Moving across national-linguistic borders: the migration-crisis nexus in Germany, Poland and Greece

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The following section consists of three short essays that discuss the interconnections between crisis and migration in Germany, Poland and Greece. In each case, the commissioned authors were asked to pay particular attention to how the local terms of 'crisis' in their respective countries have informed and shaped public debates and representations about migration during the last decade. As well as offering reflections on the variations in the migration-crisis nexus in three different national contexts, the essays all allude to the different historical, political and social conditions in which the equivalents of crisis – here *Krise*, *kryzys* and *κρίση* – have emerged and been deployed in public discourse.

Read together, the three essays gesture towards a multilingual keyword analysis of crisis. In Raymond Williams' famous formulation, keywords are those common yet complex words 'we share with others, often imperfectly, when we wish to discuss many of the central processes of our common life' (Williams, 1983: 15), which alter markedly over time and across social space in terms of both their meaning and frequency of use. Williams himself admitted that his largely monolingual focus limited the reach of his lexical investigations, noting that 'many of the most important words that I have worked on either developed key meanings in languages other than English, or went through a complicated and interactive development in a number of major languages' (20). Significantly, Williams never wrote an entry on crisis, while the word was not included in the 2005 posthumous project *New Keywords* (Bennett, Grossberg and Morris, 2005), which further corroborates the importance of attending to the processes and circumstances of its subsequent diffusion across Europe.

Serhat Karakayali discusses the ambivalent political implications of the *Flüchtlingskrise* (refugee crisis) after 2015. While some liberal elites interpreted it as an economic opportunity and the mass of volunteers saw it as a sign of positive change in Germany's attitudes to receiving migrants (to the extent that many refuted the very use of the word *Krise*), others – especially on the political Right – increasingly saw this latest 'crisis' as further evidence of the nation's long-term cultural decline.

Natalia Krzyzanowska and Michal Krzyzanowski trace the political uses of *kryzys* in Poland since the 1980s and the longstanding ethno-nationalist depiction of Polish emigration to underline

how the novel conjunction between migration and crisis and the coining of new terms such as *kryzys migracyjny* after 2015 were very much part of a political strategy by the governing Law and Justice Party to foment xenophobic sentiments among Polish public opinion.

Olga Lafazani's essay on Greece focuses on two key periods: the election campaign of 2012 in which mainstream parties mastered anti-migration rhetoric in order to deflect attention from their mishandling of the economic crisis; and the summer and autumn of 2015 during which the general shift towards a more humanitarian discourse about crisis unfolded against the backdrop of a new Syriza government and the massive rise in maritime migration. Lafazani argues that the interrelationship between *κρίση* (crisis) and *μετανάστευση* (migration), far from being stable and fixed, takes its form and meaning within wider social, economic and political contexts.

Cutting across the reflections in the essays are two important caveats: first, an Anglophone-centric analysis of migration and crisis that does not acknowledge the divergent ways in which this relationship has unfolded in other languages will be, at best, partial and incomplete; and, second, anyone who insists on having the last (critical) word on the meaning of crisis, but who simultaneously overlooks its messy and contradictory articulations in public and everyday speech, risks countenancing an ahistorical and depoliticized interpretation of language use.

References

Bennett T, Grossberg L and Morris M (2005) *New Keywords: A Revised Vocabulary of Culture and Society*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Williams R (1983) *Keywords: a vocabulary of culture and society*. New York: Oxford University Press.

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