

## IR Theory in Practice Case Study: The European 'refugee crisis'<sup>1</sup>

### Overview of the topic: The European 'refugee crisis'

The movement of people has a long-standing history on the world's continents. Historically integral to trade, it is at the root of ever-changing social relations and thus (global) politics. Indeed, it is difficult to point to a moment of origin. The category of 'refugee' on the other hand has a particularly modern connotation that stems from a person's status as 'stateless'. Particularly prominent in times of warfare, one of the first periods marked by large-scale 'refugee' movements in modern Europe is the First World War. Here, Belgian, Serbian, Russian, and Armenian peoples were among the largest ethnic groups to flee from war atrocities (Gatrell). Similarly, the Second World War was marked by large population movements as a result of evacuation, displacement, expulsion, and deportation policies conducted by military forces by different participant states.

Recently, a 'new wave' of 'refugees' has hit Europe. The majority of origin countries are Middle Eastern, North African, and Balkan states. While motivations differ among those who set out on often dangerous paths to make their way to Europe, economic reasons and intra-state conflict are among the most prominent. Particularly the latter

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<sup>1</sup> From here on forwards both the terms 'refugee' and 'refugee crisis' will be referred to in quotation marks. The reason for doing so in relation to the former is to highlight that while 'refugee' remains an important political and juridical category (see Section 3.1 below) this is not the only or singular identity marker that the person behind this category carries, refuting the idea that 'refugees' can be thought of as a monolithic group or entity.

The reason for placing the European 'refugee crisis' in quotation marks is twofold. On the one hand, the large-scale use of the term 'crisis' to describe the wave of people seeking asylum in Europe, did not begin until the summer of 2015. This, however, misconstrues its timeline. As such, this trend had in fact seen increased development even prior to 2015, but the EU 'Dublin Accords'—temporarily suspended by the German government in 2015—meant that this dynamic had predominantly affected EU states on the Mediterranean coast, particularly Italy and Greece. Despite these countries' call for EU-wide support at the very least since 2010, however, little political engagement had come from other EU member states. To call the current migration dynamic a 'crisis' only after it begins to affect particular (inter-continental) states thus misconstrues it as a sudden and urgent process and raises important questions as to whose agendas and political concerns 'count' at the EU-level.

If the above is mostly concerned with a temporal misrepresentation of the current migration wave to Europe, a second concern is a spatial misconstruction. Thus, it is important to note that while our focus is Europe's engagement with this dynamic, there is a far greater number of people who seek asylum elsewhere, particularly when their numbers are set against those who were citizens of these particular countries previously (see: [http://popstats.unhcr.org/en/overview#\\_ga=2.184364963.48007316.1535214832-854853203.1535214832](http://popstats.unhcr.org/en/overview#_ga=2.184364963.48007316.1535214832-854853203.1535214832); <http://www.unhcr.org/en-us/figures-at-a-glance.html>; [http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/publications/migrationreport/docs/MigrationReport2017\\_Highlights.pdf](http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/publications/migrationreport/docs/MigrationReport2017_Highlights.pdf)). Examples include: Lebanon, Jordan, Chad, and Turkey.

Finally, the word 'crisis' carries a negative implication that is often used in narratives that discourage the entry of people into EU member states. It should thus be stressed that the use of the term 'refugee crisis' in the following is not intended to play into such narratives and attempts to offer a nuanced analysis of the misrepresentations identified above. The continuous use of the term stems rather from little satisfactory alternatives. 'Refugee wave' too is often associated with a threatening dynamic, while 'illegal immigration' carries grave ethical concerns over the use of the word 'illegal' when describing the ontology of any human individual.

has seen a stark increase since 2015, largely due to the ongoing civil war in Syria and resulting rise of power of the ISIL terrorist group. In Syria, this conflict emerged in the context of the wider 2011 'Arab Spring' demonstrations across the Middle East, where demonstrations had called for the removal of President Bashar al-Assad from office, resulting in their violent suppression. To date, the main parties involved in the civil war include: the Syrian government, a loose alliance of Syrian Arab rebel groups, the Syrian Democratic Forces, Salafi jihadist groups—often in co-operation with rebel groups—as well as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). In addition, the Combined Joint Task Force—Operation Inherent Resolve (CJTF—OIR), a US-led international coalition to coordinate military operations against ISIL, means that a variety of external (state) actors are involved, many of whom support either directly or indirectly some of the main actors listed above. Often marked by intense fighting and high numbers of (civilian) casualties, it is hardly surprising that these events have resulted in large numbers of 'refugees'.

European governments have responded to this migratory dynamic differently. In the past, the main European countries of destination included Italy and Greece, due to their links to the Mediterranean Sea. When in 2015 increasing numbers of, particularly Syrian, 'refugees' made their way to Europe on land-routes, this extended to include the Balkan states. Consequently, many of these destination-countries once again sought help from the European Union to help manage the 'overwhelming' numbers. This can be traced to EU 'refugee' policy in the form of the so-called 'Dublin Accords'. These establish that, when arriving in the EU, 'refugees' must remain in the member states they first enter. Consequently, this causes problems with regard to redistribution policies, which have been marked by a slow, bureaucratic process, often impeded by growing right-wing sentiments within EU member states.

**Discussion questions:**

Can the European 'refugee crisis' be solved with those European and international institutions currently in place?

To what extent is the European 'refugee crisis' fuelling right-wing sentiments in EU member states?

## Section 1:

### Liberalism and the European 'refugee crisis'

*From reading Chapter 7 of The Globalization of World Politics (7th edn.), you should now be familiar with the basic tenets of the Liberalism International Relations (IR) theory. You are advised to consult this key chapter if you have not done so already as its contents will not be repeated here.*

*Bracketed chapter references, for example (see Ch. 8), refer to the relevant chapter in The Globalization of World Politics. Unless otherwise stated emboldened words refer to key concepts in the relevant theory chapter, in this case Chapter 7.*

This case study will look at the European 'refugee crisis' through the prism of liberalism, covering **1) Liberal institutionalism and 'refugees'** and **2) Neoliberal policies and migrant workers.**

#### 1) Liberal institutionalism and 'refugees'

Fundamentally concerned with human progress, one of the main tenets of liberalism at the international level is the establishment of international ethics and international human rights. To ensure such frameworks, liberalism is concerned with the maintenance of international institutions that bind states to such conducts. Embedded in the Kantian notion of 'Perpetual Peace', this is premised on the latter's notion of a pacific union established among all states, as well as a cosmopolitan law (Kant, 1795).

This too, has been the liberal institutionalist approach to 'refugees' Particularly prominent among international refugee law is the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (see weblinks below). This enforces a legal constraint on signatory states, who otherwise maintain the right to decide who may enter and remain on their territory under the premise of sovereignty. Indeed, it is against this convention that national definitions and policy frameworks in relation to refugeehood are ideally placed. But is this really the case?

Critics have claimed that 'despite continued political support for the international framework at the rhetorical level, the implicit assumption that international refugee law somehow works to condition or contain national and transnational refugee policy has been increasingly challenged as a matter of practice' (Gammeltoft-Hansen, 2014).

This can be seen also with regard to the current European 'refugee crisis'. As early as March 2016, Macedonia, Croatia, and Slovenia announced that they would be closing their borders to 'refugees' seeking to make their way from Greece into the Western and Scandinavian nations of the European Union (EU). Far from alone in their approach, such 'deterrence' policies reflected those earlier implemented by Hungary's, which had approved and began the construction of a four-metre-high fence along its 500km border with Serbia, in the summer of 2015. Explicitly thought to

make unregistered entry into the country as difficult as possible, this stance towards 'refugees' in Europe was reinforced in early October 2016, when the Hungarian president, Victor Orban, issued a national referendum to decide upon the admission of 'refugees' into Hungarian territory. While the referendum was not admitted due to low voter turn-out, this illustrates that European refugee politics are marked by an ongoing friction between international institutional law on the one hand, and state claims to sovereignty on the other.

This is clearly evident also from more recent developments in the EU, where debates over EU-policies towards 'refugees' have, it has been argued, threatened the institutions' stability as a whole.

Indicative is the UK's decision to leave the EU, where the so-called 'leave campaign' was largely premised on an anti-EU-migrant stance. Though the emphasis among such arguments was indeed on 'migrants' from mostly Eastern EU states (for a discussion on the use of terminology and semantics see the section on 'Constructivism' below), the political propaganda that underlined these arguments was seemingly prepared to ignore the particular nuances of heritage and reason for migration to the EU and UK in its public discussion of such arguments. Nigel Farage's 'anti-immigrant poster' (Morrison, 2016; Stone, 2016; Wright, 2016), which largely depicted 'refugees' from the Middle East, while referencing economic and employment instability among UK-citizens as a result of open EU-borders and concomitant migration of non-UK EU-citizens, is only the most obvious fallacy in the portrayal of this narrative.

The legal and semantic distinction between 'refugee' and 'migrant' and their centrality for ethical and political policies towards people who seek to move to the EU, while in itself an important discussion, is not primarily at issue here, however. Rather, the above suggests that the European 'refugee crisis' has, at the very least in its portrayal, posed a challenge to the EU with not insignificant consequences for the liberal institutionalism upon which it is premised. The question thus becomes not merely one of how liberal institutionalism deals with such events, but whether it is able to sustain them in the face of counter-claims advocating for a return to more exclusionary and unilateral state-sovereignty.

## **2) Neoliberal policies and migrant workers**

As mentioned in the introductory section, one among many other current motivations for migration is economic instability and inequity. This has been particularly prominent since the 2008 global financial crisis and is closely linked to concomitant neo-liberal economic policies of austerity. The latter refers to a series of economic policies, which seek to reduce government budget deficits. Such policies may include spending cuts, tax increases, or both, and serve to demonstrate governments' fiscal discipline to credit rating agencies (such as Moody's). The down-side to these policies is, as most macroeconomic models assess, that austerity means increased unemployment in both the public and private sector, as government spending falls. Simultaneously, tax increases reduce household disposable income.

Together, such measures are said to reduce private spending and consumption, which impacts the economy negatively.

In this sense, austerity is premised on a core principle of neoliberal economic policy: the reduction of state-intervention in the market economy. It is important to note that neoliberalism is not equal to notions of 'anarcho-economics'. Nonetheless, it is premised on minimal state regulation of markets in line with a *laissez-faire* approach. This has resulted in much cutting of state spending on welfare expenditure over the past few years. In the UK, for example, heated debates have arisen over government spending on the NHS.

In the current European 'refugee crisis', migrants, particularly from the Western Balkans (Kosovo, Albania, and Serbia) and parts of West Africa (The Gambia and Nigeria), are likely to be 'economic refugees' or rather economic 'migrants'. Fleeing from poverty and unemployment, many make their way to Europe in the hope to find employment there. However, their applications for asylum are ordinarily turned down by European nations on the grounds that they have no valid claims to refugee status.

Legally this is not an invalid argument, given the exclusion of economic reasons in the UNHCR's definition of the 'refugee' status. However, this raises important questions not only about the sufficiency of international institutions and their ability to sustain trans-national policies against national/ist urges to return to exclusionary state-sovereign policies; it also brings to light the supposed distinction between politics and economics. In this particular case, the different legal status within which economic 'refugees' are consequently placed, means a facilitation in member states' ability to turn these people back at their borders, and raises important questions as to the humanitarian ethics that underlie both the UN and EU as liberal political rather than merely economic institutions in this regard.

## Section 2

### Realism and the European 'refugee crisis'

*From reading Chapter 6 of The Globalization of World Politics (7th edn.), you should now be familiar with the basic tenets of the Realist International Relations (IR) theory. You are advised to consult this key chapter if you have not done so already as its contents will not be repeated here.*

*Bracketed chapter references, for example (see Ch. 8), refer to the relevant chapter in The Globalization of World Politics. Unless otherwise stated emboldened words refer to key concepts in the relevant theory chapter, in this case Chapter 6.*

This case study will look at the topic of the Syrian civil war and international intervention through the prism of Realism, covering the topics: **1) How would a realist study the 'refugee crisis'? Power and security** and **2) Is the notion of territorial sovereignty becoming obsolete in light of the current European 'refugee crisis'?**

#### **1) How would a realist study the 'refugee crisis'? Power and security**

As you already know from reading the chapter on Realism, this theoretical approach has many different tenets, but they all maintain that the state is the key actor in International Relations (IR). Migratory waves, however, bring this stance into question on two levels. First, they are premised on the crossing of borders between states, a space and thus status of political existence, not ordinarily considered by realist theories. Second, they centre around the individual (the 'refugee') rather than fixed collective entities (the state). Together, this dynamic ensures that the state as a singular and predominant entity in turn, is diffused in the process. To what extent, then, can realism make sense of the current refugee crisis?

A realist account of the current 'refugee crisis' in Europe is best placed as a critique of liberal internationalism (see section above). A starting point for realist analyses might thus be the EU's attempt at implementing a refugee quota system, premised on a 'distribution' of 'refugees' across member states, according to GDP. Initially, this saw much resistance from Balkan EU member states, while some of the richest EU member states, such as Germany and France, were among the most prominent advocates.

Here, particularly structural- or neorealist theorists would turn to an emphasis on power. In structural realist terms, this is premised on materiality, where economic and military advantages determine states' powers *relationally*. Seen as the most crucial element in determining a state's ability to protect itself against the possibility of conflict with another, power, understood in such structural realist terms, is considered to be emblematic of a state's security, and thus considered the most crucial motivator for state behaviour. Structural realist analyses of EU member states' rejection of the EU refugee quota system might thus argue that, given their weaker economic position, such states perceive the admission of 'refugees' into their countries as a destabilizing factor on their economic assets and in turn on their material power

(Ingelhart and Norris, 2016). Following such conceptualizations, 'refugees' are regarded as an indirect threat to states' security. Such conceptualizations have, however, often been critiqued by so-called critical security studies (see Section 3.2 below).

## **2) Is the notion of territorial sovereignty becoming obsolete in light of the current European 'refugee crisis'?**

Another approach to a realist study of the current European 'refugee crisis' might be through the lens of sovereignty. Two aspects traditionally mark understandings of sovereignty: internal and external sovereignty. While the former is largely concerned with a state's/government's internal responsibility to its citizens, external sovereignty is concerned with the relationality among states in the international system. Closely related to notions of negative freedom, external sovereignty is conceptualized as a policy of self-determination and non-interference. In other words, each individual state is granted sovereignty by all others to the extent that the latter do not infringe on the former's 'internal affairs'.

Unsurprisingly, the notion of bordered territoriality and a state's ability to control its own territorial borders is crucial to realist understandings of external sovereignty in this regard. In light of the current 'refugee' debate, it is precisely this notion of bordered territoriality that simultaneously acts as the largest source for conflict, and is most radically brought into question. As such, 'refugee' waves are premised on the crossing of borders—both with and without asylum status—by those who are not 'ordinarily' considered to belong to the so-called 'imagined community' that constitutes the host state. Border-crossings by 'refugees' thus blurs the imaginary of a clear territorial cut. While this remains, in security terms, a 'state of exception', it does raise questions about shifting perceptions of territorial borders. One might therefore ask: to what extent is the concept of territorial sovereignty among European (nation) states becoming obsolete in light of current 'refugee' waves?

The involvement of a series of non-state actors in exerting ethical pressures on governments across Europe should not be underestimated when asking such questions. Of course, realists may point to recent events, where individual EU member states closed their ports to NGO ships with 'refugees' on board, thus making the arrival and registration in the particular host country impossible. Recently, this concerned a 'Lifeline'-ship with over 230 people on board, which spent six days at sea after Italy and other EU member states refused to let it access their ports (Psaropoulos, 2018). Nonetheless, the rate and ongoing involvement of non-state actors in the EU 'refugee crisis' brings to light a series of questions concerning: a) the usefulness of thinking of nations, states, and the latter's borders as fixed (territorial) entities; b) who holds territorial sovereignty—states, individuals, or non-governmental organizations?; and c) how is territorial sovereignty exercised? In other words, it questions one of realism's main tenets: the centrality of the state as the main actor in international politics.

Realists would maintain that states remain in control. They would highlight that the suspension of the 'Dublin Accords' by the German chancellor Angela Merkel in August 2015, and the consequential admission of 'refugees' into German territories, for example, remains premised on territorial sovereignty. Even if this occurred in part as a consequence of continuous pressures from non-state actors, the final decision as to who may enter and remain on German grounds lies with the German government.

Similarly, realists might highlight the internal conflict that the German government faced more recently over the earlier Dublin Accord suspension and the concomitant EU 'refugee' distribution policies as another indicator for continuous state-centrality in international politics (*Der Spiegel* Staff, 2018; Kane, 2018; Stone, 2018). Threatening to break up the traditional alliance among the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and the Christian Socialist Union (CSU), who hold the majority of seats in the current German coalition government, this internal dispute was fundamentally marked by two opposing stances represented by chancellor Angela Merkel, on the one hand, and Horst Seehofer, currently Germany's minister of interior and head of the CSU, on the other. While the former advocated for a multilateral approach to policies concerning the accommodation of 'refugees' in various EU member states, the latter sought to enforce a quantitative 'upper limit' to the number of those granted asylum status. In addition, Horst Seehofer, advocated for a kind of retrospective reinforcement of the Dublin Accords, where 'refugees' currently registered in Germany, but whose first entry into the EU was through another member state, are to be sent back to these countries in an accelerated administrative process. The conflict, which came to a peak in June 2018 with rumours of both chancellor Merkel, and minister of interior Seehofer resigning from their respective posts, illustrates the ongoing dispute over state and territorial sovereignty indicated above.

While its divisive nature is certainly threatening to break up the EU as an international institution (see discussion in Section 1 above), it also suggests that a return to a cohesive statism in the conventional understanding of (structural) realism is far from enjoying unanimous support in the EU host countries. This raises important questions as to the validity and ability of either liberal institutionalism and (structural) realism, or indeed any international relations theory, to singularly explain and analyse (inter)national events in light of the current EU 'refugee crisis'.

### Section 3

#### Social constructivism and the European 'refugee crisis'

*From reading Chapter 9 of The Globalization of World Politics (7th edn.), you should now be familiar with the basic tenets of the Constructivist theoretical approach of International Relations (IR). You are advised to consult this key chapter if you have not done so already as its contents will not be repeated here.*

*Bracketed chapter references, for example (see Ch. 8), refer to the relevant chapter in The Globalization of World Politics. Unless otherwise stated emboldened words refer to key concepts in the relevant theory chapter, in this case Chapter 9.*

This case study will look at the topic of the contemporary European 'refugee crisis' through the prism of Constructivism, covering: **1) The social construction of 'refugees'** and **2) Securitization theory and 'refugees'**.

#### 1) The social construction of 'refugees'

At its most basic level, constructivists see the world as socially constituted. This means they are concerned with how ideational, as opposed to material, dynamics lead to political practices. Individuals, states, and other international actors are thus produced and created by their cultural environment, rather than fixed entities or objects that we can study. Within this environment symbols, rules, concepts, and categories (i.e. knowledge) shape how individuals construct and interpret their worlds and how they act within it. In other words, constructivists understand the world as coming into being through a dual process of interaction among agents (individuals, states, non-state actors) and the structures of their broader cultural and political environment. In this sense, there are no timeless laws that govern human behaviour. Instead, constructivists ask what events and beliefs bring out which practices. Therefore, social constructivists may ask: who is a 'refugee'? What constitute the social circumstances that determine that someone is considered a 'refugee'?

As we know, the category of 'refugee' did not exist in the political narrative prior to the 20th century (see Ch. 9). According to the UNHCR, 'refugees are persons fleeing armed conflict or persecution' (UNHCR). This is distinguished from 'migrants [who] choose to move not because of a direct threat of persecution or death, but mainly to improve their lives by finding work, or in some cases for education, family reunion, or other reasons. Unlike refugees who cannot safely return home, migrants face no such impediment to return. If they choose to return home, they will continue to receive the protection of their government' (UNHCR).

When consulting the current European 'refugee crisis', it is evident that this distinction is of utmost importance. Thus, as discussed in more detail in Section 1 above, the main motivation to come to Europe as a 'refugee', next to the fleeing from war and conflict, is premised on economic reasons (Centre for Economic Performance, 2016). These 'refugees', however, are considered 'economic migrants'. As such, they are

not ordinarily or for that matter, legally, considered to have a valid claim to refugee status. This is particularly visible in the heated debate over faster deportation policies of economic migrants in Germany seen in 2016, that saw increased intensity during the summer of 2018 (see the discussion of the internal dispute in the German government under Section 2.2 above). In this sense, the social construction along both normative (ethical) and political (juridical) lines does not only determine the reality of those who are currently seeking asylum in Europe, but raises important questions about what counts as a threat to livelihood, for whom and where, and whose livelihood is in need of protection (for a more detailed discussion see Section 5 on post/colonialism below).

## **2) Securitization theory and 'refugees'**

Embedded in the notion of 'speech acts', where language serves a performative function, securitization theory is closely related to theories of social constructivism. Pitted against state-centric notions of security, conceptualized by traditional (realist) approaches to security, securitization theory examines how cultural, ethical, and political norms establish something as an object of security. In other words, securitization theory examines what or who has a legitimate claim to being in danger and is therefore in need of protection. The theory follows a three-fold process: 1) the articulation of an existential threat in relation to a referent object (e.g. 'refugees'), which must be secured; 2) the acceptance of this threat by a credible audience (usually, though not exclusively, political actors); 3) the deployment of extraordinary measures to address this threat. This can take on different forms, such as changes in international law (e.g. 1951 Refugee Convention).

Crucially, there can be several securitization speech acts operating simultaneously, and this is indeed the case among different national and transnational actors across Europe at the moment. So, who securitizes 'refugees' and how? What do those who advocate 'refugee' deterrence policies securitize?

For those who advocate for the admission of 'refugees' into European member states, it is the securitization of 'refugees' that is at the heart of the narrative. Contemporarily, the articulation of an existential threat to the lives of 'refugees' due to warfare and military action is portrayed as an urgent threat that needs to be addressed. Prominent among such voices have been international and transnational NGOs (INGOs and TNGOs), humanitarian and international organizations, as well as the media. Embedded in ethical and international juridical norms, this argument has received credit from the publics of different EU nation states. In some cases this has resulted in governments taking extraordinary measures. An example is chancellor Merkel's decision to suspend the 'Dublin Accords' in August 2015 and admit 'refugees' into Germany. In effect, this was a suspension of an EU law, and can thus be regarded as an extraordinary measure. In other words, the example illustrates that the German government successfully securitized (Syrian) 'refugees' in the contemporary European 'refugee crisis'.

Those opposed to the admission of 'refugees' to EU member states tend to navigate the narrative into other directions. Prominent are two main factors: economics and

culture. The first is based on the idea that 'refugees', and the related state spending on expanding the social infrastructure, is a threat to national economies already weakened by the 2008 global financial crisis. Discussed in more detail under Section 2.1 above, such arguments have been both articulated and accommodated by right-wing populist movements across Europe. In Germany, for example, this has enabled the rapid rise of a new party, 'Alternative für Deutschland' (Alternative for Germany, AfD), which gained significant votes in regional elections in 2016.

To understand how opponents stress arguments of identity, we must first consult Benedict Anderson's famous analysis of nations as so-called 'imagined communities'. Premised on the constructivist notions of norm- emergence, cascade and internalization, Anderson argues that nations are imagined entities, created among its members through the articulation and practice of a sense of belonging to this particular community. This is premised on a sense of communality (ethnicity, language, norms, political convictions, ethics, etc.) among its members, which remains *imagined*, given that the majority of these members will never encounter each other (Anderson, 2006).

Such analyses are important when considering the current EU 'refugee crisis'. Crucial here is the exposure of the arbitrary nature that underlies the construction of nation-state communities—the sense of communality that applies within a particular bordered territory—suggesting that such imagined communities could potentially occur in any space, time, and in relation to any combination of ethical and cultural values. Strikingly, this argument is crucial for both advocates and opponents of the admission of 'refugees' in EU member states, albeit for different reasons. Advocates often stress notions of socialization, claiming that the identity of communities changes over time, where exchange among its 'old' and 'new' members leads to a re-evaluation and re-definition of its communal values. In other words, advocates believe that the community can be reimagined in ways that can accommodate both 'old' and 'new' members.

Opponents, on the other hand, stress the negative effects that this has in terms of diluting 'traditional' values. An example is Patriotic-Europeans-Against-the-Islamisation-of-the-West (PEGIDA) movement which was founded in Dresden, Germany in 2014. While this movement has since subsided, it was fundamentally premised on its members' perceived threat to German hegemonic culture and identity ('Leitkultur') through the admission of 'refugees' from the Middle East. Often accompanied with the seemingly contradictory emphasis on an essentialist view of cultural values that make the adaptation of host countries' values by 'refugees' supposedly impossible, such arguments have fundamentally informed the narrative of those who oppose the admission of 'refugees' to EU countries, on the basis of political, cultural, and national identity.

## Section 4

### Post structuralism and the European 'refugee crisis'

*From reading Chapter 10 of The Globalization of World Politics (7th edn.), you should now be familiar with the basic tenets of the Post structuralist theoretical approach of International Relations (IR). You are advised to consult this key chapter if you have not done so already as its contents will not be repeated here.*

*Bracketed chapter references, for example (see Ch. 8), refer to the relevant chapter in The Globalization of World Politics. Unless otherwise stated emboldened words refer to key concepts in the relevant theory chapter, in this case Chapter 10.*

This case study will look at the topic of the Syrian civil war through the prism of Constructivism, covering: **1) (Bio)Power and the European 'refugee crisis'**.

#### **1) (Bio)Power and the European 'refugee crisis'**

To study the contemporary European 'refugee crisis' from the perspective of post-structuralist thought requires that we return to the notion of power, albeit in a different sense to that offered by realist theorists. The thinker most crucial for the development of analyses of power from this post-structuralist perspective is Michel Foucault (despite the fact that he more readily thought of himself as a structuralist). His analysis of power (see Rabinow, 1984) remains indispensable for contemporary post-structuralist thinking and offers a vital critique to realist notions of power in International Relations theorizing.

Two aspects of power conceived in a Foucauldian sense are particularly significant. The first, is his argument that power is not something that is held (possessed or had) by an individual actor, but rather that it is something that is granted. Power is always transactional and consequently emerges, and is embedded in all social relations. While this means that there is no 'way out' of power, it is crucial to understand that for Foucault, contrary to realist analyses of power, this is not necessarily a bad thing. On the contrary, Foucault highlights that power is both constrictive *and* productive since power, for Foucault, is never temporally, spatially, or indeed materially, fixed, but rather emerges both in, and out of social encounters.

This leads to the second integral aspect of Foucault's analyses of power: discourse. The fundamental emphasis on social relations in Foucault's understanding of power means that communication and language become indispensable to his way of thinking of power. More than a mere analysis of language, however, discourse refers to the ways in which certain narratives emerge as socially accepted truth claims and establish themselves as 'knowledge'. Given that all social relations—and thus relations of power—can only exist in language, structured by and around discourse, we are confronted here with the Foucauldian triad, the truth/knowledge/power nexus.

We have already seen how this plays out in the construction of the social category 'refugee' in Section 3.1 above, concluding that the attribution of this category is crucial for determining what counts as a threat to livelihood, for whom and where, and whose livelihood is in need of protection. This becomes ever more important when turning to Foucault's understanding of Biopower (Foucault, 1998: 133–160).

In simple terms, Foucault's notion of biopower refers to the state's ability to determine the life and death of its citizens. Tracing this through the historical genealogy of European politics, Foucault argues that biopower has been exercised in different forms, moving through three main stages of power: juridical, disciplinary, and biopower. All three coincide with significant philosophical, political, social, and economic developments in European politics, particularly the structuring of states from monarchical feudal societies to liberal-democratic capitalist societies. The former, marked by juridical power, is fundamentally premised on the notion of state sovereignty as the ability to 'take life or let live'. Much in line with classical realist understandings of power, the ensuring of the state's wellbeing is conceived in terms of the wellbeing of the monarch, whose power in turn is uttered through conquest (of bodies). With the onset of capitalist societies, however, the assurance of the state's wellbeing shifts from a focus on the individual monarch and turns instead to the body politic as a whole. This requires closer administrative control over state populations and emerges with the development of (scientific) disciplines that enable the integration of biological processes into political calculations. It is in the discipline that knowledge about particular biological processes is produced, which are then administered at a political level.

It is here that both the notion of borders and citizenship become integral to a modern understanding and practice of biopower, which functions as an integral part of social contract theory. Dating back to writers such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1968), this is premised on the notion that individuals must yield certain prerogatives to the state in order to become members of its polity as a whole. In a contradictory sense then this means that the state's promise to ensure the individual's freedom (from harm) is subject to the individual's complete subjugation to the state. From this perspective, the status of 'refugees' as 'stateless' poses an unresolvable categorical problem to modern notions of politics: on the one hand, an international ethics purports that 'refugees' be protected; on the other hand, the institutional mechanism with which this protection is administered and fulfilled (the state) is no longer—in the case of the state of origin—or not yet—in the case of the host state—available. This, together with the premise of social contract theory that individuals must be free (from external constraints) when choosing to become a citizen of a state, means that the category of the 'refugee' does not fit neatly within the structuring of modern state politics, and indeed poses a 'threat' to the very basis of its logic; one that, as the increase in right-wing nationalist narratives and policies show, some believe must be resisted at all costs.

The point here is not to support such views. Rather, my hope is to convey that right-wing policies—at least in part—appear to emerge out of a perceived need to protect this modern world order. Understood in this sense, attachment to the preservation of

this order derives from its status as the underlying premise of identity in that it structures a view of the world with concomitant subject positions therein. Its loss may thus easily lead to a loss of sense of self (whether conscious or unconscious) and this is what 'must be' resisted. The fallacy or danger in such impressions is, of course, that it conceives of (national) identity in terms of a fixed and stagnant phenomenon that can not be altered; one that does not allow for a re-envisioning of a different world order with different subject positions and thus different and transforming notions of self and selves.

## Section 5

### Postcolonialism and the European 'refugee crisis'

*From reading Chapter 11 of The Globalization of World Politics (7th edn.), you should now be familiar with the basic tenets of the postcolonial approach of International Relations (IR). You are advised to consult this key chapter if you have not done so already as its contents will not be repeated here.*

*Bracketed chapter references, for example (see Ch. 8), refer to the relevant chapter in The Globalization of World Politics. Unless otherwise stated emboldened words refer to key concepts in the relevant theory chapter, in this case Chapter 11.*

#### Introduction: A Brief Note on Terminology

In Chapter 11 references to this theory are made by employing the words 'postcolonialism' and 'post-colonialism', defined as referring to analyses of colonialism and anti-colonialism. It is important to note, however, that one of the main objectives of this strand of thought is to question the 'post' that is attached to colonialism in this terminology. Thus, while colonialism as a formal imperial and administrative rule ended, for the most part, throughout the 1960s and 1970s as a result of anti-colonial struggles, contemporary post/colonial theorists often seek to bring into view the ways in which a colonial relation of power and domination continues to structure the contemporary world order. Such analyses vary in approach, depending on the particular perspective the individual scholar pursues. Their scope extends from economic, to political analyses in relation to international institutions, to considerations of culture and ideology through such concepts as 'whiteness' and 'anti-blackness'. While a detailed account of all these perspectives cannot be given here, I have chosen to refer to these analyses as 'post/colonial' theories in the following in order to stress the ongoing questioning of the 'post' that marks their interventions.

This case study will look at the topic of the Syrian civil war through the prism of post-colonialism covering: **1) The origins of the 'refugee crisis' as (neo)colonialism's aftermath?** and **2) Post/colonial stereotyping, fixed 'othering' and the 'imperial encounter' in the contemporary European 'refugee crisis'.**

#### **1) The origins of the 'refugee crisis' as (neo)colonialism's aftermath?**

One of the most important tenets of contemporary post/colonial theory is to question the 'post' in its name. Before we can evaluate this, however, or analyse its significance in relation to the contemporary European 'refugee crisis', it is useful to reconsider the running definition of colonialism. Broadly defined, it concerns the conquest, subjugation, and exploitation of land and its inhabitants, by one group of peoples (historically Europeans) over another (historically this concerned almost all non-European regions of the world). Significantly, the form of colonial conquest,

subjugation, and exploitation must not merely occur in the realm of the physical—space, territory, violence—to constitute colonial domination. Instead, post/colonial theorists approach the matter from an array of different spheres of human life: political, economic, aesthetic and cultural, ethical, etc. Deeply embedded in questions and critiques of assimilation, post/colonial theorists thus examine the various spheres and ways in which the legitimating narrative of a 'civilizing process' is played out both historically and contemporarily, and what its continuous effects are on shaping global relations today.

One of the first writers to highlight ongoing colonial dynamics was Kwame Nkrumah, a political philosopher and the first post-independent state leader of Ghana. Famously known for his analyses of 'neo-colonialism', a term that Nkrumah himself coined, the latter argued that the monetary, financial, and mercantilist structuring of the global economy leads to ongoing dominance by colonizing countries over their former colonies, despite the formal ending of territorial and administrative colonial rule. Premised on a Marxist analysis of the interplay between base- and superstructure (see Ch. 8 in the *GoWP* textbook), Nkrumah argues that 'neo-colonialism' enables an array of 'ideological and cultural weapons', which accompany the domination of the global economic system and consequently that of post/colonial states by their former imperial power.

Kwame Nkrumah's analysis of this form of 'neo-colonialism' is crucial for considerations of the current European 'refugee crisis'. Although their exact numbers remain contested, we have seen above that a significant percentage of those making their way to Europe to apply for asylum, do so for economic reasons. The result of increased unemployment and economic instability in their home countries, the origins of such dynamics, as International Political Economists point out, lie in the interconnectedness of the global economic system. From this perspective, the global political economy and resultant economic inequalities are considered the main driver of international politics. Recently, this has seen an increased focus on the effects that neoliberal policies—promotion of free trade, reduction of state spending, currency devaluation, privatization of state-owned industries, undermining of organized labour—have on international relations.

Crucial here are, as Nkrumah points out, international loans that are given to countries in the so-called 'global south', most often former colonies. Not only do such loans continue to tie formerly colonized governments to international institutions that are, both from a mercantilist and representative point of view, dominated by former colonial powers; the loans that institutions such as the World Bank under the Bretton Woods Project (see weblinks on World Bank and Bretton Woods Project below) offer are also tied to certain **donor conditions**. Increasingly, these have been marked by neo-liberal policies such as those listed above. As we have seen under section 1, however, such policies often prove crippling to the local economy within which they are implemented. In this sense, it remains questionable whether these loans fully serve the (economic) development of those countries it claims to aid, in ways that serve the latter. Thus, it might be argued that, beyond the manifestation of unequal power relations both inherent to the World Bank's representative structure, as well as

its assimilation-based 'restructuring' approach to loan-giving, such neo-colonial practices, especially where they are tied to neo-liberal donor conditions, are the cause rather than a solution to the current economically-incentivized migration waves to Europe.

Another way in which the 'post' in post/colonialism is brought into question by the current 'refugee crisis' is in relation to a re-examination of the drawing of borders by European colonial powers. Particularly significant in relation to the African continent, the division of its territory into European-controlled colonies, is largely the consequence of the so-called 'Scramble for Africa', which saw its peak in 1883 with the 'Berlin Conference'. Held by Otto von Bismarck, then the chancellor of the newly unified Germany, the conference sought to settle trade and border disputes among European colonial powers in relation to European colonies on the African continent. This largely meant that African territory was divided up into European colonies, with very little previous knowledge of, nor consideration for, the political ethnic and cultural characteristics that marked these regions and its inhabitants. Given the novel ways in which ethnicity was defined, classified, and administered by colonial rules, this resulted in ethnic conflict in some colonized regions, often actively encouraged by colonial powers, as part of the commonly used divide-and-rule policy. Even after independence, such conflicts have, in part, persisted or re-emerged. Thus, while they are primarily accompanied by 'internally displaced peoples' and large-scale 'refugee' and migration waves into neighbouring countries, the significance of this colonial aftermath is crucial in any consideration of international politics in the context of 'refugees' and must not be underestimated (Birdal and Squires, 2017; Blanton et al., 2001).

## **2) Post/colonial stereotyping, fixed 'othering' and the 'imperial encounter' in the contemporary European 'refugee crisis'**

Another way in which post/colonial theorists might analyse the current European 'refugee crisis' is through considerations of a politics of representation. Crucial here are evaluations of the semantic and linguistic representations of 'The refugee', and the ways in which it appears as a 'figure' in particular settings and narratives. In many ways, such considerations emerge from the writings of Frantz Fanon, one of the earliest and most influential African anticolonial authors. Particularly important is his analysis of the colonial 'gaze' (Fanon, 1967: 109–140). This, Fanon argues, serves two simultaneous purposes: on the one hand, it fixes the 'colonized' and racialized body in ways that strips her or him of any meaning (i.e. social identity markers) other than 'being black'. As Achilles Mbembe's reinterpretation of Fanon makes clear, this classification, in turn, results in the ability on the part of the 'colonizer' to classify the 'colonized' and place him or her within the particular power relation of the post/colonial society, whereby the former dominates the latter. In other words, it ensures the 'colonizer's' ability to imbue the 'colonizer' with social meaning, reinforcing the hierarchical power relationship between the two (Mbembe, 2001: 173–211).

Similar reinterpretations of such politics of representation have also emerged from other post/colonial regions. Among them is Homi Bhabha and his notion of 'postcolonial stereotyping' (see Box 5.1 below). Premised on the poststructuralist strand of thought (see Ch. 11), Bhabha approaches his analysis of postcolonial stereotyping through a critique of the discursive construction of 'otherness' in the truth regime which surrounds the colonial discourse. In other words, his main argument suggests that there is a 'fixity' in the ideological and cultural construction of 'the other' (in our case, 'the refugee') through which such subjects are always already 'known' (see also writings by such scholars as Edward Said on Orientalism and Stuart Hall on Identity). This exerts power in the sense of establishing a truth-regime, through which 'refugees' can be defined in generic terms and consequently controlled in the process. In other words, Bhabha argues, this leads to a discursive act of surveillance and control.

**Box 5.1: Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture***

Colonial discourse 'turns on the recognition and disavowal of racial/cultural/historical differences. Its predominant strategic function is the creation of a space for a 'subject peoples' through the production of knowledges in terms of which surveillance is exercised ... [It denotes] a form of governmentality that in marking out a "subject nation", appropriates, directs and dominates its various spheres of activity'.

Homi Bhabha (2004) *The Location of Culture*, New York, USA: Routledge Ltd., pp. 100–101.

Important then is the question as to whom or what the particular representation and construction of the figure of the 'other', in this case 'The refugee' really serves. This matter is further complicated by the fact that discursive surveillance and control through representative politics occurs both through benevolent 'othering' and through harmful 'othering'. It is not only those opposed to the admission of 'refugees' that define the parameters of their identity. Even those advocating for the admission of 'refugees' and the 'preservation' of difference (otherness) rely on a categorical parameter within which 'the refugee' is demarcated. Thus, both benevolent and harmful narratives are privy to denying 'the other' to be other in his or her multiple ways (Ahmed, 2000).

In this sense, we might argue that defining 'refugees' in the colonial discourse is an example of the ways international relations remains premised on 'imperial encounters'. Coined by Roxanne L. Doty, this signifies an 'asymmetrical encounter in which one entity has been able to construct "realities" that were taken seriously and acted upon [while] the other entity has been denied equal degrees or kinds of agency' (Doty, 1996). Indicative might, once again, be the discussion on the distinction between 'refugee' and 'migrant' and the ways in which region and therefore race demarcate the two. Beyond the 'merely' legal distinction then it

becomes obvious that the majority of those who come to Western European countries as 'refugees' are those who come from outside of Europe's borders, while many 'economic migrants' came, at least initially, from Eastern European states. Given that the former are considered 'vulnerable persons' in that they are least able to defend themselves and require protection by others, the regionalization and consequential racialization of this representation of 'refugees' vs. 'migrants' carries traces of a colonial 'civilizing' narrative. When projected onto a larger scale, this raises important questions about the unequal representation of those who carry agency vs. those who are (un)able to self-govern. As such, it serves to misconstrue the (white) 'West' as a salient place, suggesting the false notion that migration linked to people's protection of their livelihoods (whether economic or otherwise) is a unidirectional process from the 'non-West' to the 'West' (Europe).

## Section 6

### Feminism and the European 'refugee crisis'

*From reading Chapter 12 of The Globalization of World Politics (7th edn.), you should now be familiar with the basic tenets of feminist approaches to International Relations (IR). You are advised to consult this key chapter if you have not done so already as its contents will not be repeated here.*

*Bracketed chapter references, for example (see Ch. 11), refer to the relevant chapter in The Globalization of World Politics. Unless otherwise stated emboldened words refer to key concepts in the relevant theory chapter, in this case Chapter 12. Materials from Chapters 17 and 19 may also be useful here.*

This case study will look at the topic of the Syrian civil war through the prism of feminism covering: **1) Feminist critiques of the definition of 'refugees'** and **2) Feminist critiques of international human rights.**

#### **1) Feminist critiques of the definition of 'refugees' in the UN Convention on Refugees**

Feminist critiques of international relations predominantly emphasize the absence of women's experience in both its theoretical and practical aspects. Consequently, it is often argued, policies are premised on androcentric norms embedded in both epistemological and ontological approaches to IR. This has been reiterated with regard to conceptualizations of 'refugees' and emergent international policies and practices.

Recently, the number of feminists criticizing the Convention on Refugees for a neglect of gender-based definition of persecution has proliferated. These theorists claim that the universal definition of 'refugees' promoted in the Convention is premised on male experiences. This, they argue, leaves women 'refugees' faced with rejections of their claims because their experiences of persecution are left unrecognized by the Convention on 'refugee' discourse. Crucially, then, it is not merely the 'adding-in' of gender that feminists advocate. Instead, it is argued, the very notion of persecution must be reconsidered if the female gender and women's experiences are to be taken seriously (Greatbach, 1989). Indeed this reaffirms much of feminist IR discourse, which argues that the very parameter of the IR discipline must be transformed if women's experiences are to be accounted for in global politics.

One of the main arguments, therefore, is that persecutory practices accounted for in the Convention on Refugees and other treaties concerned with human rights must be extended to include the private sphere. Given the persistence of a gendered division of labour (see Ch. 17), feminists argue that it is in the private sphere that women experience the most danger and a violation of their rights. However, this is not readily accounted for in the traditional theoretical framework of IR, where the state (the

public) remains the main actor. Thus, the definition of 'refugee' as a person fleeing from armed conflict or as a person who no longer enjoys the protection of his/her government is premised upon violations that occur at the public, rather than private, level. Those whose livelihoods are endangered from within the private sphere—which national law often does not account for—are not considered and recognized in such frameworks. While this is often considered particularly stifling by feminist scholars in relation to such dynamics as rape and inner-household violence, it carries further significance in relation to the current 'refugee crisis' in that the disacknowledgement of socio-economic conditions to warrant refugee status relegates the latter too to the private sphere. Thus, while it is predominantly men who currently seek refuge for economic reasons, their intent lies in the support of their families elsewhere. In other words, their concern is with the private sphere, one that remains both explicitly and implicitly unacknowledged by the definition of who 'counts' as a 'refugee' under current international refugee law.

## 2) Feminist critiques of international human rights

The idea that 'gender' alone does not suffice to take account of women's experiences at the international level is crucial also to feminist critiques of international law, particularly concerning the protection of human rights. Catherine MacKinnon, in her book *Are Women Human?*, offers a particularly worthwhile critique of the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) (see Ch.17). Highlighting, once again, that the persistent division of labour is not taken into consideration in the construction of this convention, MacKinnon's main argument rests on the idea that 'the status and treatment of men still tacitly but authoritatively define[s] the human universal, eliding the particularity of being a man' (MacKinnon 2006). This suggests that, internationally, the definition of the human subject is premised on a fixed understanding of idealized male/public subjectivities. Simultaneously, its others, the female/private subjectivities, are devalued. This MacKinnon attributes to conventional understandings of equality in both law and philosophy, which remain premised on questions of sameness and difference: 'The word "equal" means "same" ' (MacKinnon 2006). Consequently, women are made to 'fit'. As such, international human rights treaties, MacKinnon argues, invoke a formal demand for the assimilation of women to men, if they wish to see their rights protected. In other words, 'the definition of women's identity has always been made by the concept of resemblance to the oppressor' (Marcil-Lacoste in: Harding and Hintikka, 1983). Much like the arguments presented on stereotypes above (Section 5), this denies the 'other' (in our case the female experience) to be 'other' *and* equal. Consequently, international jurisdiction and policy—including that concerned with the status and accommodation of 'refugees'—falls short of accounting for such gendered circumstances.

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