3 Narratives on ‘refugee knowledge’ in the institutions of Europe

Bea Bergholm and Reetta Toivanen

Introduction

Europe does not see us as humans...¹

The European ‘refugee crisis’ of 2015 has been the focus of a vast amount of research in the past years. The topics have ranged from the false dichotomy of the ‘economic migrant’ versus the vulnerable ‘refugee’ and the politicisation of such categories,² to migrants protesting against power and immobilisation practices by the Hungarian state,³ and to Europe’s border security systems and their counter-productive effects.⁴ There is also some significant research on the role of European organisations and their usage of the term ‘refugee crisis’, as well as the surrounding narrative and its effects on European policies aiming to control the movement of migrants.⁵

In this chapter, we take the so-called refugee crisis as a background for looking at the different narratives on refugees that have been produced. We analyse how these narratives prevent European institutions from considering the refugees’ own knowledge. The practice of ignorance towards the refugees’ own forms of knowledge stems from a specific understanding of migration and refuge that concentrates on the lack of something, be it knowledge, skills, or even capability. Thus, when analysing the discourse of the ‘refugee crisis’, we conclude that the knowledge systems of refugees are not part of any narrative on refugees.

In this case, we use the term ‘refugee knowledge’ to refer to the overall knowledge, experience, and skills that refugees have prior to entering their new country of residence (see Björklund & Kmak in this book). Refugee knowledge is usually defined in a very employment-centred way as the knowledge needed for successfully landing a job in the new host country. The focus is often on the absence of capabilities: lack of language skills, insufficient knowledge of bureaucratic processes, lack of cultural knowledge, etc.⁶ This does not allow for rethinking or reimagining what is meant with this knowledge when encountered with othered subjects. Kuhn and Jackson (2008) argue that knowledge, or what is recognised as knowledge, is communicatively constructed.⁷ In the case of refugees, communication regarding what kind of knowledge they possess is ignored, and instead the focus is on what is lacking.

Language skills are often defined as knowledge of the official language(s) of the host country, such as Finnish or Swedish in Finland. Many refugees are fluent in several globally significant languages, such as Arabic or Farsi, but because these are not dominant languages in their new country, their 'lack' of language skills may pose a significant obstacle for employment.⁸ An important question is, how could we overcome this deficiency perspective and shift the focus to the existing multitude of capabilities that refugees have?

Problematising the concept of crisis itself – we use it as a context and frame for our analysis – it is possible to discern several different narratives regarding refugees, all of which function as a hindrance to recognising the refugees' own knowledge and hearing their voices. By unpacking each of these narratives, we demonstrate how they contribute to categorising refugees in stereotypical and harmful ways. Seeing refugees as valuable human beings with knowledge and skills risks being overshadowed by these problematic narratives, which are circulated and reproduced not only in the media but also within European institutions. Standardised, transnational visual and textual representations of refugees are easily shared across countries and institutions that administer refugee projects, and thus they have significant consequences.⁹

We argue that there is reason to suspect that European institutions do not adequately consider types of refugee knowledge. We seek to raise the question of whether disregarding refugee knowledge is intentional or whether it is about a lack of consideration and benign neglect. The main site of research is comprised by institutions within the European Union, although some attention is also paid to the Council of Europe. We have analysed a vast number of policy papers, *travaux préparatoires*, proposals, white papers, and news outlets. The amount of reports, policy briefs, journal articles, and scientific research on the specific moments of refugees entering Europe from 2015 to 2019 is overwhelming.¹⁰ For the purposes of this article, the reports published by the aforementioned European institutions (the EU and the Council of Europe) in the wake and aftermath of the 2015–2017 migration were the primary source for the analysis. The main interest was to investigate what kinds of roles the refugees were assigned in these reports and whether any of these roles took the expertise of the refugees into account. The core questions for the analysis are: What are the dominant discourses or narratives regarding refugee knowledge that are impacting European rhetoric, decision-making, and policymaking? In what ways do European institutions and organisations narrate and recognize the knowledge of refugees? How do they acknowledge the knowledge and capabilities of the people fleeing from elsewhere to the European continent?

'Crisis' as the context for the narratives

According to Bourdieu and Wacquant, critical research aims at discovering power relationships at work at a given moment.¹¹ The years 2015 and 2016 can be called 'a moment' because the rising number of asylum seekers gave European governments a pretext to change their legislation and policies towards stricter border control and more rigid rules for granting asylum. The

critical theory lens invites thinking of social identities as complex, changing, and discursively constructed, and it provides an alternative to essentialist conceptualisations of social groups and their identities.¹² Using a critical theoretical frame, it can be argued that refugee knowledge is difficult to accommodate in the dominant paradigm, which only allows for very specific positionalities for refugees as individuals or groups of people.¹³ Thus, rendering a specific segment of society, such as refugees, as a problem supports essentialist governance practices that reproduce monolithic, linear, and self-sustaining actions towards them, instead of producing actual integration where both the host society and the refugee encounter and direct the actions to follow.

The word 'crisis' itself derives from the Greek word *krinō* ('to cut, to select, to decide, to judge').¹⁴ Following the definition of Murray Edelman, a crisis can be seen as a powerful political symbol, an analytical category, and a category of practice. Labelling something a crisis presents three claims:

- (1) that the particular event or sequence thus labelled 'is different from the political and social issues we routinely confront'; (2) that it 'came about for reasons outside the control of political leaders'; [...] and (3) that it 'requires sacrifices in order to surmount it'.¹⁵

Crisis labelling has long roots, and it has been a standard practice for policy-makers in the European Union ever since the end of the Cold War.¹⁶ Considered as a category of practice, crisis labelling enables and justifies new patterns of action to be taken; as Bourdieu states, labelling has a world-making capacity.¹⁷ In this text, we use the word 'crisis' in quotation marks to emphasise the dubious distinction between stability and crisis. 'Crisis' describes the hardships experienced by refugees and the situation which authorities and states faced, as they were inadequately prepared to receive the large number of people arriving in Europe in 2015–2016.

Taking the 'crisis' as a backdrop, it is possible to identify at least five different, though partially overlapping and even contradictory, narratives regarding refugees in European policy and media space. None of these narratives really give much space for the knowledge that refugees themselves already have. The first narrative sees refugees or migrants as the *source* of the 'crisis' and the problems Europe is facing. The second takes a managerial role in stressing how the 'flows' and 'streams' of refugees need to be controlled and *managed*. The third is describing the refugees as *vulnerable objects* that need to be taken care of; this applies especially to women and children, so that the fourth narrative, refugees as a potential *security threat*, is mainly applied to men. The fifth sees refugees as a potential source of help or even *saviours* for Europe in terms of a (cheap) labour force and means of correcting Europe's unbalanced age-dependency ratio. It is apparent that European institutions and organisations, despite their amplexness of differing agendas and purposes, took the media narrative surrounding the migrant movement as a given and did very little to challenge it. We will now unpack these five narratives and ask whether the knowledge of refugees is recognised in any of them.

Refugees as a source of the ‘crisis’

Reading the movement of people, or really any social phenomenon, as ‘crisis’ puts a frame around a complex social process and effectively separates it historically, socially, and politically from other social processes, non-crises. It creates a series of dualisms, where the ‘crisis’ is the less desirable mirror of a more orderly form of what is effectively the same phenomenon (mobility of populations).¹⁸

The first dominant narrative depicts refugees as the source for the ‘crisis’ in Europe, taking the concept of crisis as a given. However, the term ‘crisis’ itself requires scrutinising and critical theorisation. The situation in Europe has been termed a ‘refugee crisis’, a ‘migrant crisis’, a ‘humanitarian crisis’, a ‘crisis of border control’, and a ‘crisis of the European asylum system’.¹⁹ Apart from the migrant situation, there has even been discussion about a larger ‘crisis of Europe’, referring to both the economic crisis of 2008 and the ‘crisis of European democracy’, as right-wing populist parties have gained support across Europe.²⁰ The declaration of a state of crisis has, in turn, served to justify new emergency policies and stricter border control at Europe’s frontiers. The naming of something as a ‘crisis’ first legitimises the authorisation of exceptional or ‘emergency’ governmental measures, and then allows for their normalisation.²¹

We ought to ask ourselves some critical questions every time we encounter the word ‘crisis’: What ‘crisis’? Whose ‘crisis’? Who gains and who loses from the labelling of a ‘crisis’?²² The Eurocentric focus on the global situation also steers attention away from social, political, and structural issues that have led to unsafe living conditions in certain areas and forced people to flee. Naming and classifying always involve exercising power,²³ which in this case tends to locate the source of the crisis in the body of the individual migrant, seeing the person as bringing the Europe-threatening ‘crisis’ with them wherever they go.²⁴ Such discourse suggests both that the roots of the crisis are elsewhere (in the countries of origin of the migrants) and that Europe is a ‘victim’ of this problematic movement of people.²⁵

In their cross-European media analysis on the ‘refugee crisis’ (written for the Council of Europe), Georgiou and Zaborowski (2017) conclude that whereas the crisis was covered with significant diversity, the tendency to label refugees as outsiders and different ‘others’ dominated, leaving limited space for the refugees’ own life stories, knowledge, voice, and agendas, both in media coverage and in European policymaking.²⁶

The narrative of refugees as the source and rationale behind the ‘crisis’ in Europe simply allows for a comprehensive ignorance of the agenda of the refugees themselves. As Rajaram (2015) observes, depicting something as a ‘crisis’ is always based on fear, suggesting that it then becomes about the states’ urgent capacity to react. Mobility and migration are two sides of the same coin, but only the latter is seen as a possible crisis.²⁷ It seems that in positioning the migrating refugee as the source of crisis, the refugee becomes an ‘element’ of a faceless (and voiceless) collective, where no individual agency is separated and thus heard.

Refugees as unknown unknowns that need to be managed²⁸

'Wave', 'influx', and 'swarm' are just some of the words that have been used in the European political and media discourse about the mass movement of people. For example, the former prime minister of the United Kingdom, David Cameron, was criticised for his language about migrants when he spoke of a 'swarm'.²⁹ In the second dominant narrative, metaphors taken from the natural world construct a view of the movement of refugees as something massive, uncontrollable, and intimidating. In essence, this rhetoric places refugees outside of politics, locating them merely as targets for management, intervention, and control.³⁰ The emphasis being put on 'crisis' and urgent problems has paved the way for the European Union and its member states to change policies very quickly – and without full involvement of the European civil society. One key feature was the prominence of rush and urgency, underlining that there was simply no time for legal changes. Instead, Europeans were made to accept that policies can be altered without legal changes.³¹

The main discussions in the EU concern the distribution of responsibility for processing migrants and asylum seekers who enter or are already in EU territory. Whereas some countries refuse to take any, others complain about the disproportionate burden that they are facing. Still, the focus remains on keeping migrants and asylum seekers out of the EU. According to Human Rights Watch (2019), this includes problematic proposals for offshore processing and migration cooperation with non-EU countries with fewer resources, uneven human rights records, and less capacity to process asylum claims.³²

One example of changing EU policies without a legal basis was the decision to expand the role of FRONTEX, the EU agency coordinating naval and military operations. FRONTEX became the 'European Border and Coast Guard Agency' in 2016; simultaneously its budget was tripled.³³ The EU Commission made it overly clear that one key component of the European Union's migration agenda was to fight crime and effectively remove those who have no right to asylum in the EU. At the same time as the EU has been shaken by the deaths of people fleeing over the Mediterranean, FRONTEX has been involved in unlawful operations aimed at stopping migrants from entering the EU via Greek waters.³⁴ As early as 2015, the European Commission also presented its new 'hotspot approach', which has involved creating large camps in Greece and Italy with the aim of 'helping' these countries to deal with the large number of new migrants.³⁵ These large camps are responsible for coordinating the reception, registration, identification, and fingerprinting of asylum seekers and migrants.³⁶ According to a study by the Danish Refugee Council in 2017, the migrants forced to stay at the hotspots face unsustainable living conditions and serious human rights violations (see also Hassounh & Pascucci in this book). The third example is the agreement on the EU–Turkey deal in 2016, which states that all new irregular migrants from Turkey to the Greek islands will be returned to Turkey.³⁷ This deal is an example of the EU's management of asylum seekers as a problem that can be re-delegated outside EU's borders to undemocratic countries such as Turkey or Libya. One unfortunate example of

this line of policymaking in the EU is the New Pact on Migration and Asylum, which was adopted in September 2020. It focuses on enhancing border procedures and underlines the solidarity in-between member states without any attention to the solidarity towards the asylum seekers and migrants.

Noteworthy in all these cases is how the ‘crisis talk’ affected the EU institutions’ decisions: the justification behind the adopted novel controlling measures was not statutory, but political. Hafelach and Kurban point out that these decisions should have been based on the values and principles of the 1951 UN Refugee Convention.³⁸ Also, the EU used the Dublin Regulation, which is a system of allocating responsibilities to examine asylum applications, not for protecting the refugees but for safeguarding the national security interests of the member states.

Some EU-level initiatives have striven to highlight the opportunities of migration and migrant knowledge. In June 2016, the European Commission launched a database called the Knowledge Centre for Migration and Demography (KCMD). As the name indicates, its task is to provide the EU’s policymakers and decision-makers with relevant knowledge and evidence-based analyses in order to strengthen the response to the challenges posed by migration and leverage its opportunities and benefits.³⁹ The KCMD data tools provide EU policymakers with instruments to access information and data about migration: the KCMD Migration Data Catalogue and the KCMD Dynamic Data Hub. However, in none of the databases can one find information on the knowledge and know-how of the refugees themselves in Europe.⁴⁰

Instead, there is plenty of demographic and geographical data about immigration across the 27 EU member states that support management of what is considered the problem: the unknown refugee. It is as if there is a fundamental gap between refugee knowledge and knowledge *of* refugees. The arm that is producing information about refugees for authorities and other decision-makers is distinctly separate from the one that could contribute knowledge brought with the refugees. Though the aim of such knowledge-production may be well-meaning, in the process it risks rendering refugee knowledge invalid and irrelevant. The European Union is careful with the language it uses when writing about management of refugees. It avoids any wording that would infringe on human rights, while at the same time it bases its most significant measures on the control and management of refugees.

Refugees as vulnerable people that need protection and help

The third dominant narrative is that of the refugees being weak, vulnerable, and thus in need of protection, care, and aid. In particular, European media discourses on migration are loaded with colonial stereotypes, such as representations of migrants as ‘victims’ in need of protection (see Rajaram in this book). Promising relief and benevolence to the migrant in need, the representation is still harmful as it deprives the person of any kind of agency and sees them as a victim of circumstances, unable to do anything about their situation.⁴¹ This representation is often combined with colonial stereotypes about

physically looking non-European.⁴² According to Christiane Fröhlich, the 'migrant as victim' and the 'migrant as threat' tropes 'both perpetuate colonial power relations between seemingly stable, neutral, European identities and systems and threatening and/or damaged migrants standing outside of those spaces'.⁴³ Saara Pellander and Noora Kotilainen⁴⁴ give an example of the reactions of the general public when encountering pictures of refugees that do not fit the representation of refugees as vulnerable victims. They note that refugee men with smartphones are perceived as 'too similar to us', and therefore they are at risk of not being seen as worthy of protection.⁴⁵

Media stories and representations play into the dominant narrative of the vulnerable migrant, but the issue of vulnerability is also operationalised in public policy and public opinion.⁴⁶ It is certainly true that migrants have experienced vulnerability, such as perilous sea journeys and harsh living conditions in camps, but the governing of migration can also produce various types of vulnerabilities. The dominant narrative of 'the vulnerable' may be damaging to the migrants categorised as such: it strips them of agency and subjectivity, and, in addition, these categorisations often rely on external evaluation about a migrant's situation.⁴⁷ Some individuals are seen as vulnerable and worthy of protection, whereas others are regarded as not vulnerable enough. As Smith and Waite observe, 'Typically projected on to those deemed in need, the narratives regarding vulnerability saturate political narratives and many acts of solidarity towards refugees. As such, narratives may allow for "the vulnerable" to be alternately pitied and some of "them" "saved", whilst those refugees who are not deemed vulnerable may be expelled and excluded.'⁴⁸

The vulnerable victim narrative is also often feminised, being more strongly associated with migrant women and children, whereas men are seen in different social roles.⁴⁹ Assumptions about gender are at the heart of how distinctions of vulnerability are made. Women and children are more easily read as innocent, at the mercy of others. Men, on the other hand, are depicted as actors of consequence, soldiers, and even violent perpetrators.⁵⁰ The narrative of refugees as vulnerable victims and in need of measures being taken on behalf of them once again places the refugees outside of any agency and politics by pointing out their lack of self-sufficiency and control. There is no space for recognition of the knowledgeable person in this narrative.

Refugees as dangerous others

In their analysis of the European media landscape, Georgiou and Zaborowski (2017) proposed that migrants can occupy two different, either-or roles: they are either 'vulnerable outsiders' or 'dangerous outsiders'.⁵¹ The 'vulnerable refugee' metaphor stands in contrast with the fourth dominant narrative – the migrant as a 'threat' – which links to the topic of securitisation. Securitisation frames migration as a challenge to national security and stability. Asylum seekers are socially and politically constructed as a security question, being feared to endanger internal security, cultural identity, and the welfare state.⁵² Migrants face securitised conditions at several stages of their

journey: they might be fleeing from unstable conditions, on their route they face securitised borders designed to restrict and control their movement, and, finally, in their destination countries they may encounter a hostile environment, detention, and deportation.⁵³ The linkage of terrorism with asylum seekers and refugees has further fuelled the public view of terrorist others.⁵⁴

In September 2019, the president-to-be of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, announced the nominees for the new European Commission. Among those was a portfolio named 'Vice-president for protecting our European way of life', which immediately sparked critical reactions even within the EU institutions. Pascucci and Kmak remark that the portfolio refers to values such as dignity, equality, and solidarity, yet at the same time 'illegal' migration is presented as a threat to the economy, security, and the self-defined values and identity of the EU.⁵⁵ Framing migrants as a threat on the EU level thus strengthens the separation between those who are EU citizens and those who migrate or flee to the EU from elsewhere.⁵⁶ Later, the title was changed to 'Promoting our European way of life', but the case still remains as an example of the threat narrative permeating the EU. During the Finnish EU presidency, a debate about the future of the EU's migration and asylum policy was initiated in the meetings of the Strategic Committee for Immigration, Frontiers and Asylum (SCIFA) and the Justice and Home Affairs. The meetings concluded that while the EU must show global leadership by providing international protection to those in need, ensuring effective control of its external borders must not be compromised. They made an explicit link, once again, between 'safe and orderly migration' and an increased sense of security among all residents.⁵⁷

A survey by the Pew Research Center (2016) illustrates that the 'refugee crisis' and the threat of terrorism are very much related to one another in the minds of many Europeans. In eight of the ten European nations surveyed, half or more believed that incoming refugees increase the likelihood of terrorism in their country, whereas research evidence clearly points towards the opposite.⁵⁸ The linkage between refugees and increased security problems is a strong narrative. This is visible even in the EU Commission's Agenda for Migration, which shows that the EU aims to continue its security-oriented strategy in migration management.⁵⁹ The EU has continually associated migration with terrorism. There are two aspects to the EU migration policy, the 'Europeanisation' of internal policy, meaning free movement inside of the European Union member states, and the 'externalisation' of security threats, which has led to large camps just outside of the EU. The security discourse emphasises the need to further strengthen the EU's external borders. At the same time, the asylum policies are left to the discretion of the member states. The Malta Declaration of the EU in 2017 is a strong document of the fact that the EU has embraced the securitisation discourse officially and is ready to sacrifice its own values and externalise asylum outside its borders. SOS MEDITERRANEE, a humanitarian organisation working in the Mediterranean Sea, concluded: 'With the Malta Declaration, the European Union has laid the foundation for a massive breach of international law, financed by European taxpayers' money.'⁶⁰

The discourse that posits refugees as a security threat and a potential source of instability and insecurity for the EU and its citizens gives no voice to the refugees. The loud call for preventing terrorism effectively silences refugee knowledge, contributing to ignorance of their agency and capability.

Refugees as potential saviours of Europe

In the fifth dominant narrative, refugees are seen as potential saviours of Europe, providing cheap labour and correcting the demographic imbalance of the continent's ageing population. According to the cross-European media analysis by Georgiou and Zaborowski, it is striking how the press has reported on migrants and refugees as a monolithic, unskilled group. In the case that any distinction was made, it was the country of origin that was mentioned (62%). Only 7% of the media mentioned the profession of the refugees.⁶¹ Thus, the media presents a picture of refugees as un-educated and unskilled, which then supports the idea that refugees are suitable for low-paid and physically demanding jobs.

Turning seekers of help into productive citizens is high on the agenda of most of the member states – and consequently also the European Commission. It is seen as evident that Europe is competing with other economies to attract a skilled labour force.⁶² Changes in the skills required by the EU between 2012 and 2025 are expected to show a sharp increase (+23%) in the share of jobs employing higher-educated labour.⁶³ There are already shortages in key sectors, such as science, technology, engineering, and healthcare. The European Union makes it apparent in its statements that there is a clear need to build up Europe's own skill base and equip people for inclusion in today's labour markets.

For this purpose, the EU Skills Profile Tool for third-country nationals was launched in 2017. It is meant to support organisations that are working with refugees and new migrants to establish their previous education, training, and experience. It is part of the general New Skills Agenda for Europe, which strives for better matches of training and employment in the EU. Though its focus is strictly employment-oriented, it at least seems to try to incorporate the knowledge of the refugees into the integration programmes. According to this Agenda, approximately 25% of non-EU nationals are highly skilled. However, two-thirds of them are inactive in the labour market, unemployed, or over-qualified for their jobs.⁶⁴ Similarly to the EU's New Skills Agenda, in 2017 the Council of Europe launched a project that aims to create a permanent structure in the field of recognition of refugee qualifications. The project is called the European Qualifications Passport for Refugees, and it aims to provide an assessment tool of the higher education qualifications of refugees, in order to turn these into a competitive and certified curriculum vitae.⁶⁵ The focus on finding a labour force among newcomers omits the structural discrimination and racism-related difficulties of refugees in finding work.⁶⁶

A study by Matti Sarvimäki (2017) on the labour market performance of earlier immigrants living in Finland showed that immigrants born in Afghanistan,

Iraq, and Somalia had substantially lower employment rates, earned less, and received more social benefits than other immigrant groups or natives in 1990–2013. The immigrant–native gaps in employment and earnings remained large even after ten years’ time.⁶⁷ The reasons are linked to not recognising the skills of refugees and to high levels of labour-market racism in Finland.⁶⁸

The following citation describes well how the EU on one hand offers protection for the refugee and on the other hand sees the refugee as someone who should contribute to the European economy: ‘The EU must continue to offer protection to those in need. It must also recognise that the skills needed for a vibrant economy cannot always immediately be found inside the EU labour market or will take time to develop.’⁶⁹ What constitutes the needed skills seems to be predefined, and newcomers should be able to demonstrate these skills in order to foster the European economy. The definition of skills in these documents follow traditions of science and politics that have long instrumentalised precarity to the service of the markets.

The European Union is facing a significant demographic problem: as the population is aging, the number of working-age people is estimated to decline by 17.5 million during the next decade.⁷⁰ Countries are concerned about the age-dependency ratio and politicians are urgently calling on academia and labour unions to come up with long-term solutions to secure future pensions and benefits. According to Eurostat (2020), the EU 27 currently has a ratio of 32,⁷¹ but in 2050 – if no drastic demographic change occurs – the ratio will be 47. In many countries, such as in Finland, the situation is even worse, as it is one of the most rapidly aging countries in Europe.⁷²

In this case, the EU sees migration as the only possible solution to the problem. To quote the European Agenda on Migration: ‘Migration will increasingly be an important way to enhance the sustainability of our welfare system and to ensure sustainable growth of the EU economy.’⁷³ As Peo Hansen writes, it would seem reasonable to expect that the refugees are greeted as a first, though modest step towards reducing the EU’s age-dependency ratio.⁷⁴ He concludes that, contrary to what would make sense in this situation, the EU Commission has ‘spent all its energies on devising new measures to prevent refugees from entering the EU’.⁷⁵ It seems like the European Union does not want asylum seekers with rights but instead it prefers migration in a circular austere commodity form: the new working force should have no rights to citizenship or long-term perspectives of staying.

Search for refugee knowledge in the dominant European narrative

Migration consists today of ‘an increased number of new, small and scattered, multiple-origin, transnationally connected, socio-economically differentiated and legally stratified’⁷⁶ migrants. The groups are as diverse as humankind can be. Vertovec has aptly called the current situation ‘super-diversity’, with the aim of highlighting the ontologically different situations that people who cross borders are in. Refugees are fundamentally different from other migrants because they are fleeing – and seeking a place of security. The European Union has created a strong

image of itself as the ideal destination for refugees, which it emphasises in its official statements. This self-image of Europe is illustrated, for example, in the following statement: 'Europe, due to its geographic position and its reputation as an example of stability, generosity and openness against a background of growing international and internal conflicts, climate change and global poverty, is likely to continue to represent an ideal refuge for asylum seekers and migrants.'⁷⁷ But just how ideal is Europe for asylum seekers when we read in newspapers about the unbearable conditions in the refugee camps, detention facilities, and desperate attempts by many to reunite with their families? We may wonder whether there is any space for humanitarian politics in the field of refugees' migration to Europe.

The question of 'who is missing in these narratives?' must be answered that the Europe-focused, Euro-centric narrative has overridden the experiences of the refugees themselves. As Bourdieu put it, "The weapons of the weak are always weak weapons."⁷⁸ The refugees themselves have very restricted possibilities to change the course of their representation. 'It is this movement [of migrants] that most effectively challenges the renationalisation of politics and the fragmentation of European space', write Manuela Bojadžijev and Sandro Mezzadra.⁷⁹ In many ways, it seems apparent that recognising refugee knowledge is inherently difficult because of all the dominant discourses that are guiding our gaze away from it. Seeing refugees as vulnerable, as potential threats, and in all the other 'convenient' roles that we assign to them hinders us from seeing them as persons with capabilities.

The combination of all the narratives regarding refugees mentioned in this chapter diminishes the chances of seeing refugees as people with multifaceted skills and perspectives that would be useful for their destination country or for Europe as a whole. It is the European agenda, what Europe thinks it wants and needs, that guides the ideas about belonging. According to Benhabib, 'The struggle over what gets included in the public agenda is itself a struggle for justice and freedom.'⁸⁰ The question is then, where and how could those with limited access to power start changing the dominant agendas?

The dominant narratives regarding refugees discussed in this chapter form discourses to be further analysed. It is important to note that discourses transmit and produce power. A discourse may reinforce those in power, but it also 'undermines and exposes power, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart'.⁸¹ That is to say, none of these narratives are the truth, and not even the partial truth, but merely pictures or stereotypes that we employ when facing uncertain futures. Refugee knowledges cannot be subsumed under the idea of high-skilled or low-skilled labour according to the European standards. There is much more multifaceted potential in the concept of refugee knowledges, as becomes apparent in this volume.

Acknowledgments

This work has been made possible by the Academy of Finland funded Centre of Excellence in Law, Identity and the European Narratives, funding decision numbers 312431 and 336678.

Notes

- 1 Kakissis, 2018, 25–37.
- 2 See e.g. Crawley and Skleparis, 2018, 48–64; Holmes and Castaneda, 2016, 12–24.
- 3 See e.g. Kallius, Monterescu, and Rajaram, 2016, 25–37.
- 4 Andersson, 2016, 1055–1075.
- 5 See Tazzioli and De Genova, 2016; Davitti and Chimia, 2017, 1–46.
- 6 Jacobs, 2019.
- 7 Kuhn and Jackson, 2008, 474.
- 8 See e.g. Knuuti, 2020.
- 9 Malkki, 1996, 377–404.
- 10 In 2019, the European Commission declared the ‘refugee crisis’ to be over.
- 11 Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1999, 41–58.
- 12 Fraser, 1992.
- 13 Benhabib, 2002, 106; see also Hassouneh and Pascucci’s chapter in this volume.
- 14 Koselleck, 2002, 237.
- 15 Edelman, 1977.
- 16 Jeandesboz and Pallister-Wilkins, 2014, 116.
- 17 Bourdieu, 1992, 139.
- 18 Rajaram, 2015, 25–37.
- 19 For example, the media outlet Al Jazeera made a strong point of calling the situation a ‘refugee crisis’ instead of a ‘migration crisis’, for the sake of emphasis and, as they said, due to the need to use factual words (Malone, 2015). Inspired by that, 72,000 people signed a change.org petition to ask BBC to change its language accordingly.
- 20 Tazzioli and De Genova, 2016.
- 21 Tazzioli and De Genova, 2016, 20.
- 22 Tazzioli and De Genova, 2016, 11.
- 23 Bourdieu, 1989, 21.
- 24 Tazzioli and De Genova, 2016, 20.
- 25 Tazzioli and De Genova, 2016, 12.
- 26 Georgiou and Zaborowski, 2017.
- 27 Rajaram, 2015.
- 28 David Chandler’s formulation originally addressed such crucial knowledge gaps that are hidden, underlying processes of determination, which we know that we do not fully know of (Chandler, 2014, 50). The refugees are described as such unknown *matter* that needs to be managed – even when we know that we do not fully know them.
- 29 BBC News, 2015.
- 30 See Foucault, 1991.
- 31 For the case of Finnish Migri decisions, see Saarikkomäki et al., 2018. Migri is the Finnish Migration Service, which makes decisions on asylum and residence permits.
- 32 Human Rights Watch, 2019.
- 33 The European Parliament, 2016.
- 34 Waters, Freudenthal, and Williams, 2020.
- 35 European Commission, 2015, 6.
- 36 European Commission, 2015.
- 37 European Council, 2016.
- 38 Haferlach and Kurban, 2017, 86.
- 39 European Commission, n.d.-b. *Knowledge Centre on Migration and Democracy*.
- 40 European Commission, n.d.-b. *Knowledge Centre on Migration and Democracy*.

- 41 Benhabib, 2002; Ferrarese, 2018.
- 42 Fröhlich, 2017, 5–11.
- 43 Fröhlich, 2017, 8.
- 44 Pellander and Kotilainen, 2017.
- 45 See also Malkki, 1996, 377–404.
- 46 Smith and Waite, 2019, 2289–2307.
- 47 Ferrarese, 2018.
- 48 Smith and Waite, 2019, 2295.
- 49 Helms, 2015; see also Malkki, 1996, 377–404.
- 50 Helms, 2015.
- 51 Georgiou and Zaborowski, 2017, 3.
- 52 Huysmans, 2000, 751–777.
- 53 Mixed Migration Centre, 2019.
- 54 Toivanen, 2010, 282.
- 55 Pascucci and Kmak, 2019.
- 56 Pascucci and Kmak, 2019.
- 57 Council of the European Union, 2019.
- 58 Wike, Stokes, and Simmons, 2016.
- 59 See Haferlach and Kurban, 2017, 86.
- 60 SOS MEDITERRANEE, 2020.
- 61 Georgiou and Zaborowski, 2017, 10.
- 62 European Commission, 2015.
- 63 Descy, 2014.
- 64 European Commission, n.d.-a “European Skills Agenda Website.”
- 65 Council of Europe, 2020.
- 66 On migrants in Finland, see e.g. Krivonos, 2019; Ahmad, 2020, 826–843.
- 67 Sarvimäki, 2017.
- 68 See Akhlaq Ahmad’s field research 2020.
- 69 European Commission, 2015, 7.
- 70 Eurostat, 2020.
- 71 This indicator is the ratio between the projected number of persons aged 65 and over (the age when they are generally economically inactive) and the projected number of persons aged between 15 and 64. The value is expressed per 100 persons of working age (15–64).
- 72 Eurostat, 2020.
- 73 European Commission, 2015.
- 74 Hansen, 2018, 128.
- 75 Hansen, 2018, 130.
- 76 Vertovec, 2007, 1024.
- 77 Apap, Radjenovic and Dobрева, 2018.
- 78 Bourdieu, 2001, 32.
- 79 Bojadžijev and Mezzandra, 2015.
- 80 Benhabib, 2002, 92.
- 81 Foucault, 1998, 100–101.

References

- Ahmad, Akhlaq. 2020. “Do Equal Qualifications Yield Equal Rewards for Immigrants in the Labour Market?” *Work, Employment and Society* 34, no. 5: 826–843. doi:10.1177/0950017020919670.

- Andersson, Ruben. 2016. "Europe's Failed 'Fight' Against Irregular Migration: Ethnographic Notes on a Counterproductive Industry." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 42, no. 7: 1055–1075. doi:10.1080/1369183X.2016.1139446.
- Apap, Joanna, Anja Radjenovic, and Alina Dobрева. 2018. The Migration Issue. *European Parliamentary Research Service*. PE 635.542. [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2019/635542/EPRS_BRI\(2019\)635542_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2019/635542/EPRS_BRI(2019)635542_EN.pdf).
- BBC News. 2015. "David Cameron Criticised over Migrant 'Swarm' Language." Accessed July 30, 2015. <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-33716501>.
- Benhabib, Seyla. 2002. *The Claims of Culture – Equality and Diversity in the Global Era*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. doi:10.2307/j.ctv346pnd.
- Bojadžijev, Manuela, and Sandro Mezzadra. 2015. "'Refugee Crisis' or Crisis of European Migration Policies?" *Focaal Blog*, Accessed November 12, 2015. <http://www.focaalblog.com/2015/11/12/manuela-bojadzijeve-and-sandro-mezzadra-refugee-crisis-or-crisis-of-european-migration-policies/>.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. 1989. "Social Space and Symbolic Power." *Sociological Theory* 7, no. 1: 14–25.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. 1992. *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. 2001. *Masculine Domination*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Bourdieu, Pierre, and Loïc Wacquant. 1999. "On the Cunning of Imperialist Reason." *Theory, Culture & Society* 16, no. 1: 41–58.
- Chandler, David. 2014. "Beyond Neoliberalism: Resilience, the New Art of Governing Complexity." *Resilience* 2, no. 1: 47–63. doi:10.1080/21693293.2013.878544.
- Council of Europe. 2020. *European Qualifications Passport for Refugees*. <https://rm.coe.int/eqpr-leaflet-en-web-july-2020/16809ee917>.
- Council of the European Union. 2019. "Way Forward for EU Migration and Asylum Policy-outcome of Discussions." *Presidency Report*, Accessed November 22, 2019. <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-14364-2019-INIT/en/pdf>.
- Crawley, Heaven, and Dimitris Skleparis. 2018. "Refugees, Migrants, Neither, Both: Categorical Fetishism and the Politics of Bounding in Europe's 'Migration Crisis'." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 44, no. 1: 48–64. doi:10.1080/1369183X.2017.1348224.
- Danish Refugee Council. 2017. "Fundamental Rights and the EU Hotspot Approach." Accessed October, 2017. https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Fundamental%20rights_web%20%281%29.pdf.
- Davitti, Daria, and Annamaria La Chimia. 2017. "A Lesser Evil? The European Agenda on Migration and the Use of Aid Funding for Migration Control." *UCD Working Papers in Law, Criminology & Socio-Legal Studies Research Paper*, no. 7: 1–46. <https://ssrn.com/abstract=2966042>.
- Descy, Pascaline. 2014. "Projected Labour Market Imbalances in Europe: Policy Challenges in Meeting the Europe 2020 Employment Targets." *OECD/European Union: Matching Economic Migration with Labour Market Needs*. doi:10.1787/9789264216501-12-en.
- Edelman, Murray. 1977. *Political Language: Words That Succeed and Policies That Fail*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- European Commission. 2015. *A European Agenda on Migration*. https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/policies/european-agenda-migration/background-information/docs/communication_on_the_european_agenda_on_migration_en.pdf.
- European Commission. n.d.-a "European Skills Agenda Website." *European Commission*, Accessed November 2, 2020. <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1223&langId=en>

- European Commission. n.d.-b *Knowledge Centre on Migration and Democracy*, Accessed October 28, 2020. https://ec.europa.eu/knowledge4policy/migration-demography_en.
- European Council. 2016. *EU–Turkey Statement*. Press release, Accessed March 18, 2016. <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2016/03/18/eu-turkey-statement>
- European Parliament. 2016. *Regulation (EU) 2016/1624 of the European Parliament and of the Council*, Accessed September 14, 2016. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:32016R1624&from=EN>.
- EuroStat. 2020. *Projected Old-age Dependency Ratio*, Accessed April 30, 2020. <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/tps00200/default/table?lang=en>.
- Ferrarese, Estelle. 2018. *Vulnerability and Critical Theory*. Translated by Steve Corcoran. Leiden: Brill.
- Foucault, Michel. 1991. "Governmentality." In *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*, edited by Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon, and Peter Miller, 87–104. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Foucault, Michel. 1998. *The History of Sexuality: The will to Knowledge*. London: Penguin.
- Fraser, Nancy. 1992. "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy." In *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, edited by Craig Calhoun, 109–142. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Fröhlich, Christiane. 2017. "A Critical View on Human Mobility in Times of Crisis." *Global Policy* 8, no. 1: 5–11.
- Georgiou, Myria, and Rafal Zaborowski. 2017. *Media Coverage of the "Refugee Crisis": A cross-European Perspective*. Council of Europe Report. DG1 (2017) 3.
- Haferlach, Lisa, and Dilek Kurban. 2017. "Lessons Learnt from the EU–Turkey Refugee Agreement in Guiding EU Migration Partnerships with Origin and Transit Countries." *Global Policy* 8, no. 4: 85–93.
- Hansen, Peo. 2018. "Asylum or Austerity? The 'Refugee Crisis' and the Keynesian Interlude." *European Political Science* 17, no. 1: 128–139.
- Helms, Elissa. 2015. "Men at the Borders: Gender, Victimhood, and War in Europe's Refugee Crisis." *Focaal Blog*, Accessed December 22, 2015. <http://www.focaalblog.com/2015/12/22/elissa-helms-men-at-the-borders-gender-victimhood-and-war-in-europes-refugee-crisis/>.
- Holmes, Seth M., and Heide Castaneda. 2016. "Representing the 'European Refugee Crisis' in Germany and Beyond: Deservingness and Difference, Life and Death." *American Ethnologist* 43, no. 1: 12–24. doi:10.1111/amet.12259.
- Human Rights Watch. 2019. "The European Union – Events from Year 2018." Accessed October 28, 2020. <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2019/country-chapters/european-union#fc635d>.
- Huysmans, Jef. 2000. "The European Union and the Securitization of Migration." *Journal of Common Market Studies* 38, no. 5: 751–777.
- Jacobs, Joela. 2019. "Refuge and Refuse: Migrant Knowledge and Environmental Education in Germany." *Migrant Knowledge*, Accessed September 13, 2019. <https://migrantknowledge.org/2019/09/13/refuge-and-refuse-migrant-knowledge-and-environmental-education-in-germany/>.
- Jeandesboz, Julien, and Polly Pallister-Wilkins. 2014. "Crisis, Enforcement and Control at the EU Borders." In *Crisis and Migration: Critical Perspectives*, edited by Anna Lindley, 115–135. London: Routledge.
- Kakissis, Joanna. 2018. "Europe Does Not See Us As Human: Stranded Refugees Struggle in Greece." *Parallels/NPR*, March 9, 2018. <https://www.npr.org/sections/parallels/2018/03/09/589973165/europe-does-not-see-us-as-human-stranded-refugees-struggle-in-greece?t=1605614820094>.

- Kallius, Annastiina, Daniel Monterescu, and Prem Kumar Rajaram. 2016. "Immobilizing Mobility: Border Ethnography, Illiberal Democracy, and the Politics of the "Refugee Crisis" in Hungary." *American Ethnologist* 43, no. 1: 25–37.
- Knuuti, Karoliina. 2020. "Helsingin 'Kielitaidottomat' Kielinerot." *Maaailman Kuvalehti*, Accessed April 17, 2020. <https://www.maaailmankuvalehti.fi/2020/2/pitkat/helsingin-kielitaidottomat-kielinerot>.
- Koselleck, Reinhart. 2002. *The Practice of Conceptual History: Timing History, Spacing Concepts*. Translated by Samuel Todd Presner. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Krivosos, Daria. 2019. "Migrations on the Edge of Whiteness: Young Russian-speaking Migrants in Helsinki, Finland." PhD diss., University of Helsinki. <https://helda.helsinki.fi/handle/10138/304004>.
- Kuhn, Timothy, and Michele H. Jackson. 2008. "Accomplishing Knowledge: A Framework for Investigating Knowing in Organizations." *Management Communication Quarterly* 21, no. 4: 454–485.
- Malkki, Liisa. 1996. "Speechless Emissaries: Refugees, Humanitarianism, and Dehistoricization." *Cultural Anthropology* 11, no. 3: 377–404.
- Malone, Barry. 2015. "Why Al Jazeera will not say Mediterranean 'Migrants'." *Al Jazeera*, Accessed August 20, 2015. <https://www.aljazeera.com/blogs/editors-blog/2015/08/al-jazeera-mediterranean-migrants-150820082226309.html>.
- Mixed Migration Centre. 2019. *The Ever-Rising Securitisation of Mixed Migration*. <http://www.mixedmigration.org/articles/the-ever-rising-securitisation-of-mixed-migration/>.
- Pascucci, Elisa, and Magdalena Kmak. 2019. "Eurooppalaisen Elämäntavan Suojeleminen." *Politiikasta.fi*, Accessed November 7, 2019. <https://politiikasta.fi/eurooppalaisen-elamantavan-suojeleminen/>.
- Pellander, Saara, and Noora Kotilainen. 2017. "(Not) Looking Like a Refugee: Visual Memories of Refugeeeness and the Figure of the 'iPhone Man.'" *Border Criminologies Blog*, Accessed June 16, 2017. <https://www.law.ox.ac.uk/research-subject-groups/centre-criminology/centreborder-criminologies/blog/2017/06/not-looking>.
- Pew Research Center. July, 2016. "Europeans Fear Wave of Refugees Will Mean More Terrorism, Fewer Jobs."
- Rajaram, Prem Kumar. 2015. "Beyond Crisis: Rethinking the Population Movements at Europe's Border." *Focaal blog*, Accessed October 19, 2015. last accessed April 28, 2020. <http://www.focaalblog.com/2015/10/19/prem-kumar-rajaram-beyond-crisis>.
- Saarikkomäki, Elsa, Nea Oljakka, Johanna Vanto, Elina Pirjatanniemi, Juha Lavapuro, and Anne Alvesalo-Kuusi. 2018. *Kansainvälistä Suojelua Koskevat Päätökset Maahanmuuttovirastossa 2015–2017. Pilottitutkimus 18–34-Vuotiaita Irakin Kansalaisia Koskevasta Myönteisistä Ja Kielteisistä Päätöksistä*. Turun Yliopisto: Oikeustieteellisen Tiedekunnan Tutkimusraportteja Ja Katsauksia 1.
- Sarvimäki, Matti. 2017. *Labor Market Integration of Refugees in Finland*. VATT Institute for Economic Research: VATT Research Reports 185/2017.
- Smith, Kate, and Louise Waite. 2019. "New and Enduring Narratives of Vulnerability: Rethinking Stories about the Figure of the Refugee." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 45, no. 13: 2289–2307.
- SOS MEDITERRANEE. 2020. *Three Years Following the Malta Declaration – SOS MEDITERRANEE Denounces How the EU Support for the Libyan Coast Guard Further Worsened the Situation in the Central Mediterranean*. Press release, Accessed January 31, 2020. <https://sosmediterranee.com/press/three-years-following-the-malta-declaration-sos-mediterranee-denounces-how-the-eu-support-for-the-libyan-coast-guard-further-worsened-the-situation-in-the-central-mediterranean/>.

- Tazzioli, Martina, and Nicholas De Genova. 2016. "Europe/Crisis: New Keywords of 'the Crisis' in and of 'Europe'." *New Keywords Collective. Near Futures Online 1 "EuropeataCrossroads"*. <http://nearfuturesonline.org/europecrisis-new-keywords-of-crisis-in-and-of-europe/>.
- Toivanen, Reetta. 2010. "Counterterrorism and Expert Regimes: Some Human Rights Concerns." *Critical Studies on Terrorism* 3, no. 2: 277–294.
- Vertovec, Steven. 2007. "Super-diversity and its Implications." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 30, no. 6: 1024–1054.
- Waters, Nick, Emmanuel Freudenthal, and Logan Williams. 2020. "Frontex at Fault: European Border Force Complicit in 'Illegal' Pushbacks." *Bellingcat*, Accessed October 23, 2020. <https://www.bellingcat.com/news/2020/10/23/frontex-at-fault-european-border-force-complicit-in-illegal-pushbacks/>.
- Wike, Richard, Bruce Stokes, and Katie Simmons. 2016. "Europeans Fear Wave of Refugees Will Mean More Terrorism, Fewer Jobs." *Pew Research Center*, Accessed July 11, 2016. <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2016/07/11/europeans-fear-wave-of-refugees-will-mean-more-terrorism-fewer-jobs/>.