Post-truth and demographics in the "refugee crisis". The thanatopolitical "pleat" in the European Union

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Abstract

Demographic pressure, along with the threat of nationalism and xenophobic populist movements, has become part of the story in which the so-called refugee crisis *is threatening the architecture of the European Union, starting with the Schengen Treaty. This story is considered a "post-truth" construct which conceals the fact that the crisis is the outcome of a migration policy designed to be subordinate to the desire for an ideal unified labour market detached from the reality of real migratory flows. This policy has given increasing berth to security and fear, which has legitimised inaction in the face of the humanitarian tragedy caused by what we call here "thanatopolitics." This article analyses the use of the demographic argument, the role of Schengen in the construction of* Fortress Europe *and the refugee policy, and the emotional mobilisation of public opinion during the crisis based on a selection of the most frequently reproduced images in the summer of 2015.*

Key words: migration policy, refugee, European Union, geopolitics, post-truth.

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1. At the gates of hell: Post-truth and the story of the refugee crisis

In March 2016, Donald Tusk, the president of the Council of Europe, warned: "I want to appeal to all potential illegal economic immigrants: don't come to Europe, don't risk your lives or your money". He concluded with a Dantean, "It is all for nothing". The eviction of illegal settlers in Calais had begun the previous day, around 3,000 people thrown together in deplorable conditions hoping to leap the channel to Great Britain. The encampment was not taken apart until October 2016, four months after Brexit's victory in the referendum on whether or not Great Britain stayed in the European Union (although it was not completely eradicated).

This episode cannot be understood without framing it within the refugee crisis in the summer of 2015 and the European institutions' construction of the canonical story of this event, which has been accepted by not only the media but even the harshest critics of the EU's migration policies. There are four main arguments:

1) "demographic pressure" precipitated the migratory crisis, which is projected to continue in the future and encompasses both "economic immigrants" and "refugees") (Naïr, 2016);

2) the refugee crisis endangers the EU's framework, and the first victim will be the Schengen Treaty, which enshrines freedom of movement for EU citizens (Arango et al., 2016);

3) the rise in xenophobic populism in favour of protectionism since the economic crisis is thwarting a unified migration policy to cope with the crisis, especially in the Eastern European countries; and

4) the solution is to further the European project and reinforce Schengen, as summarised in the slogan "More Europe!". Some translate this into the creation of a Common European Asylum System (CEAS) (González Enríquez, 2015), although it initially only took shape with the creation of a European Border and Coast Guard Agency (European Commission, 2015). This four-act drama unfolded parallel to an emotional *crescendo*, one good example of which is Tusk's dissuasive message targeted ostensibly at candidates for emigration, although really for European citizens, implicitly denying the former entry into paradise and condemning them to hell, hence the admonitory "Lasciate ogni speranza, voi" ("Abandon all hope, ye who enter). The agents that have contributed to these emotional politics – where fear and compassion jostle with each other – include both the European institutions, in their efforts to create public opinion, and the media and NGOs, in their efforts to raise awareness and censure the humanitarian drama besieging refugees in particular and immigrants in general, often mixed together, who are trying to come to Europe illegally from the Mediterranean border.

We uphold three interrelated hypotheses. The first is that we are now at a critical juncture in the development of EU migration policies, and not because of their absence, as claimed. The second is that the story that demographics has become a global risk which, along with nationalism and xenophobic populist movements, threaten the European architecture – where the EU's responsibilities are centrifuged in the states – may be a "post-truth" construct both in the more classical sense of distancing the institutions (here EU) from a reality replaced with

stories fabricated by idea labs (in this case neoliberals), a thesis upheld back by Hanna Arendt (2018) in the 1960s, and in the use of emotions as a mobilising agent (Lacroix, 2001). And the third is that in practice this story entails what we call the "thanatopolitical 'pleat'" applied to managing migrations: the shift towards death in the binomial "live and let die" which characterises biopolitics (meant since the 18th century as a way of rationalising the problems that emerge from governmental practice of the phenomena inherent to a set of living beings as a population), which from its inception has been associated with liberalism, according to Michel Foucault (1976 & 1978).

On the following pages, we set out to analyse how and why the demographic argument is mobilised; we first examine communications from the European Union and the Global Risk reports sponsored by the World Economic Forum (WEF, 2016), contrasted with the main demographic data published by Eurostat and the scholarly literature, in order to then re-examine the aforementioned crisis within the context of the governability of populations and offer an alternative story to what is known as the "refugee crisis in Europe".

2. "Migratory crisis" and demographic evolution

2.1.   Demographic excesses and the production of redundancy

"Demographic pressure", morphed into "migratory pressure", has become one of the most common arguments explaining the causes of the migratory crisis in the Mediterranean. Thus, the term "demographic faultline" is used to explain the migrations from the southern to northern Mediterranean, not just of refugees (Naïr, 2013). This story, focused on the surpluses that demographic growth is causing on the continent of African, in contrast to the ageing process in Europe, steers us to the malthusianisation of the debate and consequently its naturalisation. It is understandable that this stance is adopted strategically, since turning demographic growth into a global risk (Domingo, 2015) accentuates the urgency of taking measures, not only temporarily but also for the forthcoming years, while the comparative population dynamic and structural data and the population projections by the United Nations seem to bring objectivity to the problem. Finally, by framing it this way, migration itself can be offered as a solution, making a virtue of necessity; by this we mean that migration can be presented as a way to offset the ageing of the European population and make the pension system sustainable – as proposed by the United Nations with the term "replacement migrations" (UN, 2001), following the maxim by which risks become opportunities.

However, it is important to note that the production of surpluses, or redundancies, is essentially due to the economic system, not to the demographic potential. We use redundant in the way Zygmunt Bauman (2003) defined it: the population comprised of individuals incapable of entering the job market or who, once expelled from it, have no prospects of going back and are not even considered reserves, whose main characteristic would be their status as failed consumers. However, this definition has been expanded upon by different authors, including the anthropologist Arjun Appadurai (2015), who used the concept of "naked life" coined by the philosopher Giorgio Agamben (1998) to encompass everyone who remains in a grey area of the law, simultaneously inside and outside it, that is, a life stripped of the attributes of citizenship. This definition allows him to add illegal immigrants and refugees to the redundant population, in addition to prisoners of

war, people who live in conditions of forced labour or forced to work in prostitution, child laborers and those exploited by a regime of semi-slavery. Even though the defenders of the thesis of "the demographic faultline" end up having to mention the productive system's inability to absorb the youths who are reaching working age due to past demographic growth (Naïr, 2016), they forget that economic development also produces expulsions from the job market, and that even with the arrival of empty generations at the active age, they can be expelled, as happened with the youths of Spain after the implementation of the austerity policies since 2012. This thus turns expulsion into an intrinsic mechanism of capitalism, not demographics, which Saskia Sassen (2015) has explained with the development of predatory formations.

It is true that the demographic evolutions in the EU and the majority of African countries are in two very different phases: the former in the post-transitional phase, characterised by low or very low fertility and almost zero or even negative growth, and the latter by a considerable upswing in population, even though a gradual decrease in fertility has begun in many of the countries. The increase is still high due to the potential of an age pyramid concentrated around the reproductive years, with large young cohorts, while the countries lagging the most in the downward turn are only in the initial stage of this demographic transition. These differing dynamics and structures explain why the United Nations' population projections forecast that by 2051 Africa will be the continent experiencing the steepest population growth (115%), above Asia (only 18%), even though the latter will still be the most populous continent, with 5.261 billion inhabitants, almost twice as many as the 2.571 billion Africans estimated for that year. If we compare this evolution with Europe's, the differences are stark: as the African population increases, Europe's will decrease by 3.5%, standing at 714 million. However, this will not be the only difference; the most important one is still structure: 30 years from now the active population will reach 67% in Africa, most of them young adults, while in Europe it will have dropped to 57% of the total, with a full 28% of the population over the age of 65. If we bear in mind the African market's difficulties absorbing this acceleration in the young population, it is logical to think about migration to Europe. Even if the African economy develops, it will continue to expel part of its population.

Still, we have to stress first that the migratory movements resulting from the humanitarian crisis on the Mediterranean frontier with the EU are not solely comprised of African citizens. Instead, they also include the bulk of refugees from Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq, in addition to a considerable contingent of Asians – from Pakistan, India and Bangladesh – whom the mafia conduct via Africa. Secondly, economic reasons are still more important in the growth in expulsions than demographics, regardless of whether it is because of the political and economic disintegration of the African regimes or the direct or indirect application of the structural adjustment measures imposed by the International Monetary Fund and backed by the EU, or the intervention of governments and corporations alien to regional interests. Thirdly, we should also recall how during the migratory boom to Spain, the influx of immigrants from Latin America who became illegal once their tourist visas expired far outnumbered the African immigrants. At that time, nobody thought of associating this massive illegality with any kind of "demographic pressure".

2.2.   *The limits on the registration of refugees in the EU*

One of the first difficulties in analysing the "refugee crisis" is precisely the size of the refugee population, which is overestimated in some cases due to duplications and underestimated in others when they have avoided registering. The uncertainty is extreme with regard to the real flows and the deaths by drowning or on the journey across the Sahara. And this does not include the difficulty comparing among the different countries due to their particular legal definitions of asylee or refugee, which have them retain refugee status for longer or shorter periods of time. For example, the increase of refugees in Pakistan is now due more to births than to an increase from new influxes. Proof of this statistical disarray is the news item that appeared in *The Guardian* in late 2016 citing sources from Europol, which estimated the figure of disappeared minor migrants and asylum-seekers at 10,000. Is this a statistical artefact or, as the news item insinuated, is it truly the number of minors who have fallen into the hands of human trafficking mafias working in prostitution and organ sales?

What we do know is that the majority of persons displaced by war are redistributed within the same or in neighbouring countries. According to the United Nations Refugee Agency (2016), of the 64 million estimated refugees in the world, Turkey, with more than 2.5 million Syrian refugees alone, is the country that has received the most, followed by Pakistan with 1.6 million (primarily Afghans), the Islamic Republic of Iran with 979,000 (the majority of whom are Afghan as well) and Ethiopia with slightly over 736,000 people (mostly Somalis and South Sudanese). Meantime, the EU-28 recorded 1.09 million people with refugee status on 31 December 2016, 30.5% of them women and 20.7% minors under the age of 14. If we compare the people registered as refugees or asylees in the EU since 2008 and the asylum-seekers throughout this same period (Fig. 1), we can clearly see how requests for asylum skyrocketed in 2015.

Figure 1. Population with refugee status living the EU and monthly applications for asylum in the European Union, 2008-2016
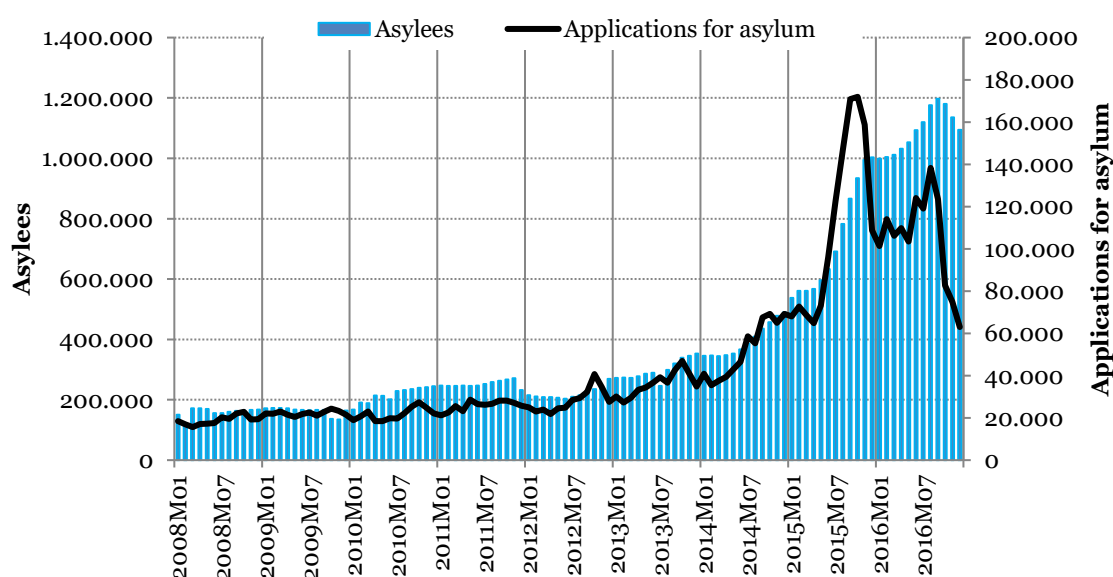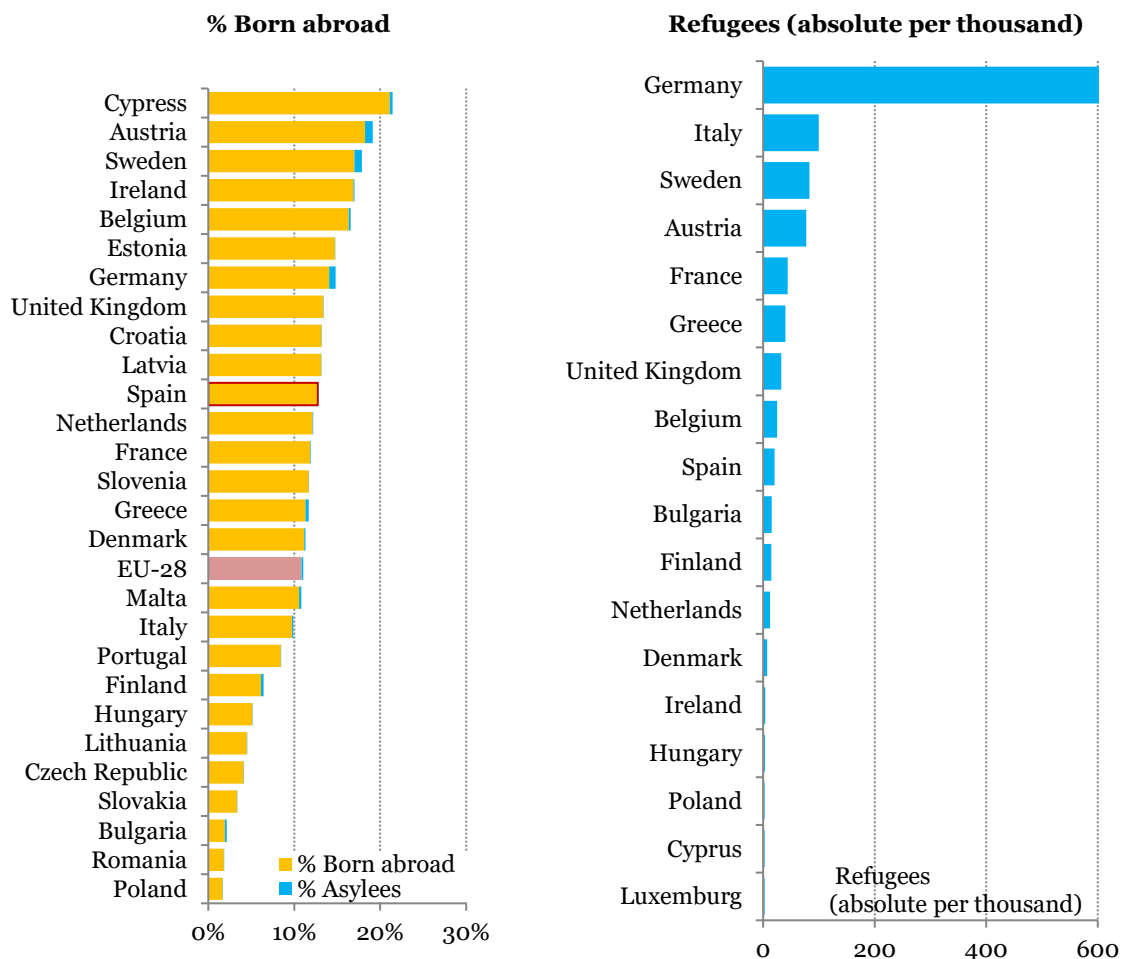

Source: Author. Eurostat [*migr_pop3ctb*] [*migr_asypenctzm*]. Extracted on 5.12.17

Precisely in the month of May, this figure increased 23% from the previous month, and a peak of 172,000 applications for asylum was reached in October, which later fell to 28,485. This was unquestionably impacted by the implementation of the agreement with Turkey, as we shall discuss below. And even though it is true that there was a significant increase in the proportion of applications in Italy dovetailing with the implementation of the treaty with Turkey, from 6.7% in January 2015 to 17.8% in December 2016, it is equally true that Germany continued to receive the most applications throughout the entire period, with almost one-third of them, even towards the end. The exceptional increase has resulted in a rise in the number of asylees and refugees, albeit far under these numbers. Thus, even though the number of applications rose considerably since May 2015, the number of people with a residence permit for reasons of asylum is only increasing moderately, quite far from the volume of applications, reaching a ceiling of 1.3 million people registered in September 2016.

If we focus on the refugee crisis in the European Union, we can begin by highlighting that immigrants account for a minimum percentage of the total population and a very small proportion of the population born abroad in each European country (Fig. 2).

**Figure 2. Population born abroad and refugees in each EU-28 country, 2016**

Source: Author. Eurostat [*migr_pop3ctb*] [*migr_asypenctzm*]. Extracted on 5.12.17

Where they do reach a higher percentage, such as in Sweden, Austria and Germany, they only account for 1.3%, 0.9% and 0.7% of these countries' total populations. In absolute numbers, of the 1.09 million refugees living in the EU in 2016, 54.8% or 602,000 lived in Germany, trailed far behind by Italy, with 9.1% or almost 100,000, Sweden with 7.6% or 83,000 and Austria with 7.1% or 77,000, while Spain only had 20,340 or 0.04% of its population. And even though Spain is tied for fourth place with Italy in absolute numbers, with almost 6 million people born abroad or 13%, after Germany, Great Britain and France, in relative numbers it is lower in the ranking, in eleventh. Therefore, the Spanish government's reluctance to accept its assigned quota of 20,000 refugees, fewer than 1,000 of whom it had received by early 2017, seems unjustified.

Who were the main asylum-seekers in the EU in 2016? The largest group were Syrians, with 339,000 applications, accounting for 27% of the 1.3 million recorded that year (Fig. 3), followed by 186,000 Afghans and 130,000 Iraqis. Still, these figures are lower than those from 2015, when 668,000 applications were received from Syrians at the peak of the crisis. However, the statistics also reveal countries' willingness to accept them. According to the same Eurostat sources, few of these applications were actually processed, and the number of rejections was extraordinarily high. Spain stands out on both accounts as one of the countries that processes the fewest applications (fewer than 5% per year) and rejects the most (96.1%), aligning itself with Eastern Europe and Portugal in this pitiful statistic. It lags far behind Austria, Germany and Belgium, where between 85% and 95% of applications are in fact denied, although the number of cases processed and decided is far higher than in Spain (94,000 in Germany versus 580 in Spain).

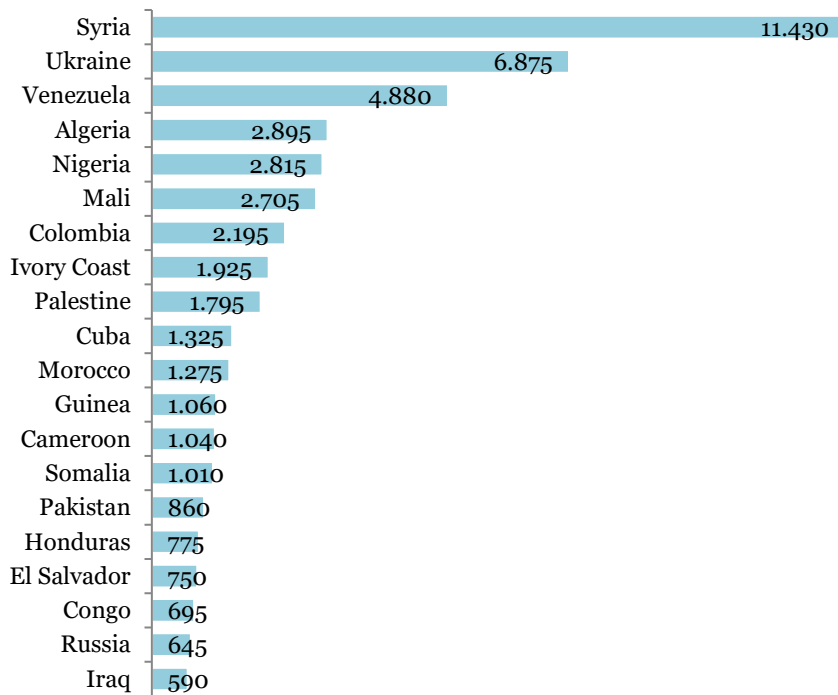**Figure 3. Main nationalities of asylum-seekers in the European Union, 2016**
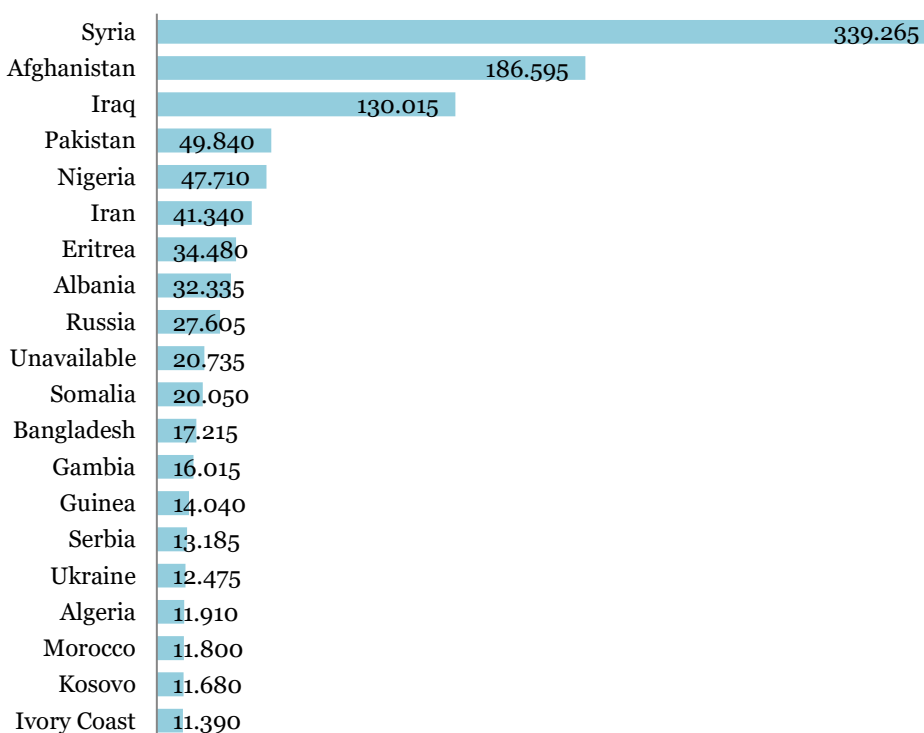
Source: Author. Eurostat [*migr_pop3ctb*] [*migr_asypenctzm*]. Extracted on 05.12.17

Figure 4. Percentage of denials of applications of asylum, EU 2016

☐	25 - 50
☐	50 - 75
☐	75 - 85
☐	85 - 95
☐	95 - 100
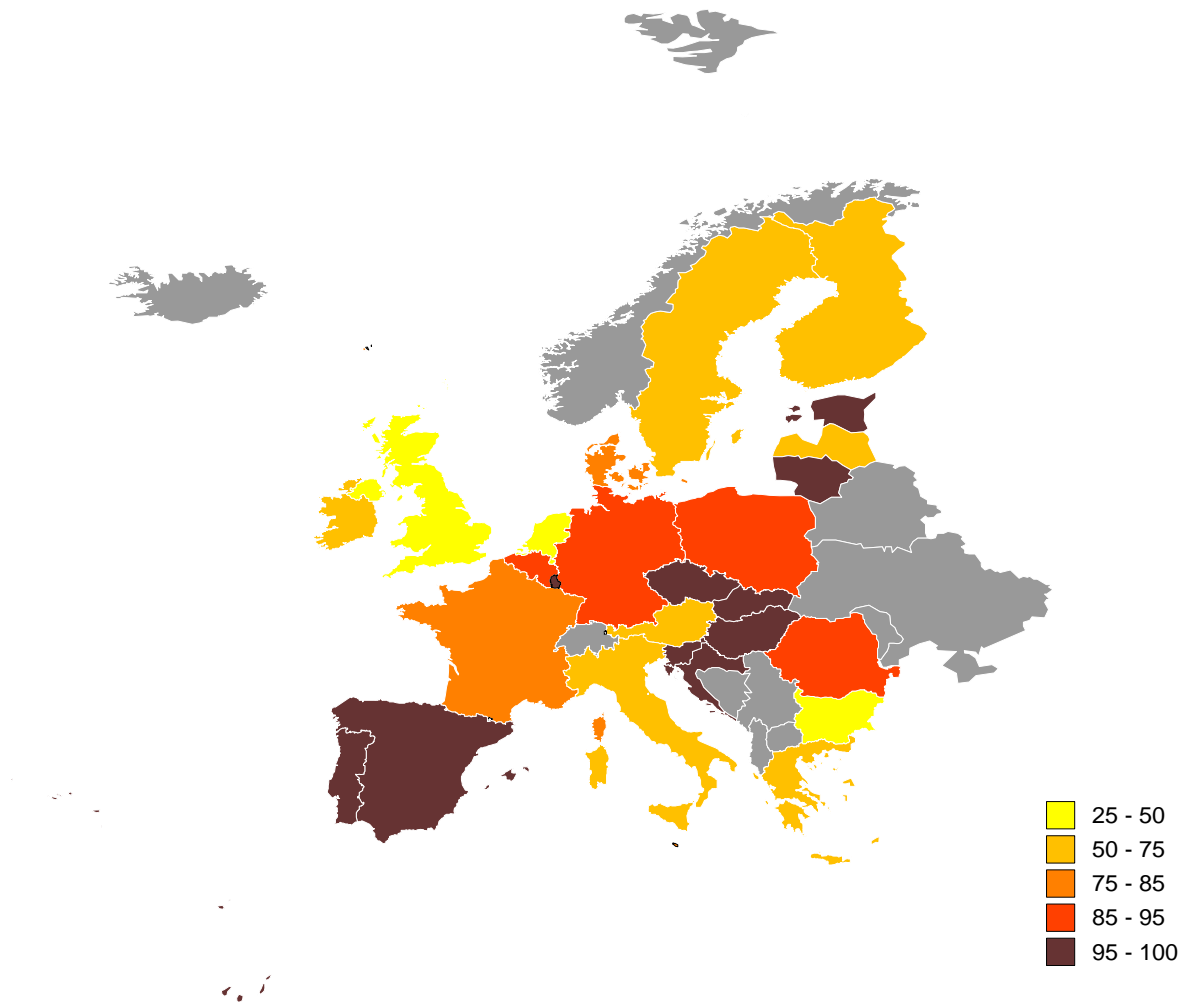
Source: Author. Eurostat [*migr_pop3ctb*] [*migr_asypenctzm*]. Extracted on 05.12.17

Finally, specifically in Spain, from which countries do most asylum-seekers come? Examining the applications from 2008 to 2016 (Fig. 5), we can see that there is a mix of countries with recent armed conflicts – Syria and Ukraine, with 11,430 and 6,875 applications, respectively – and those suffering from acute political crises – such as Colombia, Cuba and Venezuela. Many of them have immigrant communities which have long been settled in Spain, such as Nigeria, Mali and Pakistan. However, the temporal aggregation conceals the succession of different origins: 86% of the Syrian and Ukrainian applicants came in the past two years.

Figure 5. Applicants for asylum in Spain, 2008-2016

Country	Value
Syria	11.430
Ukraine	6.875
Venezuela	4.880
Algeria	2.895
Nigeria	2.815
Mali	2.705
Colombia	2.195
Ivory Coast	1.925
Palestine	1.795
Cuba	1.325
Morocco	1.275
Guinea	1.060
Cameroon	1.040
Somalia	1.010
Pakistan	860
Honduras	775
El Salvador	750
Congo	695
Russia	645
Iraq	590

Source: Author. Eurostat [*migr_pop3ctb*] [*migr_asypenctzm*]. Extracted on 05.12.17

3. Schengen and fortress Europe: The mercantilisation of law

3.1.   *Schengen, migration policy and the neoliberal utopia*

The temporary suspension of the Schengen Treaty and the closure of national borders, as on the French and Italian borders at one point due to the French government's desire to stop thousands of Tunisian refugees from entering after the Arab Spring in April 2011, has led to the belief that the Schengen Treaty on the free movement of persons and the idea of Fortress Europe are opposed to each other. The most widespread message is that the so-called "refugee crisis" is threatening the Schengen space.[1]

With the signing of the Treaty of Rome in 1957, article 3 of the constitution of the European Economic Community stated that the objective of creating an internal market must entail eliminating obstacles to the free movement of people, services and capital. Consequently, one of the Council of Europe's first activities after approving the EEC regulations was to issue a statement on the free movement of persons (regulations from 1961 and 1964). However, it was not until the signing of the Schengen Treaty in 1985 that a migration policy was sketched out – who was able to move and who should not have access to the free movement area – that had nothing to do with the volume, direction or sociodemographic characteristics of the migrations occurring at that time, and even less so with those that would be

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[1] The Schengen space is comprised of the 28 EU countries minus Bulgaria, Croatia, Ireland, Romania, the United Kingdom and Cyprus, plus the states in the European Free Trade Association (EFTA): Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland.

precipitated in the new millennium. The design sought to devise a unified labour market within the neoliberal dream, as articulated by F. Hayek in 1944.[2]

Since the mid-1980s, and especially after the Schengen area entered into force in 1995, it was geared at transforming the existing flows into an ideal by: 1) trying to limit the arrival of non-EU immigrants to those with strong job qualifications, as a policy to attract talent; 2) encouraging what is called "internal mobility" for people with low qualifications, with the goal of mostly meeting this demand with EU workers; and 3) limiting non-EU immigrants to circular or seasonal migration programmes to the extent possible, which many authors, including the demographer Livi-Bacci (2012), have viewed as the desire to save integration costs.

Schengen is also at the foundation of the creation of what is known as Fortress Europe, since the dissolution of internal borders meant strengthening the external ones through coordinated action among the police forces of the different member states (Lasagabaster, 1996). After the Schengen Treaty entered into force, and as part of the migratory system it brought about, the Dublin Convention was signed in 1990, which sought to standardise asylum policies, although it was actually a move in a convergent, restrictive direction by spreading the suspicion that economic immigrants used the right to asylum fraudulently as an easy way to enter the different EU countries. Requests for asylum were associated with illegal immigration. Thus, also around this time, asylum started to be granted drastically less than before in almost all the EU members, even though we should recall that they were coming during the conflict in the former Yugoslavia. The implementation of the Dublin Treaty meant that asylum-seekers were logged in Eurodac – the digital fingerprint bank to monitor terrorism. In 2003, the Dublin II Convention introduced the concept of "readmission", which meant making the countries where the refugees arrive, which is geographically determined and begins with Greece and Italy, responsible for asylum. This is a procedure which seeks to force the EU countries to better control the periphery, and in the refugee episode in the summer of 2015 it explains the reluctance of both the refugees and some of the countries to register their entry when they clearly stated that their goal was to reach Germany or Sweden (Solanes Corella, 2016). In 2013, the entry into force of the new regulation, Dublin III, confirmed these principles even though it proclaimed that transferring asylum-seekers to member states where they run the risk of receiving "inhuman or degrading treatment" was explicitly banned.

The relationship between the limitation on asylum and the construction of a Fortress Europe became clear after the approval of the Amsterdam Treaty and the European Council of Tampere in 1999, which sought to harmonise member states' policies by adopting a common action programme for 2000-2005. The Hague Programme was precisely arranged around the development of a common asylum system, along with cooperation with the third countries from which the immigrants come, the fair treatment of nationals of third countries living in the EU and the effective management of flows (Pinyol, 2012). This how outsourcing to third countries became the leading border control practice in exchange for compensation, which was often calculated under the category of development cooperation, or by

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[2] We shall use the definition of neoliberal by the historian Daniel Stedman Jones (2012, p. 2) as: "the free market ideology based on individual liberty and limited government that connected human freedom to the actions of the rational, self-interested actor in the competitive marketplace".

favouring their nationals in migrations to the EU. This backdrop should be borne in mind in order to understand the framework of negotiations with Turkey as a solution to the "refugee crisis" in 2015. After the proposal to distribute refugees in the different EU countries with a quota policy failed because of many European countries' refusal and boycott, EU technocrats and states have rummaged through the neoliberal cash register. The measures have ranged from the co-payment of upkeep expenses proposed to the refugees – in Switzerland, Denmark and the German states of Bavaria and Baden-Württemberg – to zero-sum exchanges (one in, one out), which in practice have led to the goal of accelerating the expulsion of illegal immigrants (regardless of whether they are workers or refugees) so the refugees can "fit".

3.2.   The 2015 refugee crisis

The migratory crisis in the summer of 2015 is also largely as much a consequence of the articulation of this outsourcing policy as the growth in refugees themselves (Ferrero & Pinyol, 2016). Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's threats to expel the estimated 2.5 million displaced persons in the Syrian conflict living in Turkey to the EU ended with the EU'S approval of 2.7 million euros meant to contain the Syrian refugees on 3 February 2016. Erdogan's negotiations with the EU sparked the totalitarian shift and the impunity with which internal repression was unleashed after the attempted coup d'état in July 2016. On 7 March of that same year, the EU representatives faithful to the principle of outsourcing border control had agreed with the Turkish Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu to return the economic immigrants and refugees who had reached Greece from Turkey back to Turkey – including those known as 'hot returns'. This meant exchange of Syrian refugees based on the fact that for every Syrian returned to Turkey, the EU pledged to take in another, implicitly consigning non-Syrian refugees to expulsion, maximising the criminalisation of economic immigrants, restricting the profile of "refugee" and, by delegating the prevention of international immigration to the EU to Turkey, accepting the compromise of visa applications from nationals from the aforementioned countries which were suspected of sending flows towards Europe. In return, Turkey would receive substantial economic compensation, doubling the funds allocated until then to reach 6 billion euros, and the need for its citizens to get visas to circulate through EU countries was eliminated, in addition to extracting the promise to accelerate entry into the EU and being permissive with its interventionist aspirations in the war in Syria and human rights violations in its domestic policy. It is important to acknowledge that the payment for its gendarmerie does not even cover the expenses which the Syrian refugees had previously cost Turkey (Naïr, 2016). This solution meant the conversion of refugee camps, whose main purpose was to register the refugees who reached Greece's coasts and distribute them, into centres – called Hotspots – where they are classified in order to distinguish economic immigrants from candidates for refugee status and later detained and deported (Uriarte, 2016). The shift in direction, which de facto meant the militarisation of the camps, came hand in hand with actions to kick out the NGOs. The volunteers were gradually replaced by police officers and the soldiers sent by the EU, which is also a display of mistrust of the efficiency of the host states, Italy and Greece, which are suspected of being somewhat lax (Rodier, 2017).

In 2016, the World Economic Forum's Global Risks report cited what are called "large-scale involuntary migrations" as the global risk with the highest impact

and the most plausible one for the forthcoming decade, mixing flows stemming from armed conflicts with potential future flows due to climate change and economic migrations (WEF, 2016). One prominent component of its construction as a global risk is its potential relationship with terrorism, a connection noted previously (WEF, 2016) but this time associated with the immigrants' lack of integration in European societies. If we bear in mind the huge influence of these reports presented at the annual gathering in Davos on governments and corporations, the effort to come up with arguments in favour of hosting refugees, thinking about both Turkey and the EU countries, is actually noteworthy. Thus, praise is heaped on the benefits that displaced persons can bring to both the countries where they are in transit (spurring the demand, activating international trade, increasing monetary flows through remittances and enhancing the use of new technologies) and the host countries (supplementing the working population to offset ageing).

The crisis has ended up with an overwhelming manifestation of weakness: turning refugees into the Achilles heel of EU policy. This weakness is being exploited by authoritarian regimes like Turkey's via negotiations that spotlight the EU's dependence on it, while at the same time revealing a worrisome domino effect, both in the closure of internal borders of the EU countries and in the vulnerability of the external borders, once the Eastern flank has been armoured. Italy and Spain have already ventured to predict that they will become the next targets of the mafias that traffic in immigrants and refugees. Meantime, the UNHCR has calculated that there were a least 5,000 deaths in the Mediterranean in 2016, with the most traffic headed again to the central part. There has also been a series of massive attacks on the Spanish fences in Ceuta and Melilla in February 2017, albeit nurtured by the Moroccan government as a pressure measure in the negotiations of a new treaty on the fishing and agriculture agreements between Morocco and the EU. The Council of Europe gathering in Malta on 3 February 2017 to discuss migration policy regarding the Central Mediterranean route in order to respond to this expected and feared reactivation vociferously reinforced the principle of outsourcing border control with the worrisome decision to make the failed state of Libya the main partner and guarantor of the containment of flows coming from this geographic region, all in the name of building the resilience of the EU migration policy with an eye towards future crises (European Council, 2017).

3.3.   *Xenophobic populisms and EU migration policy*

One of the effects of the refugee crisis has been a retroactive questioning of accepting the Eastern European countries' candidacies. The heart of this rejection is the use of populist, xenophobic rhetoric, with the President of Hungary Viktor Orban at the helm. Yet the middle and working classes of the Western countries are also to blame, as their votes have led to the rise of far-right and Euro-sceptic parties. As Wendy Brown (2015a) claims, this populism can be interpreted in part as the expression of the grassroots desire for the restoration of sovereign power and protection, which are threatened as the state is transformed by globalisation. The solution, it is argued, is "more Europe", a concept understood as accelerating the EU member states' cession of sovereignty. This is one interpretation which fully falls within neoliberal orthodoxy, which ultimately seems to reach the consensus that the risk is not so much migrations as poorly managing them, states' protectionist reactions to the pressure that their electorates can exert, incapable of applying the

neoliberal mindset until the end. This is the stance upheld, for example, by Ian Goldin (2011), director of Oxford's Martin School, who was also in charge of the Global Risks reports published by the World Economic Forum since 2012. Golden upholds the need to construct a "world leadership" capable of imposing a liberal agenda which guarantees the priority of freedom of movement over "national" interests.

The increase in radical right voting around Europe, not only in the Eastern countries, has been countered by an increase in votes for the revived leftist parties and grassroots organisation. The upshot has been the polarisation, not the legitimisation, of an anti-democratic leaning fuelled by the political futility of Europe. It is mistaken to explain the democratic deficit and the rise of xenophobia in different EU countries with their idiosyncrasies and recent histories, as is often frivolously done with Eastern European countries or even Germany. Instead, this situation should be interpreted as a reaction to the implementation of economic adjustment measures and the adoption of neoliberal policies, which include the dismantlement of health coverage or housing assistance system, among other forms of social assistance, which have impoverished broad swaths of the population, explaining the upswing in populism and the disdain for liberal democracy. All of these are *sine qua non* requirements for their entry into the EU, with the first result being the expulsion of the population. We should incidentally recall that the massive wave of emigration caused by this process headed to the United Kingdom, among other destinations, fed the arguments in favour of Brexit (Coleman, 2017), and that even though the UK was outside the Schengen space, this nonetheless is a commentary on the contradictions and difficulties of forming a unified labour market by mobilising the workers from EU countries.

Naturally, we can hark back to a shameful past in all the European countries where radical right groups have surged, with episodes of racism, xenophobia or rampant fascist movements. But we should first underscore the fact that despite their nationalism and anti-globalisation rhetoric, they like presenting themselves as transnationals. Secondly, they never question economic liberalism or present an alternative. Thirdly, the majority of them have made an effort to distance themselves from their fascist past, and in any case they have abandoned the anti-bourgeois rhetoric of the 1930s (Norris, 2009). But most importantly we should stress that in the majority of these countries, these episodes were also associated with the crises in the growth of capitalism and their need to crush the resistance of the working class, from the 1929 Nazi crackdown in Germany to the growth of the National Front in France since the 1970s, feeding off of Algeria's independence.

4.   *Una furtiva lagrima*: Emotional mobilisation

4.1.   *"Post-truth" in the refugee crisis: Between fear and compassion*

In late 2016, Oxford dictionary's entry for "post-truth", defined as "relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief" (Oxford Dictionary, 2016) and its choice as the word of the year led to an onslaught of articles and studies claiming the importance of being able to mobilise emotions when constructing the political discourse. Besides the brilliant trajectory of this concept, which inevitably seems to lead to banalisation with the labelling of any manipulation or falsehood in the political discourse aimed at altering reality – in

short, any public lie – as "post-truth", this definition of the neologism and the popularity it swiftly attained should be taken not as the point of departure but as the culmination of a long epistemological process on emotions in social mobilisation and their relationship with the truth. This process ranges from the disdain of emotions, eclipsed by the concept of (economic) "rationality" as a driving force behind human actions in the market society, with the confinement of emotions to the family and private sphere (Heller, 1979), to valuing them as a constituent part of decision-making in the risk society (Brown, 2015b), especially in the capacity to anticipate the future or cope with what by definition is not only unknown to us but also unknowable.

The spread of post-truth would not have been possible had the dividing line between factual truth and opinions not vanished, which Hanna Arendt (2017) viewed as one of the many variations lies can have as a form of action, a basic element of politics. Transforming uncomfortable truths into opinions also allows manifest falsehoods to be elevated to the same status. The mutation of the role of emotions in shaping subjectivity has come parallel to the convergence of the rise in marketing and the spread of the new technologies (in media as well) in the past 30 years, including the generation of big data, the shift in communication policy and the consolidation of neoliberalism. All these trends have fostered the creation of populations corresponding to market segments to which different political messages are targeted depending on their characteristics. According to authors like Joyce Harsin (2015), this is the culmination of the transformation into the regime of truth, as Michel Foucault defined it (2001, pp. 158-159):

> The types of discourse which [each society] accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements; the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true.

The mercantilisation of emotions and what is called storytelling, the practice aimed at imposing ideas, generating meaning and controlling behaviours which has become essential in the governability put into place by neoliberalism (Salmon, 2008), have also played an essential role in legitimising a politics which needed to constantly fabricate a plausible narrative as the gulf between the EU's migratory management and the reality it was trying to subvert became ever larger. If we just focus on the use of emotions in constructing discourses with the aim of mobilising people around migrations from the Mediterranean border and the 2015 refugee crisis, we have to conclude that fear on the one hand and compassion on the other were the two feelings that have occupied the opposite ends of the political and media discourse. However, both of them, imbued with the feeling of belonging which is essential to understand processes of identity construction (Guibernau, 2017), were subjected to enormous tension precisely because of the impact that the acceleration of migrations and the diversity resulting from globalisation were having on social and demographic reproduction.

The discourse of fear has accompanied and been reinforced by the media turning refugees into security threats (Limón-López & Fernández de Mosteyrin, 2016). This has reinforced the siege mentality, which is essential to making Fortress

Europe acceptable; in the terms used by Giorgio Agamben (2004), it has facilitated the imposition of a permanent state of exception, turning the exception into the rule, which has grown apace with terrorist activity. At the same time, it is connected to the feeling of belonging by reinforcing the meaning of the community besieged by an always threatening *other*, here used to legitimise the discourse on restricting migration, along with the argument on the limits of the EU's ability to absorb more. The cry for compassion, in contrast, has sought identification with the refugees through belonging to the same community. This is the facet that interests us the most, which we wish to explore in the next section.

4.2.   Plush-toy policies: Media replacement

In order to understand the gradual emergence of empathy towards the refugees, stoking compassion, we shall analyse the repercussions of some of the pictures that went viral in the same summer of 2015, which perfectly illustrate this media-driven process. The corpse of the little boy Aylan on the coast of the island of Kos on 2 September of that year was the spark that ignited it for several reasons. First, because it took the picture of a lifeless child for public opinion to mobilise on a large scale, which had seemed immune to the death of all children and adults of both sexes who had scandalously preceded this snapshot for years. Secondly, because this boy, whose surname was Kurdi, was one of the children in a family of Kurdish refugees who had fled the city of Kobane, which had been destroyed because of the Turkish government's apathy as it witnessed the annihilation of its enemies, the Kurds, on the other side of its border as part of the ethnic cleansings with which sought to control and subjugate its own population, not to mention that these refugees are marginalised in their own land because they are Kurds. However, this story is silenced because it is uncomfortable and the goal is to avoid discomfiting these states, which are viewed as the EU's preferential partners that do nothing more than act as the Cerberus shuttling migratory flows back and forth.

As stated above, only the feeling of belonging can explain the impact of this snapshot. The categorisation of Syrian refugees as *peers*, or at least as victims that inspire compassion, occurred through their identification with the middle classes (Rodier, 2017), unlike Sub-Saharan or other economic migrants, whose phenotype, beginning with the colour of their skin, acts as a class marker. The first reports on the crisis stressed the use of mobile phones and credit cards, as well as their educational level, associated with some of them being fluent in English, and the increasingly astronomical figures that they had to pay their "facilitators" (which rose in direct proportion to the difficulties imposed by states and the EU).

The second picture is a humanitarian aid worker giving a plush toy to a Moroccan refugee boy upon the latter's arrival to Munich. This emblematic image was among many others of people who were moved to welcome the first refugees with plush toys. In this way, the replacement of a public policy managing immigration with philanthropy, in the hands of citizens' good will, is accepted, with the obligatory pictures of women. This image of solidarity contrasts with the journalist Petra Lazlo kicking children who were trying to cross the Hungarian border holding their father's hand on 9 September 2015. Before that month was over, the news had spread that the family who had been the target of this aggression had already been granted asylum and was living in Getafe, while the Spanish government continued to grumble about the refugee quota which it had been assigned in theory – and never met – and kept the majority of Syrian refugees who

had applied for asylum in purgatory for months, or even years. In 2015, and even until mid-2016, Spain had only allowed in 18 Syrian refugees in a shameful rehashing of its stingy behaviour during the Balkans war.

Appealing to emotions has sought to ignite indignation through images that move us and spark compassion. Yet this emotivity can eclipse a critical analysis of the situation. As Michel Lacroix (2001) pointed out, emotion as a mobilising agent entails two obvious dangers: 1) enshrining the state's (and EU's) inhibition and shifting that role to NGOs and volunteers; and 2) becoming a narcissistic reflection of self-compassion, limited to being a compensatory gesture of self-centred angst. The subsidiarity of NGOs, if not the migration industry (Gammeltoft-Hansen & Nyberg-Sorensen, 2011), either legally or not, has pushed decisions that should always be taken in the strict realm of rationality towards media circus, guiding the public by emotivity. What has fostered this prime role of emotivity is the lack of regulations based on social justice. Thus, we respond to applications for asylum and refuge with plush toys because of the destruction of the tangible social spaces where the refugees live – with the EU's complicity or passivity – and their desire to escape poverty with the unequal distribution promoted by a geopolitics that is the heir to European colonialism.

The European population has shown that it is willing to mobilise where their leaders have tended towards criminal passivity, in the best of cases. Grassroots solidarity can be found even in states where authoritarian gesticulations have monopolised the reaction to the refugee crisis. Having passed the peak of the crisis, the images lose power because of the very volatility of emotional consumption, yet also because the discourse of terror has completely enshrouded the issue after the rumours that a Syrian passport was found near the scene of the Paris attacks on 13 November 2015 (Bataclan disco, terraces of the nearby bars and the Stade de France), which justified the declaration of a state of emergency in France and the resumption of border controls with its neighbours in December of that same year (Guild, 2016). This find, which associated terrorism with refugees, was compounded by the events in Cologne at the end of the year (with recurrences in other German and Swedish cities) of women being subjected to sexual aggressions and robberies by groups of people identified as "immigrants".

5.   Conclusions: The thanatopolitical "pleat" and the refugee crisis

On 15 Marc 2016, an opinion piece was published in *El País* by José María Mena, former chief prosecutor on the High Court of Justice of Catalonia, on the imminent agreement between Turkey and the EU on refugees. He said:

> "Technically, legally, this is not geocide, because there is no direct intention to exterminate, which would be essential in order to file a suit in the International Criminal Court against the signatories of the preliminary agreement dated 7 March. However, there is a direct causality between the European governments' traitorous, cold lack of compassion and the thousands of people suffering and dead. They are tantamount to genocide."

Perhaps it cannot be considered genocide, but it is clear proof of the increasing pre-eminence of thanatopolitics in the 21st century. We use the metaphor of the "pleat" that Guilles Deleuze (2015) applied to Michel Foucault's

theory of the self to refer to the dual status of being inside and outside, of being simultaneously ontological and epistemological, and of referring equally to a practice and its problematisation (Probyn, 1992), in this case reflecting the twofold facet of power by including biopolitics and thanatopolitics. Thanatopolitics, the politics of death, from the Greek *thanatos*, meant as a mechanism that destroys human life with the consent or mediation of the state, which is supposed to protect life (Fernández Vítores, 2015), has always been present as a temptation and resource of biopolitics. This was noted by the Italian philosopher Roberto Esposito (2011), as Laura Bazzicapulo (2016) reminds us: thanatopolitics redirects us to the presence of violence in the sovereign decision on death, whereas biopolitics strives to protect and augment life. In this new millennium, the shift is clear. We can find it in the categorisation and decisions taken on migrations, and more flagrantly in the indifferent stance taken when faced with the deaths caused by migratory policies that are based on a mercantile calculus, which is sinister in the Mediterranean but equally so on the border between Mexico and the United States.

The landscape of redundancy, as Don Mitchell (2009) proposed calling the Holtville cemetery (California), with its interminable rows of anonymous crosses, where illegal immigrants who died trying to cross the border are buried, is nonetheless the silent counterpart of the abundance generated by competition. The extension of the wall between the two countries, built upon juicy business for the companies that benefit from the revitalisation of employment, is upheld on this apartheid which justifies death as outside political action more than as foreseeable. The apartheid industry generated by this policy ends up becoming a lobby; we have seen it in the defence of razor wire manufacturing for the sake of the development of the region of Màlaga, which has been besieged by unemployment. Yet we are also seeing it on a much larger scale in the business generated by the construction of the wall promised by the new president of the United States, Donald Trump, from cement companies to the high-technology industries applied to surveillance (deployment of sensors and drones), offshoots of the military industry. Thanatopolitics is the product of economic rationality, not folly.

The acceptability of the shift from biopolitics to thanatopolitics applied to immigration and refugees has needed the post-truth of the story devised by neoliberal think tanks such as those in Davos, applied unscrupulously the EU bureaucracy. The calculus of risk has been essential in this replacement of truth, where judgement of reality is replaced by mathematical evidence from the model and acts as a form of self-deception. In order for this to be possible, controlling and directing scholarly output (statistics as a production of reality) has been essential, guiding it towards not inquiring into the truth but confirming the political decisions that strengthen the market. The evaluation system of the main R&D projects in Horizon 2020 fall within this self-sustaining paradigm. On the other hand, this tendency has converged with the rise of the radical right, whose most important role has been to take over the traditional right and sectors attuned to the culturalist and xenophobic theses which are clearing the way for the acceptance of thanatopolitics in migratory matters.

In vain, we seek the decree or the open declaration of the battle against refugees or against illegal immigration. Frontex vessels and hypothetical armed actions are still being targeted against "traffickers". And yet, how should we view Foreigner Detention Centres, or the refugee camps where the population is divided between those who will be allowed in and those who will be expelled, or those who

will remain in a limbo of uncertainty? Within this context, recourse to the law may seem futile. How else, besides a maritime border, can we explain that assisting castaways is a violation of the law? How else can we justify the Greek prosecutor's accusation of human trafficking against the firefighters from Seville on 14 August 2016?

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