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# **Public Discourses and Politics on Migration: A Precarious Situation and Dismal Outlook?**

## **Abstract**

Emotions dominating normative frameworks is not new in the making of migration-related policies or in public discourses on migration. However, this matter has entered a different dimension in the age of populism and post-factualism reshuffling the parameters of this issue to a large extent. I will argue in this article that we can find a mixture of developments that consecutively reveals a state of public discourses that is highly precarious and that needs change and counteraction. Instead of retreating into well-trodden policy issues and overtly neglecting the potentiality for a constructive discourse that includes the deliberation on migration realities and migratory processes and its complexities, a vision is needed for new evidence-based, well-informed, yet not technocratic, forms of discourse and a future of reflexive knowledge production.

## **Keywords**

Migration, discourse, politics, policy-making, post-factualism, knowledge production

## **Öffentliche Diskurse und Migrationspolitik: Eine prekäre Situation und ein düsterer Ausblick?**

## **Zusammenfassung**

Die Prägung politischer und öffentlicher Migrationsdiskurse durch Emotionen und Normativität ist nicht neu. Im Zeitalter von Populismus und Post-Faktizität hat diese Prägung jedoch Dimensionen angenommen, die die

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Migrationsforschung und Politik / Zeitschrift für Migrationsforschung – Journal of Migration Studies 2021 1 (2): 147–164,  
<https://doi.org/10.48439/zmf.v1i2.114>

Parameter dieses Sachverhalts deutlich verschieben. Ich werde in diesem Beitrag verschiedene Entwicklungen diskutieren, die einen öffentlichen Diskurs kenntlich machen, der als hochgradig prekär bezeichnet werden kann und der Änderungen sowie Gegenmaßnahmen benötigt. Anstatt bekannte und veraltete Politiken zu rekurrieren und einen potenziell konstruktiven Diskurs zu vernachlässigen, braucht es Ideen und Visionen einer evidenzbasierten, jedoch nicht technokratischen, Form eines Migrationsdiskurses und einer zukünftigen reflexiven Wissensproduktion.

## Schlagwörter

Migration, öffentlicher Diskurs, Migrationsdiskurs, Migrationspolitik, Politikproduktion, Post-Faktizität, Wissensproduktion

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## Introduction

The field of migration has become a pivotal issue that drives some of the most drastic changes in political landscapes and policy-making areas in the past decades. The election of Donald Trump as US president, populism on the rise in Europe or the UK leaving the European Union have been dominated and fueled by the skewed and often convoluted policy field of migration, its managerial control components and its discursive undercurrents.

Consecutively, European governments implicitly admitted the failure of their immigration policy as regards the control and management of increasingly ›unwanted migrants‹ during the past decades (Castles 2004; Freeman 1994; Joppke 1998). The ›lost control‹ claim arose in the beginning of the 1990s and gathered momentum in the European ›asylum crisis‹ when the fear over the unwanted migration of asylum seekers shifted to a fear over the asylum-seeking process that portrayed it as a potential pathway for irregular migration. Such pathways of ›bogus asylum‹ or ›economic asylum‹ were increasingly reflected repeatedly in policy discourses. There is a long list of examples, with some European ones to be found in Austria, Slovakia, Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary (Vollmer 2011). At the European as well as the national level, the evolution of legislations epitomized a growing concern over such ›uncontrolled‹ groups of migrant populations. Governments introduced restrictionist legislation and the development of control logics to oversee and manage the selection of migrants across borders. Sovereignty logics claimed back power, and the alleged ›lost control‹ over national and Europe-

an borders became increasingly prominent in policy and public discourses alike (Sassen 1996; Kraler et al. 2008; Vollmer 2011).

Some of these rather hidden legislations were paired with the development of welfare policies in the EU and beyond. After a neoliberal rollback, and an ongoing ›dual crisis‹ of welfare states and national identities in Europe (Schierup et al. 2006; Jenson 2009), the very foundations of welfare provision were put in question by policy reforms and their underlying concepts. New exclusionary borders have been drawn around social rights and public welfare provision, producing a ›hierarchy of citizenship‹ (Castles 2007) that conflicts with human rights law and is frequently challenged by it (Blake 2004). Rising opposition challenged the access to social protection for non-citizens based on the view that »social protection should be for those who belong to the ethnically defined community and who have contributed to it«, which has been critically labeled as arising ›welfare chauvinism‹ (Kitschelt 1997, p. 22; see also Mewes and Mau 2012). Attempts to explain such chauvinism include »cultural and economic conditions, but also individual perceptions and explanations«, such as perceived material risk (Mewes and Mau 2012, p. 150). Fear of ›the stranger‹ combined with material risk averse behavior as well as surveys that state a migration potential of 15% of the world's adult population (Esipova et al. 2018) have built a fundament that resonates in public domains.

Once again, the destructive language and arguments that were used in the early 1990s can be found in discourses on migration in the more recent past (e.g., Rheindorf and Wodak 2018; Fuchs 2016) and the present. This language and its related arguments are well perceived in the public domain. Immigration opponents use various arguments frequently involving metaphors that usually refer to the consequences of immigration being harmful for the country, such as swapping or flooding, or being offensive or dangerous. Immigration will »destroy Japan«, as Makoto Sakurai of the Japan First Party has, for example, stated (Guest 2019). The intention is to produce fear and a threat – by now, a well-known phenomenon of the configuration of the migration discourse on a global scale.

Such language and engaged narratives – irrespective of their truth value – have been present in public discourses for many years; however, the impact of such narratives has increasingly gained political significance. Using fear or *angst* that stems from the unknown and strange object is effectively winning votes in the past and in the present day (see Austria, Brazil, Denmark, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Poland, the US, etc.). Nevertheless, we can find a different quality of populism and a widespread political efficiency of these narratives, which has gained a new relevance and historic momentum. This

development affects public discourses and consequently also policy-making as such.

This article intends to discuss the precarious situation, mostly with reference to the case of Germany by drawing attention to some ramifications that call for new research and the balancing of a discourse that considers migratory processes as much as the processes and implementation of ›migrant integration‹ (a highly problematic concept as such which will not be discussed in detail). First, I will show and discuss the matter of emotionality, which is not new to the migration discourse or the politics of it. A short excursion into the German legislative history will exemplify this, while a second, and more alarming point will link this normative dimension with the arising phenomena of post-factualism, which fuels and exploits this normative dimension in drastic and most efficient ways. As a consequence, the German discourse is convoluted and polarized at various levels. It is a topic that is becoming politically ›overly convoluted‹ and consequently political actors retreat into the more structured and less convoluted topics such as ›migrant integration‹ that offer a way to deal with this field, but which drastically oversimplify it and ignore important angles – and by which I will draw this third and last part to a close.

## Emotionality and Normativity Resonate

Using an example and looking at German legislative development and its production by using methods of discourse and policy analysis (Vollmer 2014), we can find, for instance, for the period 1973–1999 a range of policy-making processes that are dominated by emotional and normative frameworks. In particular, the policy domain of controlling migration and especially irregular forms of migration is driven by values, beliefs and fears.<sup>1</sup> One can find a fierce, emotionalized bargaining game among political actors. Instead of trying to objectively use data and information, actors seek information that they can use for underpinning their belief or value systems. Knowledge and facts are used rather as political ammunition, that is, knowledge and facts are functionalized for the actors' normative frameworks. Instead of evidence-based arguments, the policy domain of migration control operates with normative categories (e.g., threat, deception, overpopulation paranoia), which has an impact on the outcome of a decision-making process.

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<sup>1</sup> For a more updated discussion see, for instance, Poutrus (2019) or for a discussion linked to migration regimes, see, for instance, Hess and Kasperek (2017).

These normative frameworks could be found in several policy processes, one of them is, for instance, the AZR (Central Register of Foreign Nationals)<sup>2</sup>. In 1994, two bills were published, one government bill (18 March 1994) and another one proposed by the *Fraktionen* CDU/CSU and FDP (1 March 1994). In short, the reintroduction of the AZR was intended to be a preventive measure and to enable officers »to refuse entry« if a »justified suspicion is identified«. During the policy process, deception and mistrust were normative elements, which equally imbued the decision-making trajectories. Analysis has shown that dynamic policy frames entailing elements of deceit extended to criminality, deviousness, or the »morally contestable«. Emotive arguments, including distrust and suspicion, were reconciled with instrumental measures in policy frame constructions (Vollmer 2014). Values linked to myth and memories of the nation and culture (see, e.g., Smith 1971; 1988) were found as an additional part in decision-making frameworks. However, such narratives referring to myths and memories of nationhood had already shown their effectiveness in previous legislative processes.

Reaching further back in German policy history, this became apparent in a crucial phase of the policy process of *Ausländerpolitik*.<sup>3</sup> In the final phase of *Ausländerpolitik*, starting at the end of the 1970s and which continued throughout the 1980s, political actors (in this case mainly members of the *Deutscher Bundestag*) pointed to the significance of national sentiments reminding members of parliament of »their heritage«. Parliamentary coalition groups used figurative tools to signify alienation, fostering the potential risk of further detachment of the German population from their »own community«.

Another example is the policy process of the Asylum Law in 1993, which changed the German Constitution (§ 16 of the *Grundgesetz*). Discourse analysis has shown that discursive processes were gradually dominated by a few argumentative constructions. One of the major components of these constructions was the element of threat. Policy makers referred to the abuse of the German Asylum Law (and therefore indirectly the abuse of the German Constitution) by a group of »bogus people« that had no right to be in Germany.<sup>4</sup> However, this discursive linkage threat was effectively related to notions of

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2 The Ministry of the Interior (BMI) proposed a foreigner database (AZR) in August 1988. It was amended several times by the BMI between August 1988 and June 1989 and discussed in both parliamentary houses until the process ceased in September 1990. The bill was denoted as being unconstitutional and discriminative in its nature.

3 Not to be confused with »policies on foreigners« in general. However, this is a specific policy process.

4 See also, for instance, meetings of the Interior Standing Committee on 29 April 1992, 6 May 1992 and 23 September 1992.

illegality, criminality and organized crime (see Vollmer 2014; for more recent examples, see Poutrus 2019).

Nevertheless, policy issues and proposed policy solutions, introduced and mobilized by actors, need another decisive variable: *acceptability*, or *resonance*. This variable built the basis on which policy preferences or policy choices (among political actors and ›the public‹) are justified or as Edelman (1977; 2001) would put it »symbolically justified«. More generally speaking, differences exist between various policy domains (see, e.g., May et al. 2006) and each policy domain plays by its own rules. Therefore, not only the nature of the political bargaining game, but also the environment of this game needs to be looked at in future research. But how can we speak about further explanatory insights of such prevailing emotional frameworks and how can political actors exploit emotional frameworks?

By introducing a psychological perspective on decision-making, scholars have shown in the past (e.g., Tetlock 1985) that there are features of political contexts and distinctive ways of thinking about policy issues as well as decision dilemmas that are related to them. In this way, policy issues become distinctively defined a priori and thus influence policy decision processes that have implications for policy outcomes (Farnham 1990; Kaarbo 2008). In turn, features of political context create a pervasive concern in the view of acceptability, which has been demonstrated in the political science literature over a period of decades (see, e.g., Harring et al. 2019; Schilling 1961). Political context predetermines the acceptability or sufficient consensus for a given proposal. It determines to some extent effective political action and its underlying policy aims (George 1980; Schmidtke 2014). We can observe that party politics and normative framing of policy domains became increasingly prominent, especially in the domain of migration control. With regard to this specific policy domain of migration, each policy issue is not only a policy problem but also a *political problem*, and henceforth acceptability and public resonance play a decisive role (see Anderson 2017; Brown 2010; Castles 2004).

Acting on the premise of achieving acceptability by taking into account majorities and their sentiments in parliaments as well as public opinion, rational imperatives can be strategically neglected, as irrational frameworks offer more flexibility and efficiency – as the case above regarding Germany has demonstrated. Parliamentary popularity may not comply with opinions that are popular in the historic moment as perceived by members of the public. Values, belief systems, emotions and normative frameworks offer strategically more attractive and broader coverage and reach a higher degree of acceptability and resonance at both levels (parliament and public opinion). Normative frameworks offer more flexibility and thus they are less complicated to adjust, if necessary, in order to create more resonance. Building a

consensus among those who have substantial impact on the policy process, namely coalition leaders or powerful individuals in parliament (see, e.g., Putnam 1988), values and belief systems can be incrementally adjusted during policy conflicts. Political actors often desire to serve a number of values, thus creating a blending or combination of several normative elements into a new one, which is likely to fit into features that are needed for the policy proposal to be effectively accepted at both levels: parliament and the public. This blending survives a screening for acceptability and can incorporate a variable significance of each normative element (for instance threat, deception, overpopulation paranoia) (see Vollmer 2014).

Nevertheless, in this way, policy proposals that are expected to reach no acceptability will not be put forward and henceforth policy proposals that are expected to satisfy the majority will be preferred. Such a preoccupation with acceptability, however, leads to policy measures that will be presumably accepted but not necessarily to the ones that are urgently needed or that represent a thoroughly deliberated and possibly sustainable solution.<sup>5</sup>

One might even propose the assumption that a sustainable solution based on available and up-to-date evidence and data might not be relevant at all, but the primary goal is the political acceptability and resonance in public domains themselves to win on the battlefield of politics. Hence, policy-making on migration is under the influence of entire bandwidths of interests, institutions, and ideas, which – following their ›own agendas‹ – might not be based on the realities of the processes or causes and effects of migration (see also, e.g., Hampshire 2013). In addition, personal beliefs and public opinion on migration might be strongly shaped by a range of different factors that have little or nothing to do with facts, data and evidence (Blinder 2011), and coming back to the matter of the above explicated role of acceptability and resonance, this very matter has entered a different dimension and that is the matter of populism in connection with the age of post-factualism and emotionalism that reshuffles the parameters of this problem to a large extent (see also Boswell et al. 2011).

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5 We still look at a discursive context in which public debates and policy-making are often ill-informed and based on mythical narratives instead of facts (see, e.g., Boswell 2008; 2009). Research has produced relevant insights about the field of migration; however, there are significant limits to the existing data and analyses. Ruhs et al. (2019) argue that because there are considerable gaps in the evidence base and there are mixed results around key migration issues such as the impact of immigration and the solidarity among ›natives‹, there are also reasons why data and research play a relatively minor role in public debates and policy-making on migration.

## Post-factualism

To generate threat scenarios in public migration discourses was and is comparatively simple, but the digitalized public domain has the power to generate fear out of thin air. With sufficient speed and the effect of virality, fear and unfound paranoia can be generated through peer-to-peer information transmission. For instance, Müller and Schwarz (2019) have shown how such fear was facilitated by correlating anti-refugee hate crimes in Germany and the increasing use of Facebook. Increased use of digital and online media and related decision-making processes attune users to more heuristic ways of decision-making, giving higher importance to emotions and ›gut-feeling‹ (see, e.g., Appel 2020). Post-truth, the post-factual continuum and the related revision of decision-making principles and processes have gained substantial political force.

At the same time, the intellectual building blocks of the modern age, which comprised concepts and meanings of truth, scientific expertise and evidence with the goal of creating progress and innovation in societies, have experienced a process of being discredited. Epistemic communities and their potential insights and ideas no longer have the capacity of ordering and settling arguments or political conflicts. Experts and policy makers are discredited as an elite group, which are blamed for serving themselves instead of the common good or the public (see also Davies 2018).<sup>6</sup> Consequently, rather than trusting experts, some societal strata rely on services that are digitally fast and seemingly believable and which are assumed to have no agenda, or ›deceitful agenda‹ behind their public status.

Surely, the theorization and use of emotions and rationality is of highest value and has manifold fields of applications (Bechara and Damasio 2005; Damasio 2005), but in the context of politics and policy-making (Bloom 2014), the dominance of emotionality and dominant heuristic thinking structures, it potentially introduces various complications. Since the bargaining game over the policies and political agendas underlie certain rules, in the end, political actors or coalition groups who want to win this game need to win the majority, not only in parliament but also among ›the public‹. Brader et al. (2008) and more recently Blinder et al. (2013) and Turper et al. (2014) have discussed how delicate the relationship is between public opinion and immigration politics. Yet it opens a window of opportunity for political or public actors using whatever narrative or myth that could potential go viral or reach a critical mass of digital multiplicities that serve the interests of such actors. One could argue, who cares if this ›news‹ or these ›narratives‹ have a value

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<sup>6</sup> Which might change again as a result of the ongoing Coronavirus crisis.



of truth or whether they are evidence-based? The aim of such actors is to create mobilization and recognition while the means are meaningless.

Going through the detailed configuration of the post-factual age (see, e.g., Kaeser 2016; McIntyre 2018; or Jaster and Lanius 2019) or listing all the disinformation that has been fed to the public discourse over past years in the field of migration would clearly go beyond the limit of this paper, but the meaning of the post-factual concept is relevant here because it points to the devaluation of truth (see also König 2016). The evidence of showing that a statement is true became irrelevant and the term of alternative facts arose in more frequent and prominent fashion (Cooke 2017).<sup>7</sup> There is no true or untrue because facts raised against other facts cannot be derived as valuable or not valuable within the course of a proposition or argumentation. Donald Trump has shown us once more how this is done in his State of the Union Speech on 5 February 2020<sup>8</sup> as well as in his strategic announcements during the Coronavirus crisis.

A precarious, if not terrifying, scenario for public discourses and the chance for actors to be heard by whatever statement they make, to create new blaming logics or to produce new enemies, which all fit their politico-ideological purposes. Wodak (2019) describes it, for instance, as the conversion of the victim–offender roles (by, for instance, Matteo Salvini's LEGA, US President Donald Trump, the Brexit Party of Nigel Farage, or Viktor Orban's Fidesz). By this conversion, migrants are the powerful invaders, with the native population acting as the suppressed and exploited victims. The examples are manifold, but common discursive strategies are metaphors of natural disasters or the animalization of newly arriving people by comparing them to parasites or infiltrating the healthy natives with viruses and the like (the COVID-19 virus could potentially spiral this argument into new political significance). The framing is a war and struggle of us against them, and, therefore, narratives can be stylized by political actors who produce, follow, and mobilize such language in a way depicting themselves as the new political heroes who will save the country and its ›real‹ people (see also Wodak 2017).

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<sup>7</sup> The term of alternative facts found its way into politics and political process in the late 1990s.

<sup>8</sup> Full Transcript: Trump's 2020 State of the Union Address, *The New York Times*, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/02/05/us/politics/state-of-union-transcript.html>. Accessed: 16.8.2020.

## Impact on Public Discourses

The impact of such developments is destructive at various levels, but it certainly leads to a disconnection between discourses on migration and migration realities (see also Ruhs et al. 2019). The response to foster ›evidence-based‹ arguments and policy-making, a rationalization and depoliticization of the migration discourse and the introduction of ›fact-checkers‹ such as platforms like snopes.com (see, e.g., Graves and Cherubini 2016), has had little effect or even the opposite effect for the reasons described above.<sup>9</sup> Experts or scientific knowledge has been openly criticized for representing societal elites and not the interests of ›the people‹ (see also Boswell 2018). Members of populist movements try intentionally not to associate themselves with expertise but with ›honest opinions‹ and claim-making by which the connection to the interests of ›the people‹ is established – a very different point of reference than the elite institutions as Mudde (2004) has shown. Simple and not overtly complex lines of argument are preferred and publicly mobilized instead. These lines of argumentation exclude complex and technical explanations in favor of simple claims and spontaneous action. Indeed, for populist movements, the rejection of expertise is a core part of their political identity and strategy of political mobilization. Conversely, another key aspect is the identification with the claim that their movement is against the established facts or expertise and counter to the proposals followed by ›mainstream‹ political actors. Established facts or knowledge become as such an enemy of the people and therefore of the populist movements. The identifier ›against‹ plays an important role as simplicity and urgency are the qualities that replace the values of truth, deliberation and reflection. Research and deliberation are virtues of the ›elites‹. Clarke and Newman (2017, p. 12) refer to a different ›sense of time‹ that can be found in populist movements. Direct action and the sudden implementation of promises are proclaimed and no empty words or irritating complexities and analysis – as done to some extent by mainstream politics – are therefore celebrated.

How do such developments affect the public or the political discourse? It can respond in many ways as we can observe in Europe. A German specialty is the retreat into less conflict-ridden terrain. Although innovative and ground-breaking discussions on migration may have been achieved – as we can observe in many fields of migration in Germany and which have constructively contributed to various discursive developments –, yet a shifting took place, and this is the refocusing on the less conflict-ridden, but well-trodden terrain, of ›migrant integration‹. Dealing with integration and its

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<sup>9</sup> This shall not presume that there are *per se* ›true‹ and ›false‹ descriptions of ›realities‹.

underlying ideology is much clearer and goal-oriented and has a long and rich history in Germany (see, e.g., Oltmer 2006) than the much wider, complex and convoluted discourse of migration with all its facets. Oddly, but with symbolic power, the Christian Democrats proclaimed Germany as a »country of integration«<sup>10</sup> in 2007 with the obvious intention of circumventing and dismissing the term »country of immigration«. This focus of making people similar and less different is represented most adequately in the fetish of the capacity of speaking the German language as proficiently as possible,<sup>11</sup> disregarding the migratory experience of people that have possibly grown up in a country in which more than five languages are frequently spoken and where an understanding of a working-level of language use is more commonplace (e.g., Eritrea). The background was and still is today the understanding of integration as a measure of the contributions of immigrants' economic and social performances to Germany and the German society. This is also why the term of »promoting and demanding« (*Fördern und Fordern*) signifies this understanding, which is driven by economic performance and the utilitarian value of immigration and the presence of people from potentially other places and spaces (see, for instance, Gomolla 2013).

Yet a new strand of actors and academics in the field aim to revisit the term *integration* or replace it, and such drastic revisions are highly needed as one can observe a certain dominance of the integration topic in Germany for decades. This dominance has consecutively undermined the relevance and importance of the topic of migration as contributing to the country's process and knowledge repertoire.

An indicator of a neglected discussion on migration and the experience of the phenomenon but focusing on the more familiar topic of integration is the evolution of the public discourse during the arrival of people between 2014 and 2018 during the humanitarian but so-called migration crisis.

For instance,<sup>12</sup> Vollmer and Karakayali (2018) found a volatile discourse that was first unexpectedly refugee-welcoming and empathetic, thereafter tumbling in the course of time and lastly disintegrating to a large extent. The understanding of migration realities were framed and politicized as performed by people deserving help facilitated by mediatized representations of, for instance, women and children on the move, so that the public discourse was dominated by empathetic attitudes and narratives. An intricate and interdependent philanthropic relationship between the host country's

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<sup>10</sup> Maria Böhmer (CDU), Deutscher Bundestag, 146. Sitzung, 22.2.2008, Plenarprotokoll, p. 15439.

<sup>11</sup> See, e.g., Presse- und Informationsamt der Bundesregierung. 2007. *Der Nationale Integrationsplan: Neue Wege – Neue Chancen*, Berlin.

<sup>12</sup> There certainly is a growing body of literature.

population and the refugees emerged. However, a downturn took place as soon as the association of migration processes and deservingness vanished due to new narratives (terrorism and events of undeservingness) painting a far different picture and building a framing of migration and migratory subjects. A re-demonizing process of refugees and their labeling as undeserving migrants, or ›economic migrant‹ emerged.<sup>13</sup> Without the reflexive knowledge in the public domain and more qualified understanding of the nature of migration, its processes and the drivers of migration, windows of ideological opportunity have and will open recurrently for conservative and right-wing parties, not only in Germany, but across the European Union and beyond.

A second indicator is the oversimplification often used by political actors – due to a missing and neglected discussion – of the migration phenomenon to the push-pull logic of migratory processes. Surely, and still relevantly, there is a marvelous explanatory power of push-pull logics examining significant factors that influence population movements, but nowadays it seems shortsighted. Having emerged as one of the migration theories more than half a century ago that intended to describe and order migration logics (see Lee 1966), it is still a useful start to explain some migratory dynamics and procedures. However, it heavily oversimplifies the truly complex ramifications of migration processes and the ever-changing phenomenon or event of migration and its context and drivers. Black et al. (2011) refer to a plethora of drivers, including environmental ones, whereas Van Hear, Bakewell, and Long (2017) mention further drivers that come into play that cannot be fed into a model that has two sides and opposing mechanisms.<sup>14</sup>

Expressed very crudely, migration studies and theory deal with people and not organic machines underlying a binary model. Decision-making processes, even when it comes to migration, are not that simple to research, and Haas (2008) rightly criticized the blunt assumptions in the way individuals respond to incentives including full information situations and markets in various economic equilibriums. These are assumptions that are far from migration realities, which are instead very chaotic, spontaneous, irrational and very human. These qualities are underlined by the fact that potential migrants may respond very differently or conversely to the various factors of

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<sup>13</sup> This has however further implications for the relabeling process widening the category ›economic migrants‹, that is, potentially including a large number of people that are forced to leave their countries as a result of socioeconomic conditions and the threat of poverty or malnutrition. It would effectively demonize and illegitimatize an even broader category of forced migrants.

<sup>14</sup> If such opposing mechanisms are used, they tend to be used by researchers in migration literature as a starting point to underline the simplicity of it and to heighten the theoretical innovation presented by the researchers themselves, as Carling and Collins (2017) argued.

›push‹ and ›pull‹ forces (see also, e.g., Castles et al. 2014). Interactive markets and interdependent socioeconomic as well as political processes in the coexistence of migratory subjectivities just cannot be bound to a binary model with incentives, determinants and drivers. An inter- and transdisciplinary view of such interdependencies as well as cobwebbed networks of social relations and interactive factors may try to put forward some assumptions and regularities, but these need to be renewed and set into context for the given time and place. The nature of migration is too dynamic and the political changes are happening too swiftly to set up models. Evidence and data improve knowledge of the process of migration, but academic disciplines shall be careful with producing models, predictions about journeys, quantifications or dichotomized categorizations (voluntary/involuntary or regular/irregular, or the new bordering practices of migrants and refugees). It undermines migratory subjectivity and agency, which have been proved in the past five years as very powerful. Knowledge of migration and its realities is unfortunately undermined by a discourse that has refocused on the much more comfortable issue of ›migrant integration‹ – especially in Germany.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, this article carves out a mixture of developments underlining the need for more research as well as changes in the production of knowledge in public domains.

Emotionality in policy-making and the neglect of evidence-based arguments and deliberative decision-making in highly politicized contexts can be seen more generally as problematic, but it becomes a heightened issue in the policy domain of migration and its underlying public discourses. As argued in the paper, whereas emotionality and normative frameworks have resonated in past and present public discourses, this matter has entered a different dimension in the age of populism and post-factualism reshuffling the parameters of this problem to a large extent.

The devaluation of what can be critically denoted as true, the irrelevance and mortification of scientific knowledge, critical and reflexive contemplation, all point to a daunting scenario for public discourses and the chance for actors to be heard by whatever statement they make or to create new blaming logics or produce new enemies that suit their politico-ideological purposes or even agendas. The digitalized public discourse in which anyone has the chance to claim the truth, be published and receive recognition or even legitimacy in its content is not the problem as such. The problem is not the new freedom of being heard and having a voice by all users of the digitalized public domain, but the content that it contains, the text, the words and their

meaning. Provocation, verbal attacks, bullying and recognition for being outright harsh and hateful to other members of the public, is commonplace. Behavior and the content – may it be anti-Semitic, racist, sexist or nativistic – has become brutal. The additional procedural demonization of evidence-based facts and knowledge and the stigmatization of ›elite actors‹ by the alleged ›real people‹ draws the nature and culture of public discourses into a Hobbesian age of ›all against all‹, of brutishness and a scenario of a destructive, instead of constructive, discursive conflict.

Yet to retreat and hide behind the more comfortable and well-trodden path of integration ignores the innovative steps that have been made in Germany in the past years concerning migration and the discourses on it. The same applies to a focus on oversimplified mechanistic models of migration to create artificial order and clarity. The push-pull model might be comfortable and plausible (especially for political actors), but it describes only a small part of the phenomenon and process of migration, by essentially oversimplifying the complex and dynamic matter of migration and bluntly ignoring the subjectivity of the migratory agency.

Certainly, these are arguments no politician or political actor would like to hear, but academia is not serving politics to make things simple. Therefore, academia might consider its distance and proceed to set out the research and methodologies needed for the sake of producing reflexive knowledge (see also Dahinden et al. 2020) and an understanding of migration and informing participatory processes. Knowledge of migration – not political popularity – is the firmest basis for policies serving humanity. It builds frameworks for contextualized and varying complex migratory situations in sending and receiving countries. In other words, this is a call for more empirical research in the field migration studies developing, for instance, complex meta-models of migration regimes and its implications (see also Andrijasevic et al. 2005; Pott et al. 2018) or the understanding of migration realities where the view and voice of *migrancy* move on the center stage of concern as well as of theorization. Significantly, innovative and progressive inter- and transdisciplinary groups of migration and media/narration studies in collaboration with sub-fields of psychology might shed light on the interconnections between migratory process, media effects and cognitive perception processes in public discourses. There is an urgent need to study and understand how and why data, facts and research may or may not affect public discourses on migration or the given policy-making landscapes in Germany, in Europe or in other contexts across the globe.

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