



CCIS | Center for Comparative
Immigration Studies

The Making of a Crisis: Migration and Polarisation in the French Media

Thursday, April 20, 2023 | 12:30PM - 2:00PM Pacific Time

In-person Event Only | ERC Conference Room 115



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Michelle Reddy is a political sociologist with interest in international development and organizations and currently is the program director for the Master in Development Practice (MDP) program. She is an affiliated faculty member at the Institute for International Studies. Her recent work has largely focused on social mobilization and local governance during crises: Ebola, COVID-19, and the European migration crisis. A second, related line of work focuses on the expansion and professionalization of education and health nonprofits in developing countries.

The Politics of Asylum Crisis project, financed by the French National Research Agency, analyses the discursive construction of a migration crisis in French media from 2015 onwards as the origin of an enduring political crisis in the European Union (EU). Using a rich textual dataset extracted from six main French national newspapers and their online editions, we address two empirical questions: How is the crisis constructed over time? What meaning was assigned to the “migration crisis”? Our results first show that the press predominantly presented the crisis as a “migration crisis” and only marginally termed it a refugee or asylum crisis on limited occasions. French media also offered intense coverage of this migration crisis, in the absence of either massive (irregular) immigration or asylum increase in France. Besides five identified peaks, the migration crisis became a background noise in French media after 2015. Secondly, the press generated a highly polarised coverage, with certain migration-related events having a polarising and politicising effect on media discourses. Right-wing newspapers offer a more intense coverage of the migration crisis as an issue of irregular or economic migration and as a European policy failure. Left-leaning newspapers more frequently label the crisis as a refugee and asylum one, insisting on humanitarian aspects and highlighting policy and moral deficiencies in matters of protection and hospitality. Lastly, media discourses overwhelmingly framed the crisis as a European and political one, putting the European Union institutions, European and French governments and parties, political leaders, as top themes that gave meaning to the migration crisis. Overall, our results show how French media constructed the “migration crisis” as part of a systemic political crisis well beyond the mass arrivals of asylum seekers in 2015.

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