Journal of European Integration

ISSN: (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/geui20

Politicizing support and opposition to migration in France: the EU asylum policy crisis and direct social activism

Pietro Castelli Gattinara & Lorenzo Zamponi

To cite this article: Pietro Castelli Gattinara & Lorenzo Zamponi (2020) Politicizing support and opposition to migration in France: the EU asylum policy crisis and direct social activism, Journal of European Integration, 42:5, 625-641, DOI: 10.1080/07036337.2020.1792459

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/07036337.2020.1792459

© 2020 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group.

Published online: 19 Aug 2020.

Submit your article to this journal

Article views: 312

View related articles

View Crossmark data

Full Terms & Conditions of access and use can be found at https://www.tandfonline.com/action/journalInformation?journalCode=geui20

JOURNAL OF EUROPEAN INTEGRATION
2020, VOL. 42, NO. 5, 625–641
https://doi.org/10.1080/07036337.2020.1792459

ARTICLE

OPEN ACCESS

Politicizing support and opposition to migration in France: the EU asylum policy crisis and direct social activism

Pietro Castelli Gattinara[a] and Lorenzo Zamponi[b]

[a]Center for Research on Extremism (C-REX), University of Oslo, Oslo, Norway; [b]Centre On Social Movement Studies (COSMOS), Scuola Normale Superiore, Firenze, Italy

ABSTRACT
This article focuses on the migration policy crisis in France to illustrate how social movements contribute to the epistemic construction of 'crises' of European Integration. To tackle politicization, we compare the framing and mobilization choices by grassroots actors in solidarity with asylum-seekers and groups aiming to defend national borders from them. Using original Protest Event data and 21 face-to-face interviews, we find that the construction of the crisis as a policy failure crucially reshaped mobilization on both sides of the conflict. Specifically, direct social actions allowed the two camps to respond to a context perceived as critical, politicizing the crisis in light of the declining trust in representative institutions, while also responding to the growing demand for efficacy and concreteness. The findings offer novel empirical insight on movement–countermovement interactions and contribute to the scholarly debate on the relation between crises and the politicisation of contentious issues in Europe.

KEYWORDS
Collective action; migration; politicization; France; EU; crisis; direct social actions

Introduction

This article focuses on how social movements react to emergency circumstances and mobilize during situations described as crises. The main argument is that the way in which collective actors cope with perceived crises has to do with how they understand and frame the public problems at stake. Most notably, collective actors might reconfigure their mobilization strategy to accommodate the specific demands of times of crisis (Bosi and Zamponi 2020). These choices, in turn, might reshape the way in which crises are politicized, increasing the salience of specific public problems, expanding the range of contrasting actors, and polarizing the content of public debates (Grande and Hutter 2016). To this goal, we look at the impact of the European migrant crisis as a dimension of the broader process of politicization of the EU, assessing the reaction by collective actors supporting asylum-seekers and groups mobilizing against their arrival in France.[1]

We illustrate that the migrant crisis reshaped the available space for contention on both sides of political conflict in France, and facilitated the diffusion of specific forms of actions aiming at exerting a direct impact on society. In addition to their material effects,

CONTACT Pietro Castelli Gattinara Pietro.castelli@c-rex.uio.no Center for Research on Extremism (C-REX), University of Oslo, P.O. Box 1097 Blindern, 0317 Oslo, Norway

© 2020 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group.
This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives License (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, and is not altered, transformed, or built upon in any way.

these Direct Social Actions (DSAs) politicized the need for decisive intervention in support of – but also against – refugees. In line with the remits of this Special Issue, therefore, the article suggests that collective action choices participate to the epistemic construction of crisis, since even though unexpected events may have material bases, it is their perception and interpretation that makes them 'crises'.

In the following sections, we discuss the linkages between the EU migration policy crisis and European integration and illustrate our argument concerning the expected role of DSAs in the process of politicization. We then present our data and the choice to focus on France as a case study. Using original Protest Event Analysis data and 21 face-to-face interviews, the empirical analysis discusses the evolution of mobilization over time, offering an in-depth account of the interaction between contrasting camps and the relationship between collective action and politicization. The concluding section offers a general reflection on how grassroots mobilization in response to highly visible humanitarian emergencies within the EU borders nourished the construction of the European crisis as a policy failure.

The migration crisis, mobilization and the politicization of Europe

By looking at mobilization during the 2015 asylum emergency, this paper tackles the question of how the politics of permanent crisis influence the politicization of Europe. Previous scholarship in fact suggests that the politicization of EU integration has been associated to a series of groundbreaking events, such as the subsequent enlargement waves but also landmark shocks like the Great Recession, *Brexit*, and the refugee crisis (Pirro and Taggart 2018). The latter holds a particular importance, configuring a veritable critical juncture in the politicization of the EU (Hutter and Kriesi 2019). The 2015 emergency, in fact, siphoned migration policy at the core of public debates about Europe and turned the issue of asylum into one the most controversial topics in the European integration process (Della Porta 2018; Castelli Gattinara 2017). The asylum policy crisis is in fact closely connected to core EU issues like the tearing down of internal border controls and the less successful efforts to build a common external border and foreign policy. Hence, the migrant crisis had critical repercussions for European integration, reinforcing pre-existing centripetal forces within the union, eroding the consensus for solidarity with frontline states, and triggering the renationalization of border control policies and other measures to reinstate the national sovereignty of individual member states (Colombeau 2019).

Yet, the 2015 emergency was not simply a result of the sheer number of arrivals to the EU, nor it merely stemmed from the strategic use of the term 'crisis' – which had long been routine in debates on this issue (Alcalde 2016). Indeed, civil society mobilization on this issue is by no means a new phenomenon, both in terms of migrant and solidarity activism (Koopmans et al. 2005; Eggert and Giugni 2015) and anti-immigration street politics (Castelli Gattinara and Pirro 2019). If the recent inflow of asylum seekers did not configure an unfamiliar situation, national governments in the EU appeared critically unprepared to provide humanitarian intervention. This triggered a perception that the policies and regulations in place were unfit to address what was presented as an emergency, justifying calls for urgent and atypical decisions. The 2015 'summer' of migration (Hess and Kasparek 2017), thus, came to configure a critical turning point,

whereby the occurrence of a relatively unexpected event was framed discursively as a crisis to justify decisive interventions (Hay 1996).

In our understanding, these exceptional circumstances relate to the mobilization choices of grassroots actors in two main ways, which we deem crucial to understand the construction of the migration crisis in the EU. First, moments of perceived crisis might facilitate the development of *new forms of political engagement*, on both sides of the conflict. Perceived emergencies, in fact, reshape the available space for contention by collective actors, and reconfigure their network of potential allies and opponents (Della Porta 2018; Fontanari and Borri 2017). Second, moments of crisis might be associated with the diffusion of specific forms of mobilization, because collective action choices carry alternative interpretations of the issue at stake (Simonneau and Castelli Gattinara 2019). Notably, emergencies might propel *Direct Social Actions* (DSAs), i.e. forms of engagement that – rather than demanding the intermediation of the state – aim at producing a direct effect on society (Bosi and Zamponi 2015). Opting for this specific form of action, in fact, conveys the idea that a problem requires decisive, immediate, intervention. In sum, by reconfiguring their repertoires of contention, collective actors might respond to the specific demands of efficacy, necessity, and concreteness that characterise moments of perceived crisis. At the same time, these mobilization choices participate to the politicization of the emergency, contributing to its epistemic construction as 'crises'.

Direct activism and the framing of crises

The idea that crisis circumstances have an impact on collective action rests on two separate streams of research. First, the vast literature on political crises and politicization in Europe. Second, social movement scholarship linking mobilization choices to the specific demands of times of crisis.

Previous research on the politicization of emergencies provides initial support to the idea that mobilization choices contribute to the epistemic construction of crises. This scholarship suggests that no single state of affairs may represent a 'crisis' in and of itself, but any situation can become one if social actors interpret its consequences as such (Coleman 2013; Thompson 2009). The process of making sense of a crisis involves narrating its causes, categorizing its implications and consequences, and identifying the range of possible solutions (Jessop 2015). In this respect, unexpected events and circumstances of emergency often configure strategic moments of transition, during which various types of actors compete for the discursive, or epistemic, construction of the 'decisive intervention' that must be made to respond to the crisis (Hay 1999). If crises trigger conflict between stark alternatives, politicization implies that this conflict has expanded within the political system, notably involving the arena of mass protest (Grande and Hutter 2016). In other words, crises are closely intertwined with processes of politicization of their underlying issues, which trigger conflict between contrasting collective actors over competing understandings of what crises entail and what trajectories must be taken. Following this understanding, in this paper, we address politicization as the way in which contrasting groups in the solidarity and anti-refugee camp interpreted the migrant crisis.

A second argument in support of the connection between the crises and collective action comes from scholarship on social movements. These studies suggest that collective actors opt for forms of action that they consider most effective and justified in a given

context (Kriesi et al. 1995; Tilly 1978). Since these choices obviously depend on each actor's subjective interpretation of external circumstances, the discursive nature of crises comes to play a crucial role. The framing of periods of necessity as crises implies that state institutions live a moment of critical weakness, which decreases people's trust in governments to manage exceptional events (Della Porta 2015). This, in turn, leads grassroots actors away from traditional forms of mobilization that call for the intermediation of public authorities, in favour of direct interventions in society, or DSAs (Bosi and Zamponi 2020; D'Alisa, Forno, and Maurano 2015; Kousis 2017). Indeed, previous studies have shown that the Great Recession triggered various forms of direct action, including volunteerism, solidarity economy, and alternative economic practices (see: Kousis and Paschou 2017) and that this did not depend on the economic hardship *per se*, but on the narrative reproduction of the crisis by the actors (Zamponi and Bosi 2018).

Combined, these two streams of research suggest that the strategic choices of mobilization of collective actors, and notably DSAs, are not only a reaction to a situation of perceived emergency but also a way to shape its discursive construction as a crisis. In this respect, mobilization choices during the migrant crisis were closely connected to politicization strategies. The short-circuit of the system of control of asylum seekers in 2015 produced visible situations of humanitarian emergency within the EU (Hess and Kasparek 2017), which reinforced pre-existing dynamics of politicization and civil society mobilization (Karakayali and Olaf Kleist 2016; Giugni and Grasso 2018). On the one hand, the perceived abandonment of asylum seekers by local and national authorities facilitated the re-activation of networks of migrant welfare 'from below', in contrast with state- and EU-level policies (Ambrosini 2011; Zamponi 2017). On the other, the demand for more security triggered grassroots mobilization and bottom-up actions by anti-immigrant actors as well, who accused public authorities of being unwilling to fulfil their duties of law enforcement (Froio and Castelli Gattinara 2016; Castelli Gattinara 2018).

The material inadequacy of EU governments to cope with exceptional migration flows in 2015 triggered perceptions of distrust in local administrations, national governments, and supranational bodies. Distrust in public authorities facilitated the emergence of direct forms of intervention by contrasting collective actors and, in turn, reinforced the idea of an asylum crisis within the EU. The use of new forms of political engagement by collective actors thus stemmed from a desire to respond to the asylum emergency, but also from the attempt of contrasting actors to interpret and frame it via specific mobilization strategies. Albeit the interpretation of the issue by solidarity and anti-refugee movements was arguably opposite, direct activism allowed both sides of the debate to frame migration as a crisis, and to politicize it in ways that responded to the growing demand for efficacy and declining trust in representative institutions.

Case study and methods

The choice of studying France rests on three main considerations. First, because of the enduring salience of the issue, linked to France's long history of immigration and distinct citizenship regime (Koopmans et al. 2005; Monforte and Dufour 2011). Second, because of the relevance of anti-immigration politics and notably the *Front National*, which can be considered not only a forerunner of the contemporary radical right but also one of the most successful parties of its kind (Rydgren 2018). Finally, because of the consolidated

field of mobilization around migration in France (Monforte 2014), which explains the entrenchment of solidarity organizations in the French society from well before the outbreak of the crisis (Steinhilper 2018).

The quantitative analysis draws on Protest Event Analysis (PEA) to measure the main features of mobilization in France. In line with established practices in social movement studies, we use media data to gather information on events that are covered in public debates but use national press agency newswires (*Agence France Press*) to capture events with as little as possible 'mediation' of editorial views (Koopmans and Rucht 2002). A dedicated search string on the Factiva digital archive (2014–2017) allowed capturing all articles containing explicit references to migration and asylum in France. We then retained all articles mentioning one or 'protest events', i.e. activities reflecting contemporary repertoires of contention such as public demonstrations, confrontational events, and violent activities (Hutter 2014). The resulting dataset includes information on the time and location of each event, the promoters and form of action involved.[2] Concerning promoters, we differentiate political parties, organized NGOs, and two types of grassroots movements: solidarity and anti-immigration groups. Furthermore, to assess the relative importance of different types of activities, and their evolution over time, we classified forms of actions in three broad categories, corresponding to conventional public events (e.g. public meetings and campaigning), protest actions (e.g. demonstrations, confrontational and violent events) and direct social actions (e.g. solidarity and philanthropic actions, street patrols).

The quantitative data are integrated with 21 semi-structured interviews allowing 'scrutiny of meaning, both how activists regard their participation and how they understand their social world' (Blee and Taylor 2002, 95–96). This data enables disclosing how groups came to select specific forms of actions, but also how they enacted, appropriated and constructed meanings during mobilization (Doherty and Hayes 2018). The fieldwork lasted from December 2016 to March 2017 and targeted the multiple types of civil society actors that contribute to the practical governance of asylum, or migration 'battleground' (Ambrosini 2020). This includes activists engaged in anti-refugee initiatives and citizens engaged in the French refugee solidarity network. Respondents belonged either to formal organisations or NGOs (e.g. *Les Identitaires, Civitas, La Cimade, BAAM*) or to more informal collectives and citizen assemblies identified during the fieldwork (e.g. *Les Calaisiens en Colère; Versailles Famille Avenir, Paris d'Exil, Collectif La Chapelle Debout*). Participants were free to discuss the aspects that they deemed most relevant but were asked specifically about the activities in which they participated, their personal involvement and embeddedness in the movement.

Mobilizing on forced migration in France

The politicization of undocumented migration in France dates back to the early 1990s, when a first wave of protest by rejected asylum-seekers emerged to demand regularisation in the country (Siméant 1998). Having reached its height with the debate on the *Pasqua* law , the so-called *sans-papiers* movement activated a cycle of contention on migration that would extend throughout the following decade (Steinhilper 2018). Due to the comparatively low rates of asylum recognition in France (Fischer and Hamidi 2016), public debates mainly focused on transit migrants stranded in Northern France or trying

to cross the channel into Britain. In 2002, amidst much protest by migrant and anti-racist organizations, French president Nicolas Sarkozy ordered to shut down the refugee camp set up by the Red Cross near the border town of Calais (Schwenken 2014). Rather than solving the problem, this paved the way to the emergence of makeshifts and squats hosting thousands of people in precarious sanitary and security conditions, commonly known as the 'Jungle' of Calais.

In this context, while the outbreak of the so-called European migration crisis in 2015 did not produce a steep increase in asylum applications to France, it put additional strain to places of transit such as the Calais region. In fact, asylum requests grew steadily, from 64,000 in 2014 to a record of 98,000 in 2017, but remained largely below the levels of neighbouring countries like Germany (700.000 in 2016) and Italy (130.000 in 2017; Migration Policy Institute, 2018). Yet, the movement of undocumented migrants through the French territory led to the emergence of new places of transit, such as the train stations of border towns, and temporary camps hosting stationing migrants. These new spaces became the battlegrounds for the struggles between state actors, organised civil society groups, and grassroots local movements. As migrants entered France through the eastern border, on the coast of Menton and on the Alps, police operations such as random identity checks on trains faced the mobilization by solidarity movements helping migrants crossing from Italy, but also sustained anti-refugee mobilization demanding increasing security. Once in Paris, stranded migrants set up hundreds of small tents and cardboard boxes underneath an aerial metro, receiving initial support from local communities but also facing the muscular intervention of the French authorities. In the north of the country, the disproportionate arrival of migrants wishing to reach the UK conflated the population of the Calais camp and triggered the reaction of local authorities, right-wing parties and citizen assemblies. Taking advantage of the consensus climate on security issues following the terror attacks of 2015 and 2016,[3] the French government opted to clear the camp and relocate the over 6,000 residents to temporary reception centres, which in turn activated the opposition of citizens in the newly designated areas.

As it appears, mobilization on migration in France involved different types of actors, including government and opposition parties, NGOs and grassroots movements, and different forms of mobilization in the pro- and anti-immigration camps. To address our general expectation – that the circumstances of crisis facilitated the engagement in direct forms of activism – we shall now look at the main type of actions that have been promoted throughout the years of the crisis, and then disaggregate this information in order to account for the profile of the different actors involved. Taking 2015 as a reference point, Table 1 provides information for conventional events, protest actions, and direct social initiatives. It shows that mobilization in general increases over time also due to a remarkable growth in actions corresponding to the above definition of DSAs: if we recorded only four DSAs in 2014 (less than 4% of the overall mobilization), there were no less than 40 actions of this type in 2017 (over 13%). The evolution of street protests, instead, does not display a similar linear evolution across years. Hence, in addition to providing some initial evidence of the link between perceptions of crisis and the use of DSAs, these findings also confirm that the logics driving direct interventions do not coincide completely with the ones of protest and street activism.

Table 2 disaggregates this information by type of actors. It shows that while institutional political parties were behind most of the public events concerning migration in this

Table 1. Type of actions by year of events (2014–2017).

	Conventional actions		Street/protest actions		Direct social actions		
Year	%	N	%	N	%	N	Total
2014	74.1	80	22.2	24	3.7	4	108
2015	77.2	190	17.9	44	4.9	12	246
2016	65.3	192	27.9	82	6.8	20	294
2017	75.5	222	10.9	32	13.6	40	294
Total	100%	684	100%	182	100%	76	942

Table 2. Type of action by type of organisation (aggregate).

	Type of action							
	Conventional actions		Street/protest actions		Direct social actions		Total	
Type of organization	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N
Political parties								
Socialist Party (Parti Socialiste, PS)	98.4	246	1.6	4	0.0	0	100%	250
The Republicans (Les Républicains, LR)	97.9	92	2.1	2	0.0	0	100%	94
National Front (Front National, FN)	91.3	84	8.7	8	0.0	0	100%	92
Forward! (En Marche!, LREM)	95.6	86	4.4	4	0.0	0	100%	90
Left Front (Front De Gauche, FDG)	77.3	34	13.6	6	9.1	4	100%	44
Civil society								
Non-government organizations	69.0	40	3.4	2	27.6	16	100%	58
Grassroots pro-immigration actors	16.8	30	59.6	106	23.6	42	100%	178
Grassroots anti-immigration actors	18.4	14	63.2	48	18.4	14	100%	76
Other								
EU and foreign actors	96.7	58	3.3	2	0.0	0	100%	60
Total	684	182	76	100%	942			

period, civil society actors also promoted a considerable share of events. Furthermore, the table shows that different actors are associated with different forms of engagement. Political parties mobilize almost exclusively by means of conventional public events – with the partial exception of radical parties like the Front National and the Left Front (which promoted protests and occasionally direct actions). Civil society actors, instead, invest considerably in direct forms of activism, albeit with some differences.

First, Table 2 shows that actors differ concerning the composition of their repertoire: if for NGOs DSAs are complementary to conventional forms of engagement, for grassroots actors they pair with street protest. Second, the absolute number of DSAs promoted by solidarity actors is considerably higher than for any other group: no less than 42 events originated in the solidarity sector, against 14 and 16 for anti-immigrant groups and NGOs, respectively. As shown in Figure 1, however, prior to 2015 DSAs were marginal for all groups, but relatively more frequent in the anti-immigration camp. Third, and finally, DSAs promoted by different types of groups vary qualitatively. As we shall illustrate more in detail in the next section, while NGOs organised legal and psychological support for stranded migrants, grassroots solidarity activists provided material help, food and blankets around places of transit, whereas anti-immigration activists tried to inhibit the construction of makeshift camps via vigilante actions and citizen patrols.

Overall, albeit only tentatively, these findings suggest that the crisis contributed to the diffusion of DSAs, especially among solidarity actors. To elaborate further on how social movements have used direct activism to appropriate and politicize circumstances of crisis, the next sections look specifically at grassroots actors, offering a qualitative account of

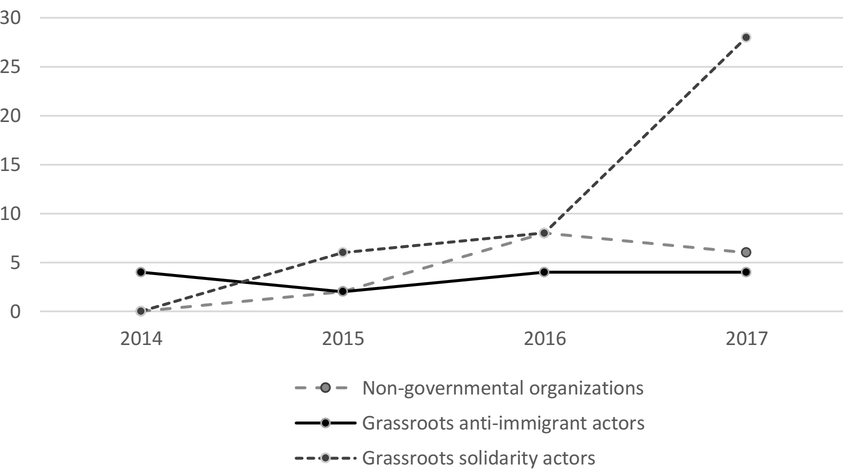

Figure 1. Number o DSAs by civil society actors (2014–2017).

how the crisis shaped the mobilization in solidarity and against the arrival of migrants in France.

Humanitarianism, alternative action and direct intervention in the solidarity movement

The interviews conducted with grassroots activists in France illustrate a clear 'itinerary' of commitment in solidarity with migrants. It all starts with a visible situation of emergency, typically the appearance of a self-managed camp. In response, people show up to bring food and blankets. This leads to the formation of a collective to coordinate help. Finally, this collective feels the need to organise itself politically.

> There were camps in Stalingrad and around. People came, they met there, and they began to think: "ok, we are all trying to help in some way, so let's build a collective". [. . .] People who were living close by, or that used that metro line, saw the camps. So they began to go there with food and things, at the beginning with some friends who were also concerned by the camps, and they met, and they decided to build this collective. [. . .] Some of them only came to help once, some of them came regularly, some of them were always here. [. . .] (S5)

> I became really involved in September 2015 when the camp in Stalingrad was evacuated [. . .], I was going to the bakery, I stopped in front of the municipality of the 18th, I saw the police cars, I saw a group of migrants there, and I stood and waited. At same point, it became clear that the police were about to go violent, and I just crossed the line. I spent the night there, with several other white people, trying to protect them [. . .], [the police] tried to prevent food and blankets from arriving, there were fights with the police, then they allowed the blankets to come in, and I stayed there 10 days, perhaps a bit longer. At that point I got in contact with some activists. (S6)

The choice of direct social action, for these activists, is triggered by the interaction between two factors. On the one hand, the visible appearance of a situation of emergency, a crisis

whose existence is testified materially by the presence of people camping in the streets. On the other hand, the distrust towards conventional politics and its capacity to have a significant impact. Indeed, for most solidarity activists, Europe is facing a crisis because of the critical lack of welcoming policies, rather than because of the influx of migrants and asylum seekers themselves. In other words, they recognize that it is a 'crisis' but they address it as a 'policy' crisis, rather than as a 'migration' crisis. Thus, solidarity activists directly engage in the struggle for the epistemic construction of the crisis, challenging the dominant framing regarding 'not the existence of a crisis, but the nature of the crisis' (Voltolini et al., forth.). 'If you see the numbers, it's clear that it's not a crisis of migrants, it's a crisis of not welcoming migrants' (S5); 'We don't have a refugee crisis, we have a government crisis' (S6); 'This is not the migrants' crisis, this is the crisis of migration policy' (S3).

Blaming national governments for creating the emergency is one of the primary triggers of direct social activism. National governments are accused of having created the emergency, but they are not considered capable (or willing) to solve it, which is why activists feel the urge to intervene in first person. 'Most of the people who are active in the camps are apolitical but with left-wing views, they don't vote anymore because they don't think it's going to change anything' (S5). The emergency triggers a feeling of urgency, a need to respond practically to material needs, instead of theorising: 'We spend too much time in writing texts and preparing statements, and I'm not sure of the validity of all of that. This is communicating whites to whites, militants to militants, it does not really interest me. [. . .] We should be occupying buildings [. . .], there should be more action and less discussion' (S6).

Direct practices constitute most part of the activities of solidarity groups, including the provision of food and blankets in the camps (S4, S5, S6, S8), as well as housing and occupations (S4, S6, S8), legal advice and support (S3, S5, S8), language courses, and social and cultural activities (S6, S8). This is a direct consequence of the construction of the crisis by solidarity activists: since they frame the emergency as a crisis of the policy framework for the welcoming and sheltering of migrants in France, they also mobilise in ways that could respond to these priorities. Nevertheless, a significant part of these groups are not at ease with being considered 'humanitarian' and they stress their political identity: 'We don't say we are a humanitarian association, we say we are a political association.' (S8); 'We are critical towards the humanitarian aspect because it is just helping the government maintain its violent position.' (S6) 'Helping is just to save people in the urgency but it is not going to change anything, because we're just doing the work the government should be doing.' (S5)

A similar scenario emerges among more established NGOs, which try to politicize migration, but mobilize first and foremost through direct social actions. The association CIMADE, whose main task is the legal assistance in the asylum process, combines this with advocacy and campaigning for policy change (S3). Similarly, the website of BAAM lists a series of demands for drastic change in the French and European migration policy, but the description of the group's 'actions' includes intervention on street camps in case of emergency (BAAM 2019). Once again, there is an advocacy component on the level of demand, but the practice of the group coincides with direct social action. The reason for that is twofold. On the one hand, the persistence of emergency circumstances motivates groups towards reorienting their activism towards materially improving the living conditions of migrants (S3). On the other hand, there is a widespread scepticism on the

possibility of more political forms of mobilisation: 'We try to organise demonstrations, but unlike in Italy or in Spain it is very hard to get people to get down on the streets.' (S5); 'When there was an anti-racist demonstration [. . .], we were 5000, while in Barcelona there were 300 000 persons. [. . .] People don't mobilise.' (S3)

Thus, notwithstanding the activists' politicised notion of the migration issue, there is a perception that the political opportunity structure in France is unfavourable for conventional mobilization as well as for protest. In this context, direct social action becomes a way to address a material need, while also setting the stage for future political action. Direct social action is a reaction to a context the actors interpret as a crisis, but it is also a tool to make it into a crisis for the broader public, to participate in the epistemic construction of the crisis, mobilise people and raise awareness on the issue.

Put differently, direct social actions serve a double function: on the one hand, they offer a concrete response to the material needs created by the emergency; on the other, they offer the tools to politicize the crisis even under very unfavourable opportunities for mobilization. This is expressed most explicitly in the words of an activist by *La Chapelle Debout*, one of the most political groups in the French solidarity network:

> I am not saying that [humanitarianism] should not be there, but I think that it should be politicised[4] somehow. It cannot be that we naively supply food to people, without and not providing them advice, or helping them legally. These two things have to be tied together. [. . .] The people who distribute breakfasts to refugees in our neighbourhood are really important. They are quiet, but they are distributing political literature, they are organising. (S6)

The frequent and visible situations of emergency that have been generated by the EU migration policy crisis have pushed activists towards forms of action that have a strong component of concreteness and urgency, in which addressing people's basic needs trumps any strategic consideration. At the same time, activists seem to engage in this form of action because they believe that direct interventions may create favourable conditions for political action.

The anti-refugee camp: direct activism and the framing of crisis

The logic is somewhat different in the anti-immigration camp in France. Here, mobilization does include a number of initiatives aiming at ensuring security at the neighbourhood level, such as small vigilante walks and occasional night watches (A1; A3; A5). While these actions effectively bypassed the intermediation of the state and can therefore be likened to the concept of direct social actions, the extent of their direct impact on society, and notably on migration and insecurity, is highly questionable. In most occasions, in fact, anti-immigration actors combined conventional and protest events with a sustained rhetoric that simply narrated direct activism. In this respect, DSAs represent a strategy to politicize migration by framing policy inadequacy as a crisis. In a context of perceived emergency and governmental unresponsiveness, framing mobilization in terms of direct engagement was expected to facilitate the drift of anti-immigration messages into the mainstream public sphere. Direct activism is presented as a response to the unresponsiveness of state authorities in times of emergency, which would force ordinary citizens to take up the duties of law enforcement and border control. This confirms the relationship between the discursive dimension of crisis and collective actors' strategies: direct activism

represented, at once, a choice of mobilization by anti-immigration groups, and a strategic frame to politicize the migration crisis in terms of security.

The shift from 'direct action' as a form of activism to 'direct action' as a politicization strategy can be noticed by comparing the action repertoire of grassroots groups engaged in night-watches at the local level, with the mobilization of anti-immigration groups who performed direct interventions as a way to attract the attention of the media. Despite unfavourable political opportunities for vigilantism in France (Bjørgo and Miroslav 2020), in fact, a number of street patrols against migrants and refugees were organised in areas where the 'emergency' was most visible – such as around the train stations of border towns, and in the areas hosting spontaneous migrant campsites. This was most notable in Calais, where local inhabitants joined groups of vigilantes patrolling the streets and looking for illegal campsites (A1; A2). Gathering support, resources, and volunteers through Facebook, the *Calaisiens en Colère* claimed to be 'complementary' to the activities of the police. Yet, they motivated activism on the urge to protect fellow citizens from the security threat posed by migrants. In this case, the choice for DSAs represented a strategic way to frame the crisis, by conveying the message that state executives and the police had failed to defend citizens from criminality and violence.

> For instance, he has been touched personally by the problem of squatting, in his garden [...] Our primary mission as *Calaisiens en Colère* is to avoid thefts, aggressions, migrants who squat houses. Especially, we wish to avoid roadblocks on the highway because the everyday lives of road users are getting tough around here (A1)

Similar actions were also organised around areas designated by police authorities to shelter asylum applicants, to prevent the residents of the camps from 'potentially conducting criminal or violent actions' (A5). Occasional vigilante actions of this sort imply a combination of territorial control, even though the magnitude and the extent of their impact are questionable. At the same time, they offer an opportunity to prime the issue of citizens' insecurity, thus contributing to politicizing migration in emergency and security terms.

> This type of actions helped developing the concept of re-migration [remigration]. That is: not only putting a halt to migration, but also encouraging people to return to their own country. And these are ideas that are now promoted by numerous politicians. (A4)

The same rationale appears in the 'Defend Europe' campaign, promoted by the French *Génération Identitaire* in co-operation with groups in Italy and other European countries, which gained much visibility over the past years. Launched in 2017, the campaign aimed at hampering the access of migrants to Europe – first by setting up a search-and-rescue mission in the Mediterranean, and then by deploying surveillance teams on the French-Italy Alpine border (Defend Europe, 2019). While the campaign was promoted through the narrative of direct social engagement, however, it mainly configured an *agitprop* operation, whereby activists performed direct engagement in order to produce effects in the media rather than in society.

The campaign, in fact, combined the outspoken ambition of setting up a maritime patrol and closing the border, with the media-oriented spirit that drives much of the Identitarians' politics (Zúquete 2018). Defend Europe was presented using typical narratives of direct activism, such as the need to act 'here and now', and the desire of engaging on behalf of law-enforcement agencies, offering the citizenry a service that the state is

either unable, or unwilling, to fulfil (A4). To hamper the alleged cooperation between NGOs and human smugglers, therefore, in 2017 the Identitarians raised about €75,000 through web-based crowdfunding, hired a vessel and a crew, and set sail to the Mediterranean Sea. Defend Europe was then replicated in 2018, this time on the French Alps, where the Identitarians deployed rented helicopters, about 1000 activists and 4 × 4 vehicles to erect a makeshift barrier, setting up temporary checkpoints and patrolling the Franco-Italian border with vehicles and afoot.

Despite much emphasis on the direct implementation of security measures and border control via direct social activism, the real objective of the Defend Europe campaign was in the media system. It set out to politicize the issue of search-and-rescue operations by NGOs in the Mediterranean and reveal their 'outrageous activities to the entire world' (Defend Europe, 2017). Indeed, both campaigns only lasted a few days,[5] and their main result was to *display* border patrolling, rather than actually enforcing it. The way in which the Defend Europe promoters claimed 'victory' for their campaign provides an additional illustration of how DSAs were used strategically to politicize the migration and frame the crisis. The French Identitarians claimed that their presence in the Alps and the Mediterranean, their documentation activity, and their patrols, not only inhibited NGOs by unveiling their alleged criminal actions but also triggered the reaction of national governments (A4). They claim to have forced the French government to increase the number of police officers on the Alps, and the Italian government's choice to introduce a controversial code of conduct for NGOs.

> Defend Europe has received an enormous amount of media coverage. While almost all were hostile, and several were lying, these articles and TV reports brought our action to the minds of millions of people. It is this media impact which allowed our political success. Only two months ago, many NGO ships were cruising near Libyan coasts like taxis waiting for their customers. Right now, the 20th of August, there's only one left" (Defend Europe, 2017).

In this sense, Defend Europe configured a performative action, in which the logics and narrative of direct social action were used as a device to politicize migration, criminalize non-governmental activism, and frame the crisis in terms of security and border control.

Conclusive remarks

This article contributed to the study of crises in Europe in two main ways. First, we offered insights on the interrelation between collective actors' mobilization and the construction of moments perceived as crises. While extant scholarship suggests that economic hardship and increasing austerity facilitate direct forms of action (Bosi and Zamponi 2015), we have shown that emergency circumstances make this framework applicable to other policy domains too, and notably migration. Second, the study offered an in-depth investigation of the interaction between actors competing for the narrative construction of a crisis. Notably, we addressed mobilization in support and opposition to migration within a single model, comparing the politicization strategies of actors engaged in migrant solidarity networks with the ones of groups mobilizing against the arrival of asylum seekers. Overall, the analysis has shown that direct activism allowed both sides of the debate to respond to a context perceived as critical, and to politicize the crisis in light of the declining trust in representative institutions.

The paper shows that the emergency framework that accompanies moments of perceived necessity is closely associated with the development of direct social interventions. The quantitative analysis indeed confirmed that DSAs acquire increasing importance with the unfolding of the migrant crisis. On the one hand, the urge for immediateness and effectiveness that characterises moments of crisis facilitates direct political intervention, as collective actors on both sides of the political conflict on migration feel the need to offer a material response to the crisis. On the other, competing actors mobilised by means of this specific form of action strategically, as a way to frame the migration issue and reinforce the idea of an asylum crisis within the EU.

This suggests that direct social interventions are closely intertwined with the politicization of crises. Indeed, the narrative accompanying DSAs varied considerably across the different camps. Quantitatively, DSAs are more important in the solidarity camp than in the anti-immigration camp. Qualitatively, the use of DSA and their justification differs between pro- and anti-migration movements: the solidarity camp is more focused on the actual organization and implementation of direct social interventions, i.e. on the material societal impact of DSAs. The anti-migration camp, instead, seems to be more interested in the narration of DSAs, as these are particularly effective in dramatizing public debates and thus setting the agenda. Still, the logic driving the choice for DSAs is similar across the two camps, as these actions are motivated by a lack in trust on representative institutions, and as part of a broader project to address the state of emergency and interpret its root causes. In this respect, both the solidarity and the anti-migration camps motivate their mobilization via direct actions on the perception of inefficacy and distance of the state and EU institutions.

Both camps, therefore, actively engaged to politicise the migration crisis, addressing it as an emergency state whose possible solutions are placed in the public space. At the same time, the two camps differed crucially concerning the strategic assessment of the possibility to have a significant political impact through conventional collective action. Solidarity actors interpreted the crisis as a policy crisis, whose roots are in the lack of governmental structure. Accordingly, for solidarity actors the use of direct actions has a clear moral implication: it responded to a policy failure and tried to lessen its material consequences. For anti-refugee actors, instead, the crisis represented a crucial discursive opportunity for mobilization, enabling to link the politicization of migration to European integration via savvy media actions presented as direct interventions. Hence, these actors mobilized based on a narrated construction of direct activism, which allowed outreaching and effective interaction with the media – something that solidarity groups have largely failed to achieve through DSAs, at least so far.

Notes

1. While we are aware of the different meanings and statuses associated to the concepts of 'refugee', 'asylum-seeker' and 'migrant' (Millner 2011; Scheel and Squire 2014), the distinction between these concepts are often blurred in the current European debate, because the actors participating to it tend to address the whole field of migration. In line with the actor-centred approach followed in this study, the article analyses the definitions proposed by these actors, rather than relying on legal definitions limiting the analysis to a set of predefined categories.
2. The full codebook is available upon request to the authors.

3. See for instance: S. Wolff, *LSE European Policy and Politics Blog,* 15 April 2015. 'Immigration, a consensual issue in the French presidential campaign?', *EUROPP Blog, The London School of Economics and Political Science*. Available at: http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/europpblog/2017/04/15/immigration-a-consensual-issue-in-the-french-presidential-campaign/
4. The activist does not refer to the academic definition of 'politicization', but uses this term to stress the need to connect political and humanitarian action.
5. M. Oppenheim, *The Independent*, 21 August 2017: 'Defend Europe: Far-Right Ship Stopping Refugees Ends Its Mission after a Series of Setbacks'. Available at: www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/defend-europe-far-right-ship-stop-refugees-mediterranean-end-mission-c-star-setbacks-migrant-boats-a7904466.html (31/01/2018).

Acknowledgments

We have presented earlier versions of this manuscript at the conference of the French Political Science Association (AFSP, Sciences Po Bordeaux) and the Italian Society for Political Science (SISP, University of Lecce). We thank the participants of the two panels and the anonymous reviewers for their valuable comments.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Funding

The author(s) disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article: Pietro Castelli Gattinara gratefully acknowledges funding from the Centre for Research on Extremism (C-REX). The fieldwork on the solidarity movement has been conducted in the context of the project 'A tale of two squares: refugees' rights mobilisations and the economic crisis';

ORCID

Pietro Castelli Gattinara http://orcid.org/0000-0003-1464-9903
Lorenzo Zamponi http://orcid.org/0000-0001-9327-3806

References

Alcalde, J. 2016. "Why the Refugee Crisis Is Not a Refugee Crisis." *Peace in Progress* 29: 1–10.

Ambrosini, M. 2011. "Immigration in Italy: Between Economic Acceptance and Political Rejection." *Journal of International Migration and Integration* 14 (1): 175–194. doi:10.1007/s12134-011-0231-3.

Ambrosini, M. 2020. "The Urban Governance of Asylum as a 'Battleground': Policies of Exclusion and Efforts of Inclusion in Italian Towns." *Geographical Review*: 1–19. doi:10.1080/00167428.2020.1735938.

BAAM. (2019). 'Our Demands/Our Actions.'. Available at: https://baamasso.org/en/baam-en/ (07/07/2020)

Bjørgo, T., and M. Miroslav. 2020. *Vigilantism against Migrants and Minorities*. London: Routledge.

Blee, K. M., and V. Taylor. 2002. "Semi-Structured Interviewing in Social Movement Research." *Methods of Social Movement Research* 16: 92–117.

Bosi, L., and L. Zamponi. 2015. "Direct Social Actions and Economic Crises: The Relationship between Forms of Action and Socio-Economic Context in Italy." *PARTECIPAZIONE E CONFLITTO* 8 (2): 367–391. doi:10.1285/i20356609v8i2p367.

Bosi, L., and L. Zamponi. 2020. "Paths toward the Same Form of Collective Action: Direct Social Action in Times of Crisis in Italy." *Social Forces*. doi:10.1093/sf/soz160.

Castelli Gattinara, P. 2017. "The 'Refugee Crisis' in Italy as a Crisis of Legitimacy." *Contemporary Italian Politics* 9 (3): 318–331. doi:10.1080/23248823.2017.1388639.

Castelli Gattinara, P. 2018. "Europeans, Shut the Borders! Anti-Refugee Mobilization in Italy and France." In D. Della Porta (ed.). *Solidarity Mobilizations in the "Refugee Crisis". Contentious Moves.*, 271–298. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Castelli Gattinara, P., and L. P. P. Andrea. 2019. "The Far Right as Social Movement." *European Societies*: 1–16. doi:10.1080/14616696.2018.1494301.

Coleman, S. 2013. "How to Make a Drama Out of a Crisis." *Political Studies Review* 11 (3): 328–335. doi:10.1111/1478-9302.12024.

Colombeau, S. C. 2019. "Crisis of Schengen? The Effect of Two 'Migrant Crises' (2011 and 2015) on the Free Movement of People at an Internal Schengen Border." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*: 1–17. doi:10.1080/1369183X.2019.1596787.

D'Alisa, G., F. Forno, and S. Maurano. 2015. "Grassroots (Economic) Activism in Times of Crisis: Mapping the Redundancy of Collective Actions." *PARTECIPAZIONE E CONFLITTO* 8 (2): 328–342. doi:10.1285/i20356609v8i2p328.

Defend Europe (2019). 'The Mission„. Available at: http://defendeurope.net/the-mission_fr/ (31/10/2019)

Della Porta, D., 2015. Social movements in times of austerity: Bringing capitalism back into protest analysis. Polity Press, Cambridge, UK ; Malden, MA

Della Porta, D., ed. 2018. *Solidarity Mobilizations in the "Refugee Crisis". Contentious Moves*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Doherty, B. and Hayes, G. (2020). Tactics and Strategic Action. In The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Social Movements (eds D.A. Snow, S.A. Soule, H. Kriesi and H.J. McCammon), Hoboken, NJ: Wiley & Sons, pp.271–288.

Eggert, N., and M. Giugni. 2015. "Migration and Social Movements." In: D. Della Porta and M. Diani (eds.) *The Oxford Handbook of Social Movements*, 159–172. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Fischer, N. and C. Hamidi. 2016. *Les politiques migratoires*. Paris: La Découverte.

Fontanari, E., and G. Borri. 2017. "Introduction. Civil Society on the Edge: Actions in Support and against Refugees in Italy and Germany." *Mondi Migranti*.

Froio, C., and P. Castelli Gattinara. 2016. "Direct Social Actions in Extreme Right Mobilisations. Ideological, Strategic and Organisational Incentives in the Italian Neo-Fascist Right." *Partecipazione e Conflitto* 9 (3): 1040–1066.

Giugni, M., and M. Grasso, eds. 2018. *Citizens and the Crisis. Palgrave Studies in European Political Sociology*. London: Palgrave Macmillan. doi:10.1007/978-3-319-68960-9_6.

Grande, E., and S. Hutter. 2016. "Introduction: European Integration and the Challenge of Politicisation." In *Politicising Europe*, edited by S. Hutter, E. Grande, and H. Kriesi, 3–31. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Hay, C. 1996. "Narrating Crisis: The Discursive Construction of the Winter of Discontent." *Sociology* 30 (2): 253–277.

Hay, C. 1999. "Crisis and the Structural Transformation of the State: Interrogating the Process of Change." *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 1 (3): 317–344.

Hess, S., and B. Kasparek. 2017. "Under Control? or Border (As) Conflict: Reflections on the European Border Regime." *Social Inclusion* 5 (3): 58–68.

Hutter, S., 2014. Protest Event Analysis and Its Offspring, in: D. Della Porta (ed.). *Methodological Practices in Social Movement Research*. Oxford, Oxford University Press, pp. 335–367.

Hutter, S., and H. Kriesi. 2019. "Politicizing Europe in Times of Crisis." *Journal of European Public Policy* 26 (7): 996–1017. doi:10.1080/13501763.2019.1619801.

Jessop, B. 2015. "Crises, Crisis-Management and State Restructuring: What Future for the State?" *Text*. October. info:doi/10.1332/030557314X14156337971988

Karakayali, S., and J. Olaf Kleist. 2016. "Volunteers and Asylum Seekers." Forced Migration Review, no. 51: 2016, pp.64–67.

Koopmans, R., and D. Rucht. 2002. "Protest Event Analysis." In *Methods of Social Movement Research*, edited by B. Klandermaans and S. Staggenborg, 231–259. Minneapolis: University Of Minnesota Press.
Koopmans, R., P. Statham, M. Giugni, and F. Passy. 2005. *Contested Citizenship: Immigration and Cultural Diversity in Europe*. Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press.
Kousis, M. 2017. "Alternative Forms of Resilience Confronting Hard Economic Times. A South European Perspective." *PARTECIPAZIONE E CONFLITTO* 10 (1): 119–135. doi:10.1285/i20356609v10i1p119.
Kousis, M., and M. Paschou. 2017. "Alternative Forms of Resilience. A Typology of Approaches for the Study of Citizen Collective Responses in Hard Economic Times." *PARTECIPAZIONE E CONFLITTO* 10 (1): 136–168. doi:10.1285/i20356609v10i1p135.
Kriesi, H., R. Koopmans, J. W. Duyvendak, and M. G. Giugni. 1995. *New Social Movements in Western Europe: A Comparative Analysis*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
Millner, N. 2011. "From 'Refugee' to 'Migrant' in Calais Solidarity Activism: Re-Staging Undocumented Migration for a Future Politics of Asylum." *Political Geography* 30 (6): 320–328. doi:10.1016/j.polgeo.2011.07.005.
Monforte, P. 2014. *Europeanizing Contention: The Protest Against' Fortress Europe'in France and Germany*. New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books.
Monforte, P., and P. Dufour. 2011. "Mobilizing in Borderline Citizenship Regimes: A Comparative Analysis of Undocumented Migrants' Collective Actions." *Politics & Society* 39 (2): 203–232.
Pirro, A., and P. Taggart. 2018. "The Populist Politics of Euroscepticism in Times of Crisis: A Framework for Analysis." *Politics* 38 (3): 253–262. doi:10.1177/0263395718770579.
Rydgren, J. 2018. "The Radical Right." In *The Oxford Handbook of the Radical Right*, 1–17. Oxford: Oxford University Press. http://www.oxfordhandbooks.com/view/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190274559.001.0001/oxfordhb-9780190274559-e-1
Scheel, S., and V. Squire. 2014. "Forced Migrants as Illegal Migrants." In *The Oxford Handbook of Refugee and Forced Migration Studies*, edited by E. Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, G. Loescher, K. Long, and N. Sigona, 188–199. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Schwenken, H. 2014. "From Sangatte to 'The Jungle': Europe's Contested Borderlands." In H. Schwenken, S. Russ, S Ruß-Sattar (eds.) *New Border and Citizenship Politics*, 171–186. London: Palgrave.
Siméant, J. 1998. *La Cause Des Sans-Papiers*. Paris: Presses de Sciences Po.
Simonneau, D., and P. Castelli Gattinara. 2019. "Prendre part aux logiques d'exclusion: Les mobilisations anti-migrants en France, en Italie et aux États-Unis." *Critique Internationale N°* 84 (3): 105–124.
Steinhilper, E. 2018. "Mobilizing in Transnational Contentious Spaces: Linking Relations, Emotions and Space in Migrant Activism." *Social Movement Studies* 17 (5): 574–591. doi:10.1080/14742837.2018.1499510.
Thompson, G. 2009. "What's in the Frame? How the Financial Crisis Is Being Packaged for Public Consumption." *Economy and Society* 38 (3): 520–524.
Tilly, C. 1978. *From Mobilization to Revolution*. Reading, Mass. : Addison-Wesley Publishers.
Zamponi, L. 2017. "Practices of Solidarity: Direct Social Action, Politicisation and Refugee Solidarity Activism in Italy." *Mondi Migranti* 3: 97–117. doi:10.3280/MM2017-003005.
Zamponi, L., and L. Bosi. 2018. "Politicizing Solidarity in Times of Crisis: The Politics of Alternative Action Organizations in Greece, Italy, and Spain." *American Behavioral Scientist* 62 (6): 796–815. doi:10.1177/0002764218768861.
Zúquete, J. P. 2018. *The Identitarians: The Movement against Globalism and Islam in Europe*. Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Pess.

Interviews

S1. Interview with Refugies Bienvenue activist, Paris, 21/05/2017.
S2. Interview with Habitants Associes activist, Paris, 22/05/2017.
S3. Interview with CIMADE activist, Paris, 22/05/2017.
S4. Interview with Comité de soutien des migrants de La Chapelle activist, Paris, 23/05/2017.
S5. Interview with Paris d'Exil activist, Paris, 23/05/2017.
S6. Interview with Collectif La Chapelle Debout activist, Paris, 25/05/2017.
S7. Interview with Collectif Quid'Autre activist, Paris, 26/05/2017.
S8. Interview with BAAM activist, Paris, 26/05/2017.
S9. Interview with United Migrants activist, Paris, 26/05/2017.
A1. Interview with *Calaisiens en Colère* activist, Calais, 18/03/2017
A2. Interview with *Calaisiens en Colère* activist, Calais, 18/03/2017
A3. Interview with *Civitas* activist, Paris, 22/03/2017
A4. Interview with *Les Identitaires* activist, Paris, 17/03/2017
A5. Interview with unaffiliated anti-refugee activist, Versailles, 26/03/2017
A6. Interview with *Riposte Laique* activist, Paris, 24/03/2017