutions and international nongovernmental organizations in the Latin American and Caribbean region shows that the discourse on migrant women's rights and their labour exploitation are framed predominantly in the context of trafficking. In turn, this framing does not open a venue for advancing migrant women's labour and social rights (ibid.).

In this strand of research addressing IO migration narratives, scholars criticize IOs for aligning themselves with the interests and priorities of receiving states, for having complex institutional structures, and for tensions among institutions that negatively influence possible initiatives (Geiger & Pécoud, 2014, p. 865). Another common criticism is that although IOs address the need for protecting migrants' rights at the discursive level, their programs on the ground do not reflect this rights-based rhetoric but rather serves neoliberal governance and state interests.

NGOs' narratives

Non-state actors also have a role in producing different narratives of international politics. Particularly, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are given importance as the protectors of an emerging global civil society that may challenge state power and corporate interests and also build networks across borders for solidarity (Josselin & Wallace, 2001). There are single cases in which non-state actors promote counter-narratives related to immigration policies. For example, "state and non-state actors compete to promote or combat securitizing discourses about migration through media in Ecuador in the aftermath of an anti-immigrant incident in 2019" (Pugh & Moya, 2020). NGOs played a critical role in 2014 articulating the complex realities faced by child migrants from Central America detained at the U.S border (Nichols et al., 2017). In the Central Mediterranean, several NGOs involving in the search-and-rescue activities (SAR) contributed to the "repoliticization of the EU maritime border;" some maintain a neutral political profile, whereas others view their SAR activities "as part of a political, not only humanitarian commitment" (Cuttitta, 2018, p. 632).

Non-state actors may enjoy greater trust and authority among refugee populations than media and state officials. This gives them power for coalition-building, brokering, and advocacy in narrative dissemination (Pugh & Moya, 2020). They may "selectively draw on the power of prevailing media narratives to buttress ideological and programmatic goals while simultaneously contesting how the same media depictions obscure the lived realities of migrants" (Nichols et al., 2017, p. 1962). In other cases, NGOs serve as the main platform for representing the "voices" of certain refugee groups, such as Palestinians in refugee camps in Lebanon until early 1980s (Minkova, 2019).

Nevertheless, many local and international NGOs (or civil society) have limited power to fully contest the dominant narratives. Although IOs work with NGOs as implementing partners, the latter have limited say over "how migration should be governed" (Pécoud, 2014, p. 28). The NGOs also hold different views, strategies, and interests and work at different scales (global, national, local) (Pécoud, 2014; Mencutek, 2020). NGOs working at the global level tend to develop a common language and use common terminology around migration issues. They also share dominant narratives of states and IOs in order to be recognized, heard, and funded (Mencutek et al., article under review). The reliance on specific discourses appears to be both strategy and constraint as observed in the migration and development nexus narrative or gender and migration narratives. (Pécoud, 2014, p. 64). For example, anti-trafficking NGO employees in Thailand construct narratives or "stories" about human trafficking that reflect the "Western values associated with modernization, the role of NGOs in development, gendered constructions of victimhood" (Kamler, 2013, p. 73). Although NGOs' narratives, particularly those of local NGOs, are effective in presenting migrants' diverse subjectivities and complex life situations, they often fail to confront hegemonic ideologies underpinning the power structures (Yin, 2016).

Migrants' narratives

Migration narratives are also constructed, revisited, and negotiated by migrants themselves. Personal narratives about migration, known as life stories or life story narratives, provide insights into the diverse experiences within a social context and nuanced understanding of complex social processes. They also help to explain multiple entangled factors behind the decision to migrate (Eastmond, 2007; Vandsemb, 1995), the influences of migration over identity-construction of migrants and non-migrant individuals, roles, family ties, localities, and others (Ritivoi, 2009; Golden & Lanza, 2013). There are recurring calls to unpack the stories behind the mere statistics about multiple facets of migration/mobility like migrant academics or follow up hidden narratives of mobility (Morley et al., 2018; Kim & Locke, 2010). The narratives are expected to feed into policy and praxis (O'Neill & Harindranath, 2006).

The narrative analysis focusing on migrants enables seeing the "hidden, subtle meanings people assign to their life experiences" (Czarniawska, 2004, p. 24). As noted by De Fina and Tseng "telling stories is a way of sharing and making sense of experiences in the recent or remote past, and of recounting important, emotional, or traumatic events and the minutiae of every-day life" (2017, p. 381). Migrants need storytelling to make sense of their challenging experiences and create a sense of continuity since they live in several forms of uncertainties, ruptures, and emotional difficulties in their life journey (Chaitin, 2002; Eastmond, 2007).

Narratives are important for making sense of experiences in the past and present (Ghorashi, 2008). As Lawson notes, migrants' stories "can reveal the empirical disjuncture between expectations of migration […] and the actual experiences of migrants" (2000, p. 174). They provide clues for the complex trajectories and time/space conceptions of

migrants, “the coexistence of futures (which can never be more than a possibility), the past (not under a person's control but constitutive of their being) and present (the context of existence) and challenge” (Shubin, 2015, p. 353). To this end, individual migration narratives, as exemplified in those produced in literary studies such as novels, is marked by at least four pivotal moments: 1) an event that urges the action of migration; 2) representation of the initial confrontation with the landscape where migrated (urban space or new country); 3) an illustration of migrants’ attempt to negotiate that landscape and his or her resistances; and, 4) visions of possibility and limitations in the newly settled place (Griffin & Griffin, 1995).

Qualitative-oriented research has paid particular attention to narratives about migration journeys. Ethnographers, for instance, use the narrative research approach – preferring to call these ‘stories’ – as the central component of their arguments, positioning themselves as being at “the crossroads of being activists, storytellers, and academics” (Coutin & Vogel, 2016, p. 631). The narratives shared by ethnographers enable us to know and imagine “clandestine crossings, painful separations, and unspeakable loss” that are in fact “a part of a larger story of global interconnectedness and inequality” (ibid.) This narrative approach also provides evidence of human rights violations during transits as, for example, experienced by African migrants in Libya (Ajayi et al., 2020) or during stay of sex worker migrants in South Africa (Schuler, 2017) or elsewhere. The media fulfils the role of the main disseminator of these migrant narratives, along with human rights advocacy groups and scholars, “turning into a mediating body between policymakers and migrants” (Ajayi et al., 2020, p. 48).

There has been discussion around the importance and credibility of migrant narratives having policy implications. Understandings of undocumented migrant travel through self-narratives of migrants (also known as migrant testimonials) are put under scrutiny due to the occasions of fabrication of some parts of migrant travel or intentional misunderstanding. The doubt cast on migrant narrations of the reasons for their flight is reflected in asylum bodies’ interrogation-like hearings which aim to ascertain the narrative’s authenticity, credibility, and trustworthiness (Loingsigh, 2020). Scholars and artists (such as poets) offer the counter-argument that “literary representations of displacement are equally valuable in helping us understand contemporary migration” and “intimate and traumatic stories of the borderline condition should be shared on migrants’ own terms, not by the demands of the European border forces” (Mathers, 2019, p. 70).

In similar vein to migration ethnography and literary studies – or building on them – the sociolinguistic approach also focuses on narratives, using narrative interviews as a research method to understand social meanings ascribed to migration-related themes such as displacement, (im)mobility, space, ethnicization, identity, and so on. For example, sociolinguists examine how language is used to identity construction and discursive boundary-making of female domestic workers in the places of employment (Ladegaard, 2020). More critical studies embrace a reflective positioning and offer nuanced understanding of narratives as “situated interactional events with which both the researcher and the researched negotiate, shape and co-construct storyworlds” (Sabaté-Dalmau, 2016, p. 269).

Besides making sense of migrants’ experiences and meaning making, narratives are considered a tool for migrants’ efforts to find recognition and legitimacy as actors at the individual or community levels. Stories are critical for selfhood as “the uniqueness of each” comes in telling our life stories to shaping listener (Cavarero, 2014, p. 4). Life story narratives are closely related to identity, particularly to the cultural meaning ascribed to personhood and ethics (Narayan & George, 2002; Jackson, 2013). Personal narratives are also influenced by actors and institutions (Fassin, 2007) in the given context, for example, recent research on LGBTs’ migrant identities and narratives in Belgium reflect the prominence of

(Western) conceptions and narratives of sexual identity in the asylum procedures and how forced migrants reinforce this view in the research interview (Dhoest, 2019).

While narratives via stories, photographs, or cultural artifacts enable hearing the 'voice' of migrants and gives them space to 'speak,' they do not necessarily make the audience fully grasp migrants' complex narratives due to lacks in other dimensions of communication, such as how migrants listen and adjust stories (Cabañes, 2017). At least, it is believed that individual narratives play a role in triggering empathy towards the marginalized one.

Narratives are also used to support certain integration/inclusion measures, particularly in the field of migrant education and health. In education, children's narratives concerning experiences of migration and inclusion in the system of the host country are given attention in order to facilitate language acquisition and peer relations (Scollan & Farini, 2018). Thus, educators consult with narrative as a tool. In the health sector, particularly in mental health, narratives are also consulted by practitioners to capture sufferings, trauma, fear, and stress. It is widely believed that narratives told by migrants help them maintain emotional well-being.

At the community level, migrant self-organization may provide insights about the utilization of narratives in claiming collective agency. As these studies draw from social movement theory, they adopt the concept of frame/framing rather than narratives in discussing voices of migrants in protests, campaigns, solidarity movements, and the arts as well as in conventional and everyday politics. Although migrants have long been invisible in the media, pro-migration organizations and movements raise their voices to challenge limiting nation-state frameworks (border and citizenship), respond to violence, ask for solidarity, and demand inclusive policy reform (Cook, 2010; Sarabia, 2020).

Conclusion

Narratives about migration and migrants have several policy implications. For example, when a mobility is defined as "illegal," it leads to measures devised to fight or stop this "illegality." If the mobility is narrated as a crisis, this brings means of containment like a contagious disease. When the crossing of borders by individuals is explained with the term of "irregularity," this calls for policies based on regulation and control. The promotion of self-reliance narratives presents the refugees themselves, not states or international humanitarian actors, as responsible for their well-being and protection on the one hand, neo-liberal governmentality, and autonomy, on the other (Easton-Calabria & Omata, 2018; Betts et al., 2020).

Nevertheless, an examination of narratives illustrate how they are very complex. There is still a need to elaborate more on ways in which the narratives of several actors influence their strategies, policymaking, implementation, and the worldviews they promote, how the actors negotiate their positions, contesting them or cooperating. This is an important endeavour as narrative changes usually occur slowly and incrementally (Autesserre, 2012, p. 209). It requires the efforts of several actors – such as civil society, experts, and the media – to engage and rebalance the public debate around migration and contribute to counter-narratives. However, counter-narratives are not necessarily standing in opposition to dominant/hegemonic narratives, but both have complicated and ambivalent relations. Narrative scenarios about migration might be envisioned to take preliminary steps. The pandemic's impact on migration narratives can be a possible starting point.

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