

Fear of the *Other* within the Contemporary ‘Migration Crisis’: Arab-Muslim Migration towards Europe and the Condition of *Otherness*

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Abstract. Immigrants from the Middle East have been labeled by nationalist and far-right European politicians as a threat to their economy, safety, and national identity. This phenomenon can be understood through a Poststructuralist approach that regards the duality between Self versus Other as a subjective narrative construction which engenders asymmetrical relations of power between an inside identity and the outside alterity. Therefore, this article aims to comprehend how the condition of otherness over Arab-Muslim peoples is constructed within the so-called “migration crisis” in Europe. This was done through a critical discourse analysis of anti-immigrant statements made mostly by European far-right politicians; as well as a literature review on Poststructuralist contributions to the subject; and by consulting secondary sources like statistical figures and public opinion surveys. The results suggest the condition of otherness over Arab-Muslim immigrants in Europe is socially and historically constituted through discursive practices of oppression, which are based on fear and uncertainty, and manifested into the increase of xenophobia and Islamophobia in the continent.

Keywords: *migration; xenophobia; islamophobia; otherness; poststructuralism*

Introduction

Amidst the so-called contemporary “migration crisis”, polarized discussions regarding the migrant condition have raised a debate on whether this movement is considered a human right or a threat to the hosting societies. While the former point of view is related to an ethical comprehension of humankind, the latter is connected to the fear and consequent resumption of nationalist values. The friction between such positions stresses the challenge to assure that those who come from a war-torn and/or poverty scenario in search of safety and a better quality of life will be able to find it in a new country.

This phenomenon can be seen, for instance, observing the recent migration influxes from the Middle East towards Europe, which have been mostly inducted by the war in Syria that affects the country since 2011, and Iraq’s instability since 2014 due to the fight against Daesh. The overwhelming majority of both countries’ population are ethnically Arab and religiously Muslim (MRG 2018a; MRG 2018b;

Izady 2014), which entails that the flows to Europe are mostly composed by Arab-Muslim communities . Despite the fact most of these migrants go to neighboring countries within the Middle East (UNHCR 2019a; UNHCR 2018), the portion that reaches Europe is usually labeled by nationalist and far-right local parties as a menace to their economy, safety, and identity. The ongoing clashes that often occur as result of the encounter between migrants and hosting communities in Europe, then, highlight the validity and importance of discussing the subject.

Through a Poststructuralist lens, this issue can be understood as a Self versus Other dilemma: a binary, mutual, and socially constructed division that sustains how one sees oneself in detriment of how one perceives the Other, wherein the Self often represents the good, reliable and acceptable, while the Other depicts the bad, hazardous, and intolerable.

Thereby, how is the condition of otherness over Arab-Muslim immigrants constructed within the so-called contemporary “migration crisis” in Europe? With this question, the paper aims to comprehend the construction process of otherness over Arab-Muslim peoples and its portrayal within the context of a “migration crisis” in the European continent. In order to do so, one pursues, firstly, a historical understanding of the circumstances that led to the constitution of a negative European perception of Arab-Muslim peoples. Then, one outlines a theoretical framework using Poststructuralism to underpin the discussion about otherness and contemporary migration. Lastly, this article questions the European far-right perspective of the contemporary “migratory crisis” deconstructing misconceptions present in the arguments used by anti-immigrant European politicians.

This is a mixed-method exploratory research that used a qualitative critical discourse analysis (CDA) of primary sources (statements made mostly by far-right politicians and the media) and literature review on Poststructuralism and migration; alongside quantitative data analysis of secondary sources from the European Union (EU), United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), International Organization for Migration (IOM), and public opinion polls to uphold the arguments exposed. The article starts from the assumption that the othering practices that targets Arab-Muslim immigrants are constituted by narratives socially and historically built that sustain a position of hierarchy between the hosting community and the Arab-Muslim immigrants and their descendants.

Indeed, migrant communities from developing countries in general suffer significant hardships when they enter transit or hosting countries, mainly concerning

their access to basic rights and social reintegration. However, regarding specifically the Arab-Muslim immigrant community in developed countries, as it can be seen in the European context, one notices that they face particular types of mistreatment when it comes to cultural and religious beliefs, such as Islamophobia and the fear of terrorism - something migrant communities from other cultural-religious backgrounds would be less likely to experience. For this reason, the article focuses on this specific group, not denying, however, that other migrant communities are also neglected among governments and hosting societies.

The interest in studying migration and its dynamics of subjective oppression derives from the issue's evident relevance to the contemporary international scenario and the urging need to deconstruct misconceptions about it, which undermines the possibility of understanding and coexistence among the social actors involved. Thus, it becomes imperative to properly discuss such a phenomenon.

The historical construction of the Arab-Muslim's perceived identity

Considering Islam's cradle is the Arabian Peninsula - which is mainly composed by Arab ethnic groups who became Muslims as a result of the religion's huge influence in the region - the Arab ethnicity in general came to be directly associated with Islam. Consequently, Muslim's perception by the West was gradually transposed to the Arab peoples as a whole. However, this reasoning opens space to misconceptions regarding the denial of other religions worshiped by Arabs and the diverse non-Arab ethnic background of other regions Islam has reached. (Soguk 2011; Hourani 1991)

The Imperialism in the Middle East came with a civilizing mission discourse to justify the objective domination promoted by European powers (Said 1993). As stated by Said (1978), the narrative construction of natives as exotic and savage beings who were not capable of living without a higher guidance (read, European guidance) was made through knowledge production. Said defined this practice as Orientalism, a subjective mechanism of domination that figured an epistemic control over the Arab-Muslim's representation. This artificial image was produced by European researchers, writers, politicians and artists, and later shared through language, until it reached ordinary citizens who would naturally reaffirm the discourse of subjugation over such community (Said 1978).

According to Hourani (1991), the constant European - mainly British and

French - exploitation in the Middle East during eighteenth to twentieth century's Imperialism generated severe consequences for local societies, such as violence and poverty. Later on, the decolonization process in the 1950s/1960s was followed by the imposition of the Western universalist nation-state model - an institutional structure divergent from local societies' arrangements (Afsah 2008). As a consequence, Muslim societies regarded this imposition as "an alienating and threatening phenomenon, causing, in most of the cases, a non-acceptance, followed by resistance" (Afsah 2008, 264). This transition between colonization and independence gave place to unstable regimes marked by Islamist upheavals, authoritarianism, and internal conflicts (Sadiki 2009; Afsah 2008; Hourani 1991). Owing to these issues, the Western perception over the Middle East became associated with war, fundamentalism, and underdevelopment. In the same way, its peoples suffered from that stereotype, being superficially defined as backward, uneducated, and violent (Said 1978).

Further on, the beginning of the twenty first century outlined an inflexion point for the Arab-Muslim negative representation worldwide. The 9/11 attacks in the United States resulted in a striking generalizing movement of constant labeling the Arabs and Muslims as terrorists. Besides the attack's severe damage materially speaking, its subjective repercussions entailed a remarkable friction between the US - and the Western values they represented - on one side, and, on the other, instead of extremism, hate, and violence, it turned to be the Middle East in itself, encompassing its culture and its main religion, condemning its peoples to a burden they would hardly escape from. The rhetoric used by the US after the episode was mainly built upon a discourse of the Arab-Muslim world as an existential threat for their security. Thus, the Middle East turned into a place the US claimed legitimacy to intervene under a necessary and imminent "War on Terror" (Rana 2007; Gregory 2004; Ali 2003).

The post-9/11 international scenario was marked by interventions perpetrated by the US in Afghanistan (2001) and Iraq (2003), both part of the alleged "War on Terror" incursions. Apart from US' blatant failure in both cases and the consequent chaos provoked in the two countries, terrorism increased exponentially in Iraq and Afghanistan and spilled over to the region and beyond (Gregory 2004). In a lesser degree when compared to the Middle East, Europe, for instance, witnessed terrorist attacks such as Madrid (2004) and London (2005) in the beginning of the decade, and Paris (2015); Brussels (2016); Nice (2016); Berlin (2016); Manchester

(2017) and Barcelona (2017) in the 2010s (DW 2017). Most of these acts were carried out by jihadist terrorist groups (and their followers) who claimed the attacks were a response to Western interventions in the Middle East. In fact, such episodes had a considerable negative impact on the European perception of Islam. Hence, it also affected the already unstable relationship between Europe and the Arab world and the Middle East in general.

Another noteworthy phenomenon for the present discussion is the rise of far-right nationalist parties in Europe. After the 2008 world economic crisis and its outcomes, like the rapid increase in unemployment and poverty rates, many countries (including developed ones) witnessed far-right political parties increasing their basis of voters. This was possible due to the use of a discourse alleging a supposed structural change in politics, which differ from what they referred as the “old” and “corrupted” politics (Ziblatt and Levitsky 2018; Hainsworth 2008). Their proposals to revert the crisis’ losses include blaming globalization and multiculturalism, incitement to nationalism and the criminalization of migration, using immigrants as scapegoats to justify an alleged increase of violence and unemployment (Ansari 2012; Todorov 2010). Such movements have been strengthened within the past years with the election of far-right politicians for national governments in Europe and in the European Parliament (Ziblatt and Levitsky 2018).

Furthermore, with the context of violence and instability that broke out in Syria in the aftermath of the 2011 upheavals in the Middle East - added to the rise of the self-proclaimed Islamic State in Iraq, millions of people were forced to flee conflict (Cook 2017). Due to proximity, they mostly went to neighboring states, such as Turkey, Lebanon, and Jordan. However, these countries have scarce resources and limited opportunities for migrants, entailing harsh conditions of integration (Şenses 2016; El Khatib et al. 2013). On the other hand, Europe is commonly taken as a synonym of development and it is geographically accessible comparing to other developed regions. Consequently, a considerable amount of migrants from Syria, Iraq, and other countries in the region migrated to Europe between 2011 to 2018, although roughly 80% remained in the Middle East (UNHCR, 2018).

In a scenario of encounter between a European society where far-right parties have growing support and an increasing number of immigrants who are mostly Arab and Muslims, there was a rise in xenophobia and Islamophobia against the latter (ECRI 2019; SETA 2019; Pew Research Center 2019; Perocco 2018; Yilmaz

2012; Todorov 2010). According to the poll survey made by Pew Research Center about migration in EU countries (2016), in “Hungary, Italy, Poland and Greece, more than six-in-ten . . . have an unfavorable opinion of the Muslims in their country – an opinion shared by at least one-in-four in each nation polled”. The survey made in 2015 by the IOM states that “people in Europe are the most negative ... towards immigration [comparing to other continents], with the majority (52%) saying immigration levels in their countries should be decreased” (IOM 2015, 2). The Eurobarometer survey research about integration of immigrants in the EU (2017) attested that “nearly four in ten Europeans (38%) think that immigration is more a problem than an opportunity” (10). Albeit attitudes towards the impact of migration in EU countries may vary significantly between the countries polled in the surveys assessed, the general sketch indicates that, in fact, most Europeans currently consider migration a complex and urgent topic.

Therefore, one acknowledges that the episodes aforementioned played a fundamental role in the historical construction of objective and subjective practices of oppression over Arab-Muslim communities in Europe. And, over an extended period of time, these practices undeniably led to hierarchical social relationships which are still manifested in the daily lives of these groups.

Poststructuralism and the condition of Otherness in contemporary migration

As it has been emphasized by the historical contextualization presented, the negative impressions built upon Arab-Muslim communities are not caused by ready-made notions. Instead, they are the result of layered events, discourses, interpretations, and ideas, none of which represent given and unquestionable assertions. Once one acknowledges that, it is possible to question how these perceptions are built. That being the aim of this study, it is suitable to utilize the Poststructuralist lens, considering its intent to not only understand, but criticize constructed interpretations of modernity (Ashley 1989).

Furthermore, Poststructuralism provides tools to visualize how the image of power plays an important role in fabricating perceptions, revealing a close bond between power and knowledge. According to Foucault (1982), the term “power” can be understood as a technique of domination and imposition over individuals’ existence. Foucault (1982) argues this power “ . . . categorizes the individual, marks him by his own individuality, attaches him to his own identity, imposes a law of truth on him which he must recognize and which others have to recognize in him” (781). Likewise, as suggested

by Ashley and Walker (1990a), “to ‘know’ is to construct a coherent representation that excludes contesting interpretations and controls meaning from the standpoint of a sovereign subject whose word is the origin of truth beyond doubt” (261). In other words, what constitutes the idea of “knowledge” can be a segregational form of rejecting divergent interpretations and imposing a “superior” perception linked to the notion of power.

Those who hold material and objective dominance - represented as political relevance sustained by economic, military and/or territorial advantages - also possess a favorable position regarding the ability to decide, according to their perspective, what is considered valid to be learned, studied, spoken, and feared (Campbell 2013; Said 1978). Likewise, the way culture, ethnicity, and people in general are perceived is also constituted by particular points of view. Therefore, the Poststructuralist approach introduces a discussion that reinforces the need to pay attention to a mutually constructed divergence - the inside and the outside.

Utilizing Ashley’s discussion regarding international and state systems (1989), one can understand the state and its concept of sovereignty as the “inside”, along with the international system and its condition of anarchy, as the “outside”. Whilst the former represents safety, the latter represents uncertainty and fear. Oelgemöller (2017) points out that state sovereignty “leads to claims about territory” which, as a result, conducts to “particular representations and practices of bordering” (Oelgemöller 2017, 3). As stated by Walker (1993), in the development of what he calls boundary politics, the state (inside) identifies itself as pro “community, peace, and world politics”, while other states (outside) are seen by the first as part of the realm that represents “danger, insecurity and fear” (18). When Shapiro (1989) argues about these conflicting relations between states, he points out that, within this opposition, the actors do not operate only to defend themselves, but also to build their identities.

One can attest this phenomenon, for example, within the current policies of border closure in Europe, where, along with the claim of supposed economic issues caused by immigrants, the states also avert themselves from the arrival of the outside’s different cultures and religions, for they are seen as a threat to their allegedly “superior” inside identity. As Bigo (2002) argues, “. . . the need to monitor borders to reassure the integrity of what is ‘inside’ . . . creates an image of immigration associated with an outsider coming inside, as a danger to the homogeneity of the state, the society, and the polity” (67).

Such divisions take into account temporal relations between parts of the world

(Fabian 2014). These binary and historically built rhetorics, created to promote and sustain a Self image of “civilization”, “evolution”, and “development”, require, by definition, the portrayal of the Other as “primitive”, “savage”, and “traditional”. Connolly (1989) sustained this argument discussing the relation between colonized peoples and colonizers, where the latter could only be self-assured by bringing down the Other. (Connolly 1989). Likewise, Memmi (2003) outlines that “the existence of the colonizer requires that an image of the colonized be suggested” (123). Accordingly, for the perceived “developed” to exist, there must also be something “in need of development” to reaffirm the identity of the former (Hall and Du Gay 1996). This quandary can be understood within the Poststructuralist Self versus Other discussion, a binary, mutual, and socially constructed relation between how one sees oneself and how one perceives the “unequal” to him/her (the Other), who is generally labeled and categorized in an excluding way (Mountz 2009). “As a noun, therefore, the Other is a person or group of people who are different from oneself. As a verb, [to] Other means to distinguish, label, categorize, name, identify, place and exclude those who do not fit a societal norm. In geographic terms, to other means to locate a person or group of persons outside of the centre, on the margins. ‘othering’ is the process that makes the Other. ‘Othering’ is the work of persons who discriminate . . .” (328) [emphasis added].

Fabian (2014) and Foucault (1973) argue that otherness is constituted by spatial distancing made through taxonomic classifications. In this sense, othering is the conduct of classifying and excluding those who are different from the Self because of perceived weaknesses. According to Foucault (1973), othering has a strong relation with knowledge and power, because it implies hierarchy and the sustainment of the already existing domination between different (groups of) people. This concept can be applied, for instance, on the othering narratives, actions, and policies fostered by states and groups that oppose the arrival of immigrants to their territory.

In a scenario of increasing migration, governments and political parties can create or use already existing narratives that incite fear and unease over these groups, in order to avoid their entrance. As a consequence, such discourses become available for the media and part of the population to absorb. Therefore, the incitement of fear increases the chance of people's support for policies that go against the alleged threat (Wodak 2015). Considering that the state's main priorities are its integrity and security, the condition of otherness over migrants, which is reified by the state, can be understood through the process of migration securitization. Huysmans (2006) defines it as “a language of creating and expressing unease towards outsiders” (46-47), in a way the

presence of migrants (or a specific group of migrants, e. g. Arab-Muslim communities) within the state represents an existential threat to its order and security. Consequently, the state tries to instill a shared belief of fear, claiming legitimacy to fight such uneasiness and protect itself by all means, despite opening a margin that presumably allows the state to break internationally shared customs, like human rights.

Huysmans (2006) adds that “securitizing immigration and asylum constructs political trust, loyalty, and identity through the distribution of fear and an intensification of alienation” (47). In case the discourse is accepted, they will consider a country with restrictive migration policies and fewer immigrants as a safer place (Huysmans 2006). Bigo (2002) asserts the securitization of migration is related to “the conception of the state as a body or a container for the polity. It is anchored in the fears of politicians about losing their symbolic control over the territorial boundaries” (65). In this sense, politicians instrumentalize the narrative of migration as a burden, reinforcing the unease necessary to sustain the duality between freedom and danger, giving them legitimacy to deny supposed risk.

It is possible to identify, thereby, the discussion about the relationship between knowledge and power within the process of migration securitization. On the one hand, the politician (or any other actor with means to) must weave subjective practices in order to build an episteme capable of justifying the narrative of migrants as an existential threat to the state’s security. On the other hand lies the objective and material conduct that will establish (or at least will propose) normative practices of controlling migration flows towards the state. Both subjective and objective practices correspond respectively to the relation between knowledge and power.

Deconstructing the “migration crisis”

One acknowledges the role of language in the construction of meaning in the dynamics of migration. As stated by Hall (1997), “language is . . . central to the processes by which meaning is produced” (1). Discourses are constituted through language (Hall 1997), which shapes the fluid meaning behind terms like migration, crisis, and terrorism. In this sense, actors with broad platforms that easily spread ideas and discourses at a high reach range, like politicians and the media, can influence the perception of people about such theme to a great extent. Therefore, they have a significant role in the production of othering practices. In order to better understand this process, some cases were assessed below, taking into account the

recent flows entering Europe.

In a speech at the opening of the World Science Forum held in Budapest, November 4th, 2015, the PM of Hungary, Viktor Orbán, made the following statement: “We must confront a *flood* of people pouring out of the countries of the Middle East . . . This is one of history’s largest tides of people, and it brings with it the danger of tragic consequences. . . . This is an uncontrolled and unregulated process, and . . . the most precise definition of this is ‘*invasion*’” (Orbán 2015a) [emphasis added]. The former PM of the UK, David Cameron, also opposed immigration when giving an interview to ITV News on July 30th, 2015, arguing that: “. . . you have got a *swarm of people* coming across the Mediterranean seeking a better life, wanting to come to Britain, because Britain got jobs, Britain got a great economy, it is an incredible place to live, *but we need to protect our borders.*” (Cameron 2015). [emphasis added]. In both cases, the migratory movements towards Europe (that in 2015 were still growing) were referred as “flood”, “tide”, “invasion” and “swarm”. Apart from the fact these words inflate the proportion of immigrants entering Europe and therefore remount to an exaggeration, such dehumanizing terms related to natural phenomena are commonly used to instill fear. The usage of such a language enables that a harsh treatment toward migrants becomes tolerable, considering their supposed imminent danger. It then opens margin for migrants to be treated and appalled as one would regarding insects, and feared as one would fear natural catastrophes.

The negativity attributed to the current migration movements towards Europe can also be observed in the term “*migration crisis*” itself, often used by Western media as seen in “Unprecedented *migrant crisis* forces EU to seek answers” (Reuters 2015); “*Migrant crisis*: One million enter Europe in 2015” (BBC 2015); “The roots of the *migration crisis*” (Wall Street Journal 2015) [emphasis added] and countless others. This expression magnifies the phenomenon as something uncontrollable that came out of the blue, interpreting the fluxes as an issue - often not for the migrants, but to the receiving states (Goździak and Main 2020; Crawley and Skleparis 2018). According to Mossé (2020), “in terms of values, the ‘migrant crisis’ . . . includes fear of foreigners, identity tensions, and the rise of nationalism, [wherein] racism and xenophobia are the common denominator” (25). One acknowledges the situation’s complexity as a humanitarian emergency, its impact for the most affected (the immigrants), and the endeavor hosting and transit countries need to adopt in order to host migrants properly. However, the association

of the term “crisis” to the states’ reception of individuals (and often their denial) enables the interpretation of migration - a natural phenomenon present in society for millennia - as something exclusively negative (Goździak and Main 2020; Crawley and Skleparis 2018).

Moreover, claiming there is a “migration crisis” can also be problematic depending on the channel this information is shared, how it is done, and its audience. If one takes into account the difference between the legal concepts of refugee and economic migrant, defining the phenomenon characterized by the forced dislocation of an abounding amount of people as “migration” (letting the concept of refugee aside) indirectly implies a degree of choice in migrants’ decision to come to Europe. Therefore, that can contradict the very concept of refugee and consequently undermine their chances to have their rights ensured when requesting asylum.

In a rally for French presidential elections in Paris on April, 18th, 2017, Marine Le Pen gave the following speech: “I will decide on a moratorium on all legal immigration to stop this delirium, this uncontrolled situation which leads us to the bottom. . . . In this election, *what is at stake is an issue of civilization*. Let France be our homeland, its way of life, its unity, its sovereignty, its pride, *its national identity*.” (Le Pen 2017). [emphasis added]. In a similar tone, Matteo Salvini (Italian former Vice-PM and, at the time, Ministry of Interior) argued in an interview for the channel M1 on May 2nd, 2019 that “. . . if we do not take back control of our roots, *Europe will become an Islamic caliphate*” (Salvini 2019) [emphasis added]. Heinz-Christian Strache (Austria’s former Vice-Chancellor) told the newspaper OE.24 in an interview on May 4th, 2019 that “*There is a creeping Islamization*, a change of population or a population displacement” happening in Austria because of the ongoing migration coming from the Middle East (Strache 2019) [emphasis added]. Two years earlier, Strache’s electoral campaign for the Austrian parliament had the slogan “Islamization should be stopped”.

Le Pen, Salvini and Strache’s statements represent the constantly used argument by those who oppose migration that the arrival of immigrants with a different culture and religion in their societies (referring mainly to Muslims) will undermine their national identity. Such position is subject to criticism, firstly, because it is usually an excuse to cover-up prejudice. Secondly, because national identity is not a fix and solid block with homogeneous and immutable features. It is, actually, an imagined and fluid product of social construction that faced constant changes and adaptations through time and, ironically, often came with and resulted

from the interaction between groups with distinct cultures, languages, and customs (Anderson 2006; Hall 1997; Hall and Du Gay 1996; Bhabha, 1994; Hobsbawm and Ranger 2012). Theoretically, any national identity is completely liable to suiting and accommodating culture and religious features owned by a different group that comes to its encounter. In practice, however, this interaction does not always happen in a smooth way and it depends on either the acceptance of both groups and their (relative) coexistence or the gradual assimilation of one by the other.

On a Facebook post on April 16th, 2017, Matteo Salvini made the following remark: “While the Pope calls for welcoming all the migrants, 700 *illegal immigrants* have landed in Calabria and another 3,000 will arrive in Italy in the next few hours. Immigration? No, *invasion* organized and financed by the new slavers” (Salvini 2017) [original emphasis]. The usage of terms like “illegal immigrants” to refer to those who cross borders in an irregular condition (regarding documentation), as most refugees and asylum-seekers do, suggests a status of lawlessness to migration. This narrative then associates the act of migrating without documents to a crime. Hence, it favors what Stumpf (2006) calls “crimmigration”, a movement of putting alongside criminal law and immigration law, overlapping both legal aspects and increasing the chance of immigrants having their rights undermined (Stumpf 2006).

In regard to the states’ measures to halt migration, attempts to close borders have been usually common, as defended by Hungarian PM Viktor Orbán in an address to the Hungarian Parliament on November 16th, 2015: “. . . *we must protect the external borders* of the European Union, because security begins with the protection of the borders.” (Orbán 2015b) [emphasis added]. Despite the objective reduction in the number of immigrants entering Europe, these measures have proved to be counter-productive in terms of life-risks (UNHCR 2019b). Even when the main routes are formally closed, it does not interrupt the entrance of immigrants through irregular situations. In fact, it only makes it more dangerous, owing to the fact that migrants need to find alternative - and often riskier - routes (UNHCR 2019b). Besides that, it ends up indirectly benefiting smugglers who seize the opportunity to find other ways of entering the country with migrants through human-trafficking, potentially increasing its occurrence on an international scale (UNHCR 2019b).

When it comes to the amount of migrants arriving in Europe, it is possible to attest that media in general considers that the so-called crisis’ peak was between 2015 and 2016 (The Atlantic 2017; The Guardian 2018; The New York Times 2020). Analyzing the number of asylum requests in the EU from 2010 to 2018, in fact, the

years of 2015 and 2016 represent the pinnacle in the number of requests (Eurostat 2018). However, considering that before 2014 Middle Eastern countries, for instance, were already facing a huge impact with migration flows coming from Syria and Iraq, why does one consider that a “migration crisis” initiated only from 2015 onwards? As a matter of illustration, in 2013, refugees in Lebanon were already one-fifth of the country’s total population. That same year, Jordan’s number of refugees represented one-tenth of the country’s whole population (UNHCR 2013a; UNHCR 2013b). That means, if a crisis is to be considered, why only when the amount of migrants reached its peak in Europe?

Albeit there is not a single and correct answer for this question, the hypothesis here is that Europe’s political and economical power compared to the other regions involved place the continent in a position of hegemony. In that sense, the discourse built by its political and social agents (like governments, political parties, and the media) are easier considered as legit when compared to its Middle Eastern counterparts (Todorov 2010; Gregory 2004).

Furthermore, it is possible to criticize the common misconception made mainly by Western society that current refugee movements are specially made from developing to developed countries. According to the UNHCR (2018), the largest movements of forced migration are from developing to other developing states. Turkey has been the world’s main receptor of refugees for the last 5 years, receiving 3.7 million in 2018, followed by Pakistan (1.4 million), Uganda (1.2 million) and Sudan (1.1 million). This clearly shows the falsity in claiming that the majority of refugees go to Europe. Nonetheless, the language adopted by Western media exhibiting continuous scenes of boats filled with frightened migrants arriving in European shores and long queues with migrants who had to cross European borders on foot, although real, make the “migrant invasion” narrative susceptible to acceptance. Such images work as what Hall (1997) calls a representational system, carrying signs and symbols that represent meanings and communicate ideas, which can be used to mobilize discourses for political reasons (Hall 1997).

Nigel Farage (former UK Independence Party - UKIP’s leader), in a rally on March 4th, 2015 stated that:

... we’ve gone from about 30.000 people/year to the figures we saw last week of 300.000! And there are very good reasons why the people of this country are now deeply unhappy with that situation... the impact on schools, the current accidents and emergency... in our hospitals, the changes that have happened within our

communities... What is being felt by ordinary decent working families is wage compression, an unlimited supply of unskilled labour... We don't want mass immigration to continue on its current rate and we certainly don't need vast amount of unskilled labour coming into this country, we need better control over our borders. (Farage 2015) [original emphasis].

The narrative adopted by Farage, widely shared by other far-right and nationalist parties in Europe, encompasses a critique that migrants from developing countries who make their way to developed countries in search of a better quality of life are intending to seize opportunities enabled by a wealthy economy of which they do not have the right over. However, it is important to emphasize that the current humongous economic gap between developing and developed countries that motivates people to migrate and seek better opportunities abroad had its origins in the colonization process exerted by European powers (Wallerstein 2006). It is undeniable that states with a colonial past considered wealthy and developed today, like the UK, France, and Belgium, were extremely benefited by exploitation and domination over the territories in which nowadays people want - or, in many cases, are forced - to leave.

Yet European states use the legal basis of their sovereignty, added to a socially constructed narrative of the supposed threat of migration to prevent these flows from entering their borders. With Arab-Muslim migrants, this representational system of threat is clear due to the use of the fear of terrorism as an argument for not accepting these groups within the state's territory. This phenomenon is less likely to be seen with migrants from a different origin and religion. Therefore, immigrants from the Middle East - who are mostly Muslim - are constantly labeled as terrorists when entering European states.

That can be seen, for instance, on Marine Le Pen's tweet on March 11th, 2018, when she argued that "By attacking the idea of the Nation and the control of immigration you let communitarianism, *Islamism and terrorism grow.*" (Le Pen 2018) [emphasis added]. Such generalizing narrative that seeks to draw a link between Islam and terrorism has the capacity to influence mainly conservative European citizens who are reluctant to difference and fear that an increase in the Muslim population in the continent will pose considerable risks to their security. Hence, othering discourses coming from someone with a high range of influence like Le Pen make Muslim immigrants susceptible to be considered a menace that must be rebuked. This happens both in the civic and governmental sphere, with hate acts

perpetrated by locals and the institutional discrimination entrenched in the state's bureaucracy (Perocco 2018).

The Spanish far-right party VOX repeatedly publishes discourses linking Muslim immigrants to the danger of terrorism, as pointed out in a tweet made on April 4th, 2019: "Let there be no doubt: VOX will continue to denounce and combat the *Islamist invasion*. We have to be vigilant *and we have to expel anyone who poses a threat to the security* of the Spanish population." (VOX 2019) [emphasis added]. The phenomenon of securitization fits neatly into this context, where far-right and nationalist politicians invoke the increase of terrorism as a direct consequence of accepting those groups within its borders. Hence, a "moral panic button" is activated, allowing the state to foster increasingly harsh measures to halt Arab-Muslim migrants' entrance, as well as encouraging xenophobic behavior against them (Geró and Sik 2020).

However, the often outlined nexus between migration and terrorism is already proven to be subject to misconception and exaggeration (Koser and Cunningham 2015). Undoubtedly, terrorism shall be condemned regardless of the context, and measures to prevent it must be taken seriously. Nevertheless, the strategy of scapegoating migrants, shutting borders, and criminalizing migration has not been an effective solution. One example that emphasizes that is the fact that the large majority of terrorist attacks that took place in Europe in recent years were not perpetrated by refugees or asylum-seekers, but by EU citizens radicalized at home (EUROPOL 2018, 25; Crone et al. 2017, 4; Schmid 2016, 45-46; UN Report A/71/384 2016; Koser and Cunningham 2015).

Nonetheless, the effort made by anti-immigration movements in Europe to link current flows of migrants coming from the Middle East with an imminent threat of terrorism has already shown its results. European border control policies' have tightened in the past years and there has been an increase in cases of Islamophobia and xenophobia in the continent (ECRI 2019; SETA 2019; Pew Research Center 2019; Perocco 2018). These outcomes represent evident difficulties in the assurance of the rights of this minority group in Europe, as they struggle to establish themselves in a context that has been historically and increasingly hostile to them.

Conclusion

This article sought to shed light over the construction process of *otherness*

over Arab-Muslim peoples and its portrayal within the context of a “migration crisis” in Europe. Through the historical contextualization, the theoretical frame, and the analysis made, one concludes this is a two-way phenomenon. Firstly, shaped by the narrative construction of Arab-Muslims as a dangerous group that bears a backward and threatening culture, who will harm Europe’s economy, safety, and identity. Secondly, with the construction of an uncontrollable crisis scenario that allows the adoption of exceptional means of solving the problem.

The dynamics of power exerted by the West over the Middle East over time enabled that historically-constructed narratives embodied the relation between Europeans and Arab-Muslims in the form of a *Self versus Other* duality. The *Other* “should” be avoided because it is coupled with the *outside*, hence, the *Other* is seen as a menace in many aspects.

The narrative of “crisis” to refer to the increase of migrants entering Europe mainly between 2015 and 2016 fits the purpose of generating a scenario of uncertainty and vulnerability. Such narrative is built through a series of arguments ranging from misconceptions regarding the real proportion of these flows; the use of metaphors, signs, and symbols that exaggerate the phenomenon and gives it an image of disaster; and the nexus between migration and terrorism, appealing to a security issue. Such a context requires, therefore, stricter measures to contain what is posed to be an imminent threat to the state. Far-right politicians, then, use their broad range of influence to bet on nationalist, xenophobic, and Islamophobic approaches to contain the so-called “crisis”.

Discrimination against Arab-Muslim immigrant communities in Europe happens both in the civic and governmental sphere, with hate acts perpetrated by locals and the institutional discrimination entrenched in the state’s bureaucracy - although the latter is beyond the scope of this research and is subject to further inquiry. Such outcomes affect the life not only of recently arrived immigrants, but also Arab and Muslims in general already established (and often natives) of these European countries (Hamid 2019). That highlights the urgency of raising awareness about a peaceful integration of these minority groups in European societies and the importance of coexistence in today’s world.

In order to understand the relation between the Arab-Muslim migrants and European hosting countries, it is necessary to comprehend how the time-based relations of power and the construction of discourse create an excluding image of said people. The Poststructuralist approach provides an association between power

and knowledge, domination and perceived danger. Such an exchange is essential to understand the historical constructive character of the asymmetric relationship of power within contemporary migration.

The work therefore comprehends that the Arab-Muslim migrants face challenges within the contemporary migration movements to Europe that results from the constructed interpretation of *otherness*, which can only be overcome through the dismantling of *othering* discourses implemented by politicians and the media, and absorbed and reinforced by the local population.

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