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Grassroots responses to mass migration in Europe

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## Grassroots responses to mass migration in Europe: Introduction

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### 1 Shifts in the EU's border regime

Whereas migration continuously is taking place, the events of the second half of the year 2015 and the first months of 2016 still mark a historical exception when over million refugee-migrants made their way across the different layers of the European border regime, marching along motorways, demanding again and again to cross the next border, and finally starting to arrive in masses at Central European cities. The international situation with the Arab Spring and the Syrian civil war in the backyard of Europe had led to a rise in numbers of displaced and fleeing persons from 2011 onwards. The national and EU reception infrastructure and EU asylum system, as formulated within the framework of the CEAS (Common European Asylum System), were not prepared to accommodate these numbers of people seeking protection, shelter and security in a decent way as stipulated in international, European and national law. The 'long summer of migration,' as these months were labelled in critical migration studies (Kasperek & Speer, 2016), led to a temporal suspension of the EU and nation-state border and migration control regime and a massive 'migration reception crisis' across the continent. While there was general uncertainty over what kind of 'crisis' that was and who it belonged to, as Rajaram (2016) notes in his 'Introduction' to a special issue of *Intersections. East European Journal of Society and Politics*, there was also a rise of solidarity and charity initiatives in broad segments of civil society, organized networks and institutionalized NGOs (Cantat, 2016; Hamann & Karakayali, 2016; Apostolova 2016; Greenberg & Spasić, 2017). Solidarity and charity initiatives were launched across Europe and with a high degree of transnational mobility and networking—including volunteering along the Balkan route, on the Greek islands, along the motorways, at border crossing points, train stations, camps, etc., from Sweden to Gaziantep as the Turkish–Syrian border 'entered into the European spotlight' (Kasperek, 2016, p. 2).

‘Hospitality’ and ‘welcome culture,’ as it was quickly framed by media and politicians alike, seemed for a short time to dominate at least part of the societal responses to migratory movements. In Germany, a survey of the Social Sciences Institute of the Evangelical Church from December 2015 shows ‘that during the fall of 2015 more than 10,9 per cent of Germans older than 14 years had volunteered to help refugees’ (Ahrens, 2015, quoted by Hamann & Karakayali, 2016, p. 70). In fact, a report based on 507 interviews with refugees fleeing to Turkey, Lebanon and eight EU-countries during these times clearly shows that those who made their journey through the ‘formalized Balkan corridor’ in the second half of 2015 frequently reported to be ‘supported by tourists offering a ride or food, by locals, volunteers, and NGO staff.’ The report also mentions that almost half of the sample (48 per cent) ‘stated that they had experienced NGOs as a supportive actor during their journey’ (Hess & Petrogiannis 2020, p. 18). Especially the so-called formalized or humanitarian corridor along the Balkan route, which operated for six months until Macedonia and Slovenia officially closed their borders on 8 March 2016, and had established a kind of ‘state sponsored transit’ (Hameršak et al., 2020), was only possible due to a corresponding humanitarian infrastructure by heterogeneous assemblages of groups, individuals and well institutionalized organizations. ‘The formalized corridor was the shifting and ever-changing interplay of the agency and autonomy of (mass) migration, the engagement of solidarity structures and broader civil society, as well as various humanitarian and securitarian practices of the affected state’ (Beznec & Kurnik, 2020, p. 35).

Whereas many studies on this phenomena focus on Western societies or individuals from the West volunteering mostly in the Southern part of the globe—indicating a certain class and geopolitical bias—, scholarship on the recent rise in solidarity and charity in the wake of recent migratory movements rather points to specific regional and local genealogies of helping others and of being in solidarity with people on the move, and the existence of well-established national and transnational networks of migration-related and anti-racist activism and advocacy (see e.g. Bužinkić, 2018; Beznec & Kurnik, 2020; El Sharaawi & Razsa, 2019). Barbara Beznec and Andrej Kurnik (2020, p. 1) speak of ‘assemblages of mobility’ along the Balkan route, consisting of the very practices of the migrants and various solidarity initiatives (also by plenty of diverse local actors such as churches, youth organizations, etc.) that made the long summer of migration possible:

By the time the first refugees arrived at the Slovenian border, hundreds of locals already volunteered for months along the entire route from the Greek islands to the Austrian border by collecting humanitarian aid, providing direct and immediate assistance to the people traveling north, and/or joining several antiracist manifestations for open borders in Slovenia, even denouncing or subverting government attempts to establish state control over freedom of movement (Pistotnik et al., 2016, quoted by Beznec & Kurnik 2020, 44).

The far-reaching responses by the EU and the nation states to these migratory movements, especially the steady closure of the Balkan route in 2016 with the help of border closures, the setting up of new bordering infrastructures, as fences, watchtowers, and ditches as well as the normalization of violence in the European ‘borderscapes,’ went along with an increasing pressure on these welcoming infrastructures and solidarity initiatives (see Hameršak et al., 2020; Nagy, 2016). On the one hand, as states regained control over the migratory movements and were increasingly able to restore themselves as the central

sovereign powers organizing reception, especially not-institutionally organized actors and groups got pushed more and more out of the field, and were forced to register and to transform themselves into institutionally acknowledged and legally approved associations and NGOs (see Cantat, 2020; Jovanović, 2020). On the other hand, initiatives and actors that did not follow the new regulation were increasingly criminalized, as is the case on the Greek islands, where almost all independent monitoring and rescue activities by volunteers have been stopped due to the risk of being the next victim of a smuggling litigation (Adam & Hänsel, 2021).

Nonetheless, there are still ‘helping hands’ around, at a local level as well as ever better organized transnationally. These everyday and grassroots-based, at times invisible acts of support for people on the move as well as the highly visibilized practices of monitoring, documenting, scandalizing, and protesting against the brutalization of border and reception policies as they are performed today in many of the European borders are still part and parcel of the daily ‘border struggles’ as Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson (2013) once termed the ongoing contestations of how the border is enacted and experienced.

## 2 Forms of humanitarianism

In the social sciences in general, the 2015 ‘migration reception crisis’ stimulated a conspicuous body of research focusing on grassroots responses to mass migration, the role of volunteers and activism (Feischmidt et al., 2018; McGee & Pelham, 2018; Rozakou, 2017; Sandri, 2017; Sutter, 2020). This literature has emphasized important aspects of the broad migration receiving apparatus, which is not only constituted by governmental and inter-governmental entities and structures, but also by migrant networks, spontaneous movements, civil associations, local NGOs, and so forth. It illuminated some of the continuities and shifts that shape the work of humanitarian reason on different scales (Brković, 2016a). Ambivalences and the largely emergent character of vernacular forms of humanitarianism meant that the grounds of critique had to be explored anew (Brković, 2017).

Whereas the critique of large-scale international forms of humanitarianism (De Lauri, 2016; 2019; Dunn, 2012; Fassin, 2011; Pandolfi, 2003) has addressed the dimensions of power, injustice and inequality enhanced by humanitarian actions and narratives, studies of bottom-up humanitarian responses in the wake of the last decade’s migration processes directed their attention towards forms of solidarity mostly built around notions of prefigurative politics, ethical citizenship, anti-racism, affective aid, and face-to-face solidarity. Of course, grassroots responses do not necessarily accommodate practices and ideals of care and solidarity. Europe at large has been caught between two simultaneous responses: hospitality versus xenophobia, compassionate pragmatism versus fear of (cultural and religious) difference (De Lauri, 2019, p. 162). In one case or the other (grassroots hospitality or grassroots racism), humanitarian ethos has been constantly mobilized through notions of crisis and emergency. In fact, whether it was an NGO willing to rescue people at sea or a right-wing movement arguing for rejecting shipwrecked persons, crisis and emergency have been used as *the* conceptual framework to read migration flows (Rajaram, 2016). Rescue/civil humanitarianism (Esperti, 2020) and xenophobia (Cap, 2018) have thus co-existed in the narrative of crisis that ignited diverse grassroots responses.

The conceptualization of mass migration as crisis and emergency—and therefore as a humanitarian issue—shows that grassroots solidarity and care are integrated into a larger and highly politicized humanitarian framework able to absorb a plurality of experiences, ideas, and elements ranging from militarization to civil engagement, and from institutional approaches to activism. Vernacular, grassroots, voluntary, and other bottom-up humanitarian responses to this sense of crisis have ambivalently provided space to pursue prefigurative forms of politics, while reproducing particular forms of power and inequality (Brković, forthcoming). Multiple forms of humanitarianism—international, vernacular, subversive, civil, voluntary, grassroots, everyday, demotic, domestic, imperial, solidary—confirm rather than contradict the main premise on which the modern humanitarian ethos rests: the recognition of a crisis and the need to do something now (Sandri, 2018; Altman, 2018; Horstmann, 2017; Richey, 2018; Taithe, 2019; Kloos, 2019; Fechter & Schwittay, 2019; Vandervoordt, 2019). Identifying a social or political phenomenon as a humanitarian crisis corresponds to the tendency of allowing specific forms of action but disallowing others, pushing the public debate into a specific direction but not another (De Lauri, 2019; Scott-Smith, 2016). To declare a humanitarian crisis, such as the 2015 ‘migration crisis,’ implies an imperative to do something, and to do it now. This makes room for a certain latitude in the scope of possible action. First, precisely what should be done remains unspecified in the narrative of humanitarian crisis, which focuses on immediate needs. What becomes prevalent is that doing something is clearly necessary, which often means that anything can be done, because something is better than nothing. Indeed, ‘it’s better than nothing’ is one of the most common responses to any critique of humanitarianism (Dunn, 2019). Doing something was a core element of grassroots humanitarian responses to mass migration, and of course ‘something’ has been deployed in a variety of ways, some highly elaborated, others more improvised, ranging from complex rescuing operations to occasional volunteerism. Whether in continuity with more established anti-racism movements or as expressions of new European identities, these responses have not simply expanded the realm of humanitarianism, they have also actively promoted different forms of participation and self. As the European borders became ‘humanitarian borders’ (Walters, 2010) in the post-2015 conceptualization of the crisis, forces of contingency (i.e. humanitarian exceptionalism) merged with grassroots instances of renewed volunteerism, citizenship, and collaboration.

### 3 But what does ‘grassroots’ mean?

The papers in this special issue illustrate the complexities of finding the right vocabulary—both descriptive and analytical—to explain how people living across Europe have responded to the recent shifts in the EU border regime. They also help us understand some of the challenges of thinking critically about this topic. This thematic issue contributes to the ongoing lively debates on the relationship between humanitarianism, solidarity, and human rights in Europe. It does so by approaching the concept of ‘grassroots’ critically and from an ethnographic perspective. We suggest that the meanings, practices, and socio-political effects of ‘grassroots’ need to be ethnographically explored, rather than assumed in advance as a given.

In the world of political praxis, the term ‘grassroots’ evokes almost instant associations

of political progressiveness (Staples, 2016). In leftist, feminist, no-border, and antinationalist circles (and in some recent critical migration scholarship), grassroots are contrasted with state institutions, which are seen as failing, absent, or violent (Milan, 2018). To describe a movement or a response as ‘grassroots’ is meant to indicate that it is widely accepted by those affected by the issue at hand and that, therefore, it is socially just, morally legitimate, and politically progressive. Indeed, in the face of violence inherent to the European border regime, inflicted and upheld by the representatives of the institutions of the EU and its member states, the focus on non-institutional, grassroots responses to mass migration in Europe may be politically and analytically promising (Vandervoordt & Verschraegen, 2019).

Yet, such a simplistic understanding of ‘grassroots’ can be theoretically and politically limiting for several reasons. First, as mentioned above, ‘grassroots’ reactions to migration may involve negative and violent, as well as welcoming, or indifferent standpoints and responses. Exploring how some types of grassroots responses emerge in particular locales and among particular groups of people, but not in others, suggests that in order to understand ‘grassroots,’ the analytical focus must be broadened so as to see the ways in which ‘grassroots’ and ‘institutional’ are co-constituted differently in various socio-historical contexts. An excellent example of this is the outpouring of grassroots support and solidarity to refugees in Serbia, which took place in 2015, while the Balkan route was open (Greenberg & Spasić, 2017).<sup>1</sup> However, once the EU borders went up again, and the Balkan route was officially ‘closed,’ solidary grassroots support scaled down, while indifferent and violent responses to people on the move became much more common. Journalist reports about groups of men in Slovenia who self-organized in 2019 to hunt and violently attack people on the move are another example of this.<sup>2</sup> Differences between political ‘solidarity’ and ‘the culture of welcome’ (*Willkommenskultur*) articulated in Germany are yet another example of how broad the scope ‘grassroots’ can be. There, the term *Willkommenskultur* was first used by organizations such as the Federation of German Employers, Association of German Engineers, and several political parties to discuss problems of migration of highly skilled workers into Germany (Hamann & Karakayali, 2016). Since 2015, however, the term *Willkommenskultur* has been used in new ways. Some initially used the term to advocate ‘radical cosmopolitanism,’ which would challenge traditional European ideas about belonging, polity, borders, and citizenship that are commonly expressed in the vocabulary of a nation-state (e.g. Baban & Rygiel, 2017). However, soon a distinction emerged between two kinds of grassroots responses: ‘solidarity,’ as a more intentionally political and egalitarian relationship towards people on the move, and ‘*Willkommenskultur*,’ as a more integration-oriented and politically neutral form of everyday help provided by German citizens (Karakayali, 2017; Hamann & Karakayali, 2016; Rozakou, 2017).

Second, ‘grassroots’ is a profoundly ambivalent concept. It may refer to ‘prefigurative politics,’ striving to reflect those forms of care and relationality that are seen as constitutive of a future, and better, society. At the same time, grassroots forms of help may contribute to the reproduction of neoliberal regimes of care. As Muehlebach (2012) has demonstrated, the neoliberalization of welfare may include an active call of the state to

<sup>1</sup> See also the 2015 docu-drama *Logbook Serbistan*, directed by Želimir Žilnik: <https://www.zilnikzelimir.net/logbook-serbistan>

<sup>2</sup> <https://apnews.com/article/57424e6bf60046e594b4c052bac86b6c>

transform oneself into an ‘ethical citizen’ and a ‘loving citizen,’ a person willing to step in and mediate the effects of the withdrawal of public and state forms of support (see also Rose, 1996; Hess, 2014). Neoliberal transformations of welfare throughout Europe have evoked particular forms of morality, which are reflected in the move of responsibility for survival and wellbeing from public institutions to an individual and their moral dispositions (Trnka & Trundle, 2014). Similarly, complex configurations of care, morality, and responsibility are emerging with respect to the treatment of migrants, refugees, asylum seekers, and other people on the move in various places in Europe (Van Dyk & Misbach, 2016; Fleischmann & Steinhilper, 2017; Cabot, 2016; 2013; Rajaram, 2018; Feischmidt et al., 2019; Brković, 2018; 2016b). Over the last six years, we have witnessed intense negotiations and disagreements taking place across Europe—from the discussions of the Dublin agreement in the EU parliament and various state commissions, to deeply intimate conversations about humanitarian aid in the privacy of one’s home—over what would constitute an ‘appropriate’ responsibility for which actor concerning the survival and wellbeing of people on the move during their attempts to reach the EU and once they are there. In these negotiations, it is not always quite clear where the boundary between prefigurative politics that charts the contours of a desired future and the moral configurations that are more in tune with the neoliberal political projects of the EU and its individual member states lies. As all the papers in this thematic issue illustrate, an ethnographic approach is needed to tease out how these ambivalences and complexities of the grassroots responses to mass migration are played out in everyday life in Europe.

#### 4 Contributions to the special issue

The range of grassroots responses to the 2015 migration reception crisis is vast. Depending on the local, national, and migratory contexts, different groups employed different modalities and policies to help the people on the move.

Synnøve Bendixsen and Marie Sandberg ethnographically explore small-scale volunteering and NGO work in Greece, Germany, and Sweden. They suggest that three different modalities of everyday humanitarianism have emerged among non-professional volunteers, and that we can distinguish these on the basis of temporality. Temporality of crisis is characterized by an impulse to immediately provide help in an emergency; temporality of care develops in an attempt to help across asymmetries and inequalities of power that shape relations between refugees and migrants on the one hand and volunteers on the other; temporality of reflexivity takes place alongside ambivalences and doubts that strongly colour the experience of volunteering.

Lieke van der Veer’s analysis redirects our attention to the bureaucratic context structuring the work of grassroots organizations to a great extent. Studying the work of grassroots organizations that support refugee status holders in Rotterdam, van der Veer shows how classifications regarding preferred target groups determine certain grassroots responses as fringe-activities that are less legible bureaucratically. Such lessened legibility translates into insecurity for grassroots organizers and, in combination with employment precarity, motivate them to play guessing games and to give in to municipal preferences to improve their funding eligibility. By exploring in particular the story of a grassroots organizer—a woman of colour with a forced migration background—the article links the

process of giving in to municipal preferences to different attempts to render grassroots activities legible, enabling a less precarious life, and turn affective labour into a life-sustaining practice.

Some of the practices that were developed in this large framework of grassroots humanitarianism evolved over time into different forms of engagement with border restrictions and violence. A case explored by Marijana Hameršak in her paper is the lasting practice of reporting of pushbacks by grassroots groups active at different locations at the Southeastern territorial fringes of the EU. After a comprehensive review of the relevant literature on pushback reports and reporting practices, Hameršak focuses on these reports as a form of writing in the context of a ‘global documenting fever.’

Edgar Córdova Morales draws the attention to the dark side of the European migration and asylum regime starting from an ethnography-volunteering conducted in a small humanitarian organization in the refugee camp Kara Tepe, a few kilometers away from the old site of the former Moria camp. In his reflection on politics of life and death, he discusses the EU–Turkey Deal of 2016 in light of the enactment of a restrictive asylum process, which made the former Moria camp a detention centre for thousands of migrants unable to access international protection, thus generating demonstrations and riots. The article delves into the asylum process in Lesbos as a postcolonial border space where re-actualized forms of racializations of migrants become mechanisms of control, detention, illegalization and ultimately exposure to premature socio-physical death.

In his research note, Grzegorz Piotrowski discusses how the discursive field around the issue of migration has rapidly changed in Poland since 2015. Contextualizing anti- and pro-migrant activism in the broader struggles over party politics, the author points to the new and complicated political alliances emerging in the country. Focusing particularly on the relations between radical grassroots groups, registered NGOs, civil servants, and politicians, the author demonstrates the importance of municipal and city levels for articulating political struggles across lines of identitarian and other distinctions.

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## The temporality of humanitarianism: Provincializing everyday volunteer practices at European borders

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### Abstract

While recognizing that ‘volunteering for refugees’ is entangled in ethical and political power dimensions, this article will discuss how we can ethnographically explore the everyday humanitarian practices of volunteers as shaped in intrinsic ways by their mode of being in the world as ethically concerned human beings. Building on recent scholarship within the anthropology of humanitarianism in which local and everyday versions of humanitarian practice are foregrounded, we wish to further the understanding of everyday volunteer practices through establishing a lens of temporality. Based on ethnographic fieldwork and qualitative interviews among small-scale volunteer networks and NGOs in Greece and in Northern Europe working in response to the refugee influx to Europe since 2015, we suggest three different modalities of volunteering among non-professionals, which we designate: *temporality of crisis*, which concentrates on the impulse to help as an immediate response to a critical moment in time, *temporality of care* expressing the asymmetrical presences in the field of volunteering and *temporality of reflexivity*, which highlights ambivalence and doubt as intrinsic to the volunteer practices. In this article, we aim for a provincializing of everyday humanitarian practices and explore humanitarianism ‘from the ground’ and in specific locations and times.

**Keywords:** provincializing humanitarianism, temporality, anthropology of humanitarianism, doing good, informal refugee relief, summer of welcome 2015, volunteering, European borders

## 1 Introduction

When refugees and migrants arrive in Europe, they meet not only border police interrogating them, medical personnel testing them, and asylum caseworkers interviewing them. They also meet a plethora of international and national NGOs, run by employers or volunteers, set up to assist with a range of tasks, such as conducting free legal help, providing clothes and food, and offering language courses. During 2015, a hitherto unseen level of civil society engagement and solidarity initiatives unfolded (Witkowski et al., 2019; UN,

2015). Some of these NGOs have existed for a long time, while others were set up rather spontaneously, partly as a response to the increase in migrants in need of basic commodities and assistance. The range of humanitarian organizations and volunteer networks for refugee relief in Europe today provides a different spectrum of responses than the otherwise inhospitable policies from European Nation States toward refugees and migrants.

Scholars have pointed to the fact that humanitarianism and doing good implicate a range of historically constituted, and less visible hierarchies and power relations between the helper/volunteer and the helped (Fassin, 2005; Dunn, 2017). Being able to provide help is a privileged position, which often victimizes the ones in need (Ticktin, 2016). This entanglement between doing good and power creates at one and the same time the figure of the benevolent benefactor and the suffering beneficiary. Scholars within the field of anthropology of humanitarianism have critically examined the imbalanced power dimensions inherent in humanitarian acts (Ticktin, 2015); humanitarian practice has been studied as a form of governance and critiqued for its lack of fighting societal inequalities (Fassin, 2012; Ticktin, 2015; 2016). We commend such critiques of humanitarian logic and its practices. Simultaneously, increased scholarship has turned toward a deeper ethnographic approach exploring in depth the different ethical, emotional and moral sentiments involved in humanitarian practices (Itzhak, 2020; Scherz, 2014; Weiss, 2015; Mittermaier, 2014). This article resonates with the call for more empirical and theoretical exploration of the growing phenomenon of grassroots humanitarian activities (Fechter & Schwittay, 2019) and their everyday practices. Our concern is how humanitarianism unfolds in practice, empirically, ‘on the ground with all the human ambivalences and contradictions this entails’ (Weiss, 2015, p. 281). Notably, we seek to contribute to a growing interdisciplinary literature on grassroots’ forms of humanitarianism and the effort to decenter (Brkovic, 2017; McGee & Pelham, 2018) and provincialize humanitarianism (Weiss, 2015) by including *temporality* into the quotation. Recognizing that the ‘meaning of “politics of humanitarianism” cannot be determined a priori’ (Weiss, 2015, p. 289), we ethnographically investigate ‘grassroots’ forms of humanitarianism *in situ*, and importantly, we explore the temporal effects of humanitarianism from the perspectives of the volunteers. Increasingly, scholars have attended to the temporal dimension, rather than the spatial one, to understand migration as a phenomenon interwoven with other social processes, such as globalization, neoliberal politics, and de-colonization (Cwerner, 2001; Griffiths et al., 2013; Mezzadra & Neilson, 2013; Ramsay, 2020; Bandak & Janeja, 2018; Bendixsen & Eriksen, 2018). Here we introduce the perspective of temporality as an analytical approach to explore humanitarianism as dynamic, shifting, and relational with ongoing sociopolitical processes as well as with the self-defining experiences of being a volunteer that takes place over time. Foregrounding temporality as an analytical lens can provide critical new knowledge about the socio-cultural dynamics of humanitarianism. Temporality is inherent in humanitarianism in that while ‘humanitarianism has morphed in the last decade, it is nevertheless still distinguished [...] by its particular focus on crisis and emergency. Humanitarianism has no long-term plan to address inequality’ (Ticktin, 2015, p. 82). Instead, care is provided in a temporal presence (Ticktin, 2015). The analytical perspective of temporality is relevant here in at least two ways; first, it refers to temporal phases through which grassroots actors undergo in their position as humanitarians (before, during and after volunteering), and second, it alerts to that the temporal aspect of the socio-political context of the situ-

ation to which the humanitarian acts are a response is not static, but change over time, for example as a 'crisis' becomes less critical or move elsewhere, due to changing policies and political responses. The approach of temporality in the study of humanitarianism, we believe, casts critical light on the need for the continued decentering and provincializing humanitarianism and their expressions. Based on interviews and fieldwork conducted in Greece and Northern Europe (Germany and Sweden) 2018–2019, our ethnographic focus is on the afterthoughts and reflections of grassroots volunteers for smaller organizations and informal networks that were established as a response to the increased number of migrants arriving in Europe in 2015.

To analyze the temporal phases and the changing sociopolitical contexts of volunteering, we present three modalities of humanitarianism (cf. Dunn, 2017) based on a joint analysis of our fieldwork material; modalities which take form over time and sometimes co-exist. In the first modality, temporality of crisis: The impulse to help, humanitarianism presents itself as a *politics of commitment*. It bears resemblance to the impulse of philanthropy; 'the selfless giving away of wealth that arouses strong emotions and brings people to tears [and which] contrasts formalized practices of regulated and legislated giving' (Bornstein, 2009, p. 630). This modality conveys the process through which volunteers are driven by an urgency to act out of compassion which generate a commitment we can consider as political, as well as a transformation of 'distance suffering' for the volunteers. The second modality, temporality of care: Asymmetrical presences in the field, express that humanitarianism in the field in practice presents itself as an asymmetric relation between humans situated in different socio-economic, temporal, and legal positions. The third modality, temporality of reflexivity: Ambivalence and doubt, takes place as an afterthought and is a modality unfolding when the volunteers are no longer directly engaged with voluntary work. Here, humanitarianism is situated within an ambivalence where volunteers move reflexively between a doubt and hope of what their contribution have entailed.

Firstly, we will shortly review some of the existing critique of humanitarianism before we discuss our methods. We then discuss a selection of empirical cases, based on fieldwork conducted among volunteers in Lesbos and in the Northern European borderlands (Germany and Sweden), exploring the practices of volunteers through the lens of temporality.

## 2 The politics of humanitarianism

As depicted by Feldman, humanitarianism can be 'several things at once': an arena of legal regulation, a discursive field where images of suffering prevail, and a form of practice (Feldman, 2012, p. 156). While humanitarianism is generally presented as 'doing good,' researchers (e.g. Fassin, 2012; Ticktin, 2006; 2014; Malkki, 2015; Feldman, 2012) have described how the moral project of NGOs humanitarianism frequently is unwittingly co-opted or come to collaborate with the same power structures that NGOs are set out to critique, circumvent or present a remedy against. Humanitarianism includes a set of relations with deep-seated inequality of power and capacity between the giver and the receiver (Barnett, 2011; Bornstein, 2009; Bornstein & Redfield, 2011; Fassin, 2012; Feldman, 2008; Redfield, 2013; Wilkinson, 2017; Barnett, 2016, p. 14). The idea of humanitarianism as a regime of care has been critiqued in-depth (e.g. Ticktin, 2014) and research has focused on the ambiguities and limitations of humanitarianism at different scales, including that

humanitarianism is part of governmentality and security policy at the EU and nation-state level (Agier, 2010). Much of this work has looked at the historical conditions (i.e. imperialism and the imagination of a global community) and wider structures which make humanitarianism, as an alleviation of the suffering of Others, possible, and the ways in which humanitarian actors facilitate or obstruct the continuation of these structures.

Scholars have called attention to how humanitarian practices are shaped by the spectacle of the event (Boltanski, 1999), the inevitable hierarchy of lives within the humanitarian terrain (Feldman & Ticktin, 2010, p. 15), and the dual nature of 'the ideal of universality' and 'the practice of difference' at the heart of humanitarianism (Fassin, 2012). The latter discussion maintains that the universality of humanity brings along a concern with preserving lives and relieving suffering while the enactment of humanitarian principles simultaneously reproduces exclusive categories of lives (Redfield, 2013; Weizman, 2011), a process Pallister-Wilkins (2017) has called 'humanitarian borderwork'. The practice of categorization ('refugee' or 'migrant') brings along differential access to humanitarian relief and a differential politics (i.e. Feldman, 2012; Pallister-Wilkins, 2015). Humanitarianism is not a value-neutral field: it is a practice 'based on the relations and hierarchies of power utilized for the governance of populations' (Pallister-Wilkins, 2015, p. 59). The manifestations of humanitarianism are wide-ranging: it carries a vast number of different meanings and ideological assumptions (Wilkinson, 2017). These scholars have demonstrated the hegemonic status of humanitarian politics, its culturally laden ethics, and its depoliticizing forms of humanitarian operation and governance. Yet, we agree with Weiss (2015, p. 277) in her dissatisfaction with how 'some of these accounts present the political and ethical effects of humanitarian governance as outcomes of an inherent structural problem of humanitarian logic, suggesting that certain political manifestations (the maltreatment of refugees, militarized interventions, arbitrary and unjust distinction between worthy and unworthy victims, and the creation of "states of exception") are the inevitable outcome of this ethical tradition.' As she argues, the form of critique is more philosophical than anthropological, and similar to her experience (Weiss, 2015), it does not settle well with our fieldwork experience. Weiss (2015) calls thus for 'the provincializing of empathy and humanitarianism,' building on Chakrabarty's move to provincializing Europe (2007), the anthropology of ethics (Lambek, 2010) and of the good (Robbins, 2013). Such a strategy of provincializing empathy insists on an empirically driven study of humanitarianism. Weiss (2015, p. 277) calls for a simultaneous challenge of the humanitarian hegemony and universalizing claims on the one hand and maintaining on the other the 'potency of this framework for those who have been socialized into this ethical tradition.' In this article we build on her and other scholars' effort to provincialize humanitarianism through ethnographic approaches, and the call for understanding how humanitarianism operates 'to incite social consciousness and with its potential to serve as an encouragement to care for people in social terms' (Wilkinson, 2017, p. 65).

Much research on humanitarianism is based on studies of humanitarianism linked to intergovernmental organizations (Wilkinson, 2017), although research has also focused on local based aid organizations. These local kinds of humanitarianism have been designated in various ways. For instance, the notions 'solidarity humanitarianism' or 'volunteer humanitarianism' (Sandri, 2018) describe an informal body of volunteers providing humanitarian aid—an alternative to the 'humanitarian machine' as offered by larger in-

stitutional established aid organizations. Fechter and Schwittay (2019, p. 1770) speak of ‘citizen aid’ as defining ‘a diverse and shifting set of mutual support practices funded by private, as opposed to public, means,’ while others operate with the concept ‘vernacular humanitarianisms’ referring to ‘local, grassroots forms of helping others that are less visible and less dominant than the international ones’ (Brkovic, 2017, p. 6). Richey (2018, p. 626) suggests the notion of ‘everyday humanitarianism’ to capture the multi-faceted versions of humanitarianisms flourishing in an increasingly marketized and mediatized context of ‘do-gooding’ from celebrity interventions to corporations performing ethical and social responsibility. Everyday humanitarianism thus refers to ‘an expanded series of practices of the everyday lives of citizens that purport to make a difference outside the traditional boundaries of humanitarian activity’ (ibid., p. 627).

In this article we discuss humanitarianism as pursued by volunteers in grassroots organizations and networks founded during or shortly ahead of the summer of 2015 in response to the refugee influx to Europe. They engaged in activities that were humanitarian: providing food, clothes, advice, and language classes and youth and children’s entertainment in an effort to cater for present, urgent needs. These were not supervised or funded by international aid organizations or governments but were based on unpaid volunteers and financed by public donations. Taking the calls for ethnographic explorations of small-scale humanitarianisms, in plural, situated and local versions, we further the scholarship of de-centering humanitarianism by focusing on the temporal effects of its different but related modalities.

### 3 An ethnographic approach to humanitarianism

The article is based on different fieldworks; the first took part of an interdisciplinary research network, *The Helping Hands Research Network on the Everyday Border Work of European Citizens*, in which both authors contributed. The second fieldwork formed part of a collective research project on *Diginauts: Migrants’ digital practices in/of the European border regime* co-led by Sandberg, and the third was an individual fieldwork conducted by Bendixsen on volunteers in the organization A Drop in the Ocean at Lesbos.

*The Helping Hands Research Network* explored different ways of doing informal volunteer work supporting refugees coming to Europe, with special emphasis on arrivals to Northern European countries in 2015.<sup>1</sup> The field workshops were conducted in a selection of Northern European countries and pursued a combination of methodological strategies, including group based in-depth interviews, walking tours, group discussions and museum visits and provided an innovative space for knowledge-sharing, in which network members were gatekeepers of their ongoing field sites (Sandberg, 2020; Sandberg & Andersen, 2020a; 2020b). Between May 2017 and October 2018, the research network visited more than 20 initiatives for refugee support in five European cities, Copenhagen, Nijmegen, Glasgow, Hamburg, and Flensburg. To support these insights, we include fieldwork material from the Diginauts project that focused on informal refugee reception in the bor-

<sup>1</sup> *The Helping Hands Research Network on the Everyday Border Work of European Citizens* gathered 12 researchers (ethnologists, anthropologists, human geographers, borders and migration scholars, and political scientists), from six different countries, Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Germany, the Netherlands and Scotland. It was funded by the Danish Research Council for Independent Research 2017–2019 (DFR/6107-00111).

derlands of Northern Europe. Field research was conducted among solidarity workers in Flensburg and Malmö, in 2018 and 2019 to explore the role of volunteer solidarity workers assisting refugees on their journeys to Europe (Mollerup & Sandberg, forthcoming). In-depth, retrospective interviews were held with in total 14 solidarity workers whom we asked to reflect back on their work to help irregularized migrants.<sup>2</sup>

Bendixsen's individual fieldwork was conducted with volunteers in the organization A Drop in the Ocean at Lesbos, summer 2018. A Drop in the Ocean is a nongovernmental organization that is not faith based and attracts volunteers from all over the global north, including Norway, USA, Canada, NZ, Australia, UK, and Germany, to different locations in Greece. At Lesbos, volunteers with Drop in the Ocean participated in activities like Boat spotting, Open Café, English classes, and Mini Drops (a place for women and children). Depending on the season around 4 to 15 volunteers worked with A Drop in the Ocean. For three weeks, Bendixsen participated in the voluntary work of A Drop in the Ocean as a fieldworker, joining in the voluntary activities and sitting in on their discussions and conversations.<sup>3</sup> She also conducted interviews with 15 volunteers in the organization toward the end of their period. These were 11 women and four men, with ages varying from 22 to 55 years. Some were students, or in between studies, and those in full time employment were a social worker, schoolteachers, a coordinator in TV production, and one was trained as a journalist. None had any experience in international humanitarian aid.

Exploring the multi-directional and different forms of volunteering with refugees within Europe, at Lesbos and in Northern Europe, enable us to avoid methodological nationalism (Wimmer & Glick Schiller, 2002). Researching humanitarianism ongoing at the same time at different locations in Europe, makes it possible to cast light on that not only space matters in how humanitarianism unfolds, but also its temporal aspects. Providing a de-centered perspective, we simultaneously seek to avoid a nativist understanding, in the sense of spelling out a specific 'Nordic' or 'Greek' variant of humanitarianism. Instead, we stress the diverse responses to the refugee crisis across Europe, and across time, while recognizing their different local contexts or environments. The national governments had different strategies of migration management and different responses to the volunteers, aspects which we will only briefly address. Bringing our diverse yet relatable fieldworks together enables an in-depth understanding of the practices of everyday humanitarianism during and after the European (refugee) crisis 2015. Whereas the Northern European and Southern European contexts are very different, each set of research material constitutes central entrances into scrutinizing the European border regime, including the mechanisms and effects of the EU's migration management policies at a specific time that posed challenges for migrants, as well for as local, national, and supranational governments. Greece and the islands together with her fellow Southern European countries like Spain and Italy

<sup>2</sup> Fieldwork in the Öresund Region was conducted during autumn 2019 together with Nina Grønlykke Mollerup as part of the interdisciplinary research project: *DIGINAUTS: Migrants' Digital Practices in/of the European Border Regime* funded by the VELUX Foundations 2018–2020 (project ID: 00016995).

<sup>3</sup> Bendixsen informed all the volunteers that she was there as an anthropologist, and she also informed people she met regularly as a volunteer about her role as a researcher. All the volunteers agreed to be interviewed before leaving the island and she had several discussions with many of them during her fieldwork. She interviewed the initiator and head of the organization in Oslo. The coordinator of Drop in the Ocean had been informed in advance that she was an anthropologist doing fieldwork on what it meant to be volunteering in Drop in the Ocean.

had a much longer experience with arriving refugees across the Mediterranean than the Northern European countries, spanning back to the beginning of 2000. The governmental responses in Greece versus in the Northern European countries are very different. In Germany, for instance, volunteers were clearly mobilized by the overall approach of 'Wir schaffen das' ('we will make it') by German chancellor Angela Merkel, whereas volunteer initiatives in Sweden experienced a political shift toward a more restrictive approach to refugees and immigration (Frykman & Mäkela, 2019; Pries, 2019). Further, although there are also local volunteers in the Greek context (Cabot, 2013; Rozakou, 2016), the ethnographic case here deals with the phenomenon of international volunteers; a phenomenon which has critically been designated 'voluntourism' (Wearing & McGehee, 2012). Lesbos in particular attracted a high number of international volunteers from 2015 onwards (Rozakou, 2016). In the Northern European borderlands, the 2015 refugee arrivals constituted a short, intense time span lasting from the late summer/early autumn 2015 and until the installment of EU-Turkey agreement in March 2016 and the 'closure' of the 'Balkan corridor.' The rise in the volunteer phenomenon were here organized and sustained by local volunteers and local communities and not from people arriving from afar like in the Mediterranean context.

Rather than establishing a comparative design, we converse between our different field materials through the lens of temporality. Temporality also plays a factor in the methodological approach, in that we as ethnographers observed and communicated temporary enactments and perceptions shaped by 'our own movement in time with those with whom we work' (Han, 2011, p. 26). Ethnography thus takes form in time and as a relationship to time (Janeja & Bandak, 2018, p. 22, see also Fabian, 2004), not only through ethnographic waiting (for something to happen), but also because we enter and exit the field at particular temporalities. Our research field was characterized by ongoing events, life phases and changing circumstances, the character of which transformed over time, although as fieldworkers we only observed some temporal instances of the longer story. Additionally, our ethnographic research took place in a particular moment of the European border regime which keeps changing still. Our material covers a specific period, which more or less corresponds to the peak of volunteer activities, and after the compassion fatigue set in and the criminalization of search and rescue NGOs operating in the Mediterranean increased. This is the limitation of our approach, yet with the privilege of being able to converse with research participants also after the events, learning from their reflections in the aftermath when the spectacle has gone, enables also retrospective ethnography insights (see also Sandberg, 2020).

In the following, we will provide some illustrative fieldwork insights, presenting three differently constituted but related modalities of humanitarianism; the political modality, the social relation modality and the reflexivity modality. Together these modalities form part of our argument of highlighting the temporality of humanitarianism when approaching the study of volunteers' practices. These different modalities should simultaneously be understood as developed from within a specific socio-historical conditions and structures of power, such as postcolonialism (see Fassin, 2012).

#### 4 Temporality of crisis: The impulse to help

The extraordinary period, which was later dubbed the ‘long summer of welcome’ (Karakalyali & Kleist, 2015) incited a vast number of people to volunteer in the emergent reception of refugees arriving to Europe. Our interlocutors frequently emphasized that they had never pursued voluntary work or been engaged with refugees or migrants in the past. Facebook groups, such as ‘Refugees Welcome Flensburg’, ‘Refugee Welcome Malmö’ and ‘Information point for Lesbos Volunteers’ functioned as important social networks and information nodes.<sup>4</sup> Focus during the intense months of 2015 were less on inducing political change and rather on the question of everyday needs, providing nutrition, clothes, shelter, and children’s needs.

Among all our research participants it was a common way of reasoning that they had initiated their volunteering as a response to social media, television news, reportages on the radio, or friends who had reported about the ‘refugee crisis.’ For instance, almost all the volunteers participating in Bendixsen’s research had come to Lesbos because they had seen the situation in the refugee Moria camp on television or social media. Some had friends who had volunteered for refugees. Others talked about the shame they felt of how their nation state treated refugees and thus sought to act differently.

Our research participants’, both at Lesbos and in Northern Europe, direct and immediate response and engagement toward the refugee situation, must be seen in light of the mediatized images of migrants arriving in Europe. Frequent depictions of large caravans of refugees walking along European highways were part of the mediatization of ‘the refugee crisis overwhelming Europe.’ In particular, the picture of Alan Kurdi (born Alan Shurdi), a three-year-old Kurdish Syrian boy washed up, drowned, on the beach in Bodum Turkey in 2015, went viral and became a symbol of the violence inherent in the European border regime. Research has found that for young volunteers in Norway and the UK the image(s) established the crisis as something taking place in their environment, invigorating them to step in and offer instant aid (Prøitz, 2018). The image of Alan Kurdi made it possible to translate the complex refugee crisis into something comprehensive, conducive to incite affective resonance and direct public reaction (ibid.). Much research has suggested that in the representations of refugees, ‘compassion depends on visuals’ (Höijer, 2004, p. 520; Boltanski, 1999; Mortensen & Trenz, 2016). Social media dynamics of moral spectatorship remain in this sense grounded in a form of humanitarian politics that support demands for global justice and the establishment of a global order of responsibility beyond states.

Trough their decision to leave home and come to Lesbos for some weeks, the volunteers’ subject position shifted from being one of a passive receiver of information, or being a spectator of ‘the refugee crisis,’ to committing actively to change the situation of people in Moria camp. Again, with Boltanski, this can be considered as a politics of commitment: changing their position from being situated at home to being in the middle of the acts of volunteering. Volunteers at Lesbos were called upon toward a ‘horizon of action,’ some in front of their television set in their homes, others through social media, by images and stories of refugees. Television reportages from refugee camps in Europe had sensitized many of the volunteers who had in consequence felt called to compassion and to act. Their

<sup>4</sup> Fieldwork in Flensburg was conducted in 2018 in cooperation with Dorte J. Andersen and Line Steen Bygballe Jensen.

awareness of distance suffering at home, derived from different sources, had induced them to humanitarian practices. For them becoming committed to act and seeking the 'distant suffering Other' implied leaving their homes. The move from the television screen, and social media, to engage with people on the ground is what Boltanski calls 'the political moment par excellence' (Boltanski, 1999, p. 31), and indicates how the images through social media and television affected them sufficiently 'to become committed and take it up as their case' (ibid., p. 31). As Boltanski argues: 'when confronted with suffering all moral demands converge on the single imperative of action. Commitment is commitment to action, the intention to act and orientation toward a horizon of action' (ibid., p. xv).

## 5 Temporality of care: Asymmetrical presences in the field

When the volunteers arrived at Lesbos in 2018, they reached a laboratory of organization of humanitarianism; before 2015 only a few NGOs existed at the island, and the reception of refugee boats was done by locals, a few international individuals and refugees working side by side. By 2018 almost 160 smaller and larger, national and international NGOs existed at the island. Already in the 2000s, application processes had been slow and the refugee status was rarely attributed in Greece (Cabot, 2013); by 2015 the magnitude of challenges in accommodating migrants and refugees was clear and engaged actors at various levels, including at the Greek state's and EU supranational level, with vast European intervention. The prime Minister stated in October 2015 that Lesbos should be announced the 'European capital of solidarity' (Rozakou, 2016), and some few months later the population of the island was altered not only by migrants and refugees, but international volunteers and aid workers, who arrived from mainland Greece and abroad to support them. Tourists in the Greek island started humanitarian activities during their vacation, such as distributing water and food (Rozakou, 2016). Autumn 2015 continued material donations to Lesbos was so great that collectivities asked publicly to halt the transfers in order for them to first sort and distribute the arrived pile (ibid.).

It is this phase of the 'refugee crisis' in which the volunteers Bendixsen interviewed, arrived at Lesbos: an island crowded by volunteers, now less acknowledged for its beaches than images of orange life vests, and at a moment where the local population appeared reluctant toward both refugees and volunteers due to a situation which seemed unending and without a hope for structural and economic change. The volunteers in Drop in an Ocean addressed assistance to migrants living in Moria Camp. Intended for 2500 people, more than 9000 people lived now cramped there and in the annexed area Olive Growth. The period in which Bendixsen pursued fieldwork, few boats arrived at the part of the island the volunteers were 'boat spotting,' making volunteers express regret that they would not welcome refugees arriving in the night on small dangerous boats. Instead, activities were to charter to already (long) arrived refugees and other migrants who were tired of waiting, living under terrible sanitary conditions and frequently expressed hopelessness. The socio-economic context in this case is crucial: the reception structures had been malfunctioning for a long time, people, both locals and migrants, were exhausted and had lost hope that reception facilities would improve. This temporal dimension of the refugee situation at Lesbos had an impact on the social relations that unfolded between the volunteers and the migrants and refugees they were there to 'help.' Some of the volunteers expressed a sense

of shame for the fact that they could, and would, leave the island, while the refugees were stuck. The different temporal dimension of the Moria population and the volunteers shaped their encounters; while the volunteers were on the island for a limited amount of time, the refugees did not know when their waiting would end, as their movements dependent upon Greek and EU authorities' decision making. Some opposed the organization's priorities, yet others expressed concern but considered their limited time on the island leaving them little option but to follow the instructions. Disconcert and uncomfortableness were thus part of how the volunteers operated in the field.

The volunteers focused on their social relationship with the refugees and their desire to create or sustain hope among the people living in a terrible situation. Part of what they were doing was also to make amendments for how the Greek and European authorities treated the refugees. As Catherine, one American volunteer in her 50ies, put it:

The work that we are doing—honestly, I just go right to human connection, treating them with dignity, and difference, and respect. All of the ways they have been treated, the journey here, where they come from, in the camp—trying to counter that a little bit. By giving, being open and respectful. Just that they are valued—because they come from places that have not valued them.

Contributing to keep up the faith that things would become better and providing hope was also part of their everyday voluntary work. As such, the volunteers were pursuing a commitment akin to Boltanski's notion of a *politics of the present* (Boltanski, 1999, p. 192), which was oriented 'toward present suffering and present victims.'

Similar to the situation at Lesbos at some moments, in the Northern European reception spots, typically at Central Stations or other major crossroads for the arriving refugees, the number of people seeking to volunteer, and assist was enormous, sometimes more than what could be organized by the ad-hoc volunteer networks or the more established organisations (such as local Red Cross groups). This state of volunteers *en masse* at times created conflict and tension among the volunteers. For instance, At Malmö Central Station in Sweden, the need for help almost developed into a competition about being allowed to help. As Amanda, a Malmö based volunteer in her 30ies, who coordinated incoming donations as well as schemes for the volunteers, recalls:

...well, there was a huge need for being able to help out. In fact, people went into a kind of aggressive mode when they were not allowed to give a hand there (laughs) [...] It was a kind of a 'right' to be allowed to help. We received several angry messages from people who ended up never being called in as volunteers, and they had then passed by the Central Station several times observing that it was always the same volunteers working there. So, they thought it was only our friends who got to do the helping. That was clearly not how it worked (laughs).

Likewise, coordination and limitation of donations from helping citizens were difficult. If for instance a call was made for a children's buggy in the Facebook-group, then '[...] one hour later 25 buggies would pile up at Malmö Central Station, which the *Jernhusen* [the owner of the premises of Malmö Central Station] was not too happy about (laughs).' The 25 buggies are easily dismissed as ridiculous and as help given without any direction. Yet, another understanding of this urgency to help out is possible: We can consider the buggies as manifesting an ethical link enabled between the individual imagination of distant suffering and a global solidarity (cf Malkki, 2015, p. 116), in turn transforming the provider from passive spectator to active care-giver.

At Malmö Central Station, a plethora of volunteer initiatives were present, in addition to the formal NGO's like Red Cross and Save the Children, such as Kontrapunkt, Konvoj för Medmänsklighet ['Convoy for Humanity'], Refugees Welcome Malmö, 'Allt och alla' ['Everything and everyone']. The main task was to accommodate the arriving refugees with food, advice and temporary shelter, often in frustration with the slow reaction of the Swedish Migrationsverket, who established an information point at the Malmö Central only weeks after the volunteers had established themselves there (Frykman & Mäkela, 2019). Most of the arriving refugees wanted to move on to other destinations in either Sweden, Norway or Finland, and temporary accommodation was organized by among others Kontrapunkt, the local mosque and the Swedish Church. Among the volunteers working at the station, Amanda further recalls some tensions and conflicts about who was supposed to do which tasks. 'There were some individuals, who—there was a group who was like “this is us who will oversee food preparation. This is our thing”.' Amanda further depicts how certain groups of friends developed as a natural outcome of people working together for several hours during a span of time, yet at some point daily crisis meetings were necessary in order to sort out who was supposed to do what.

Incompleteness and frictions were part of the volunteering *en masse* at Malmö Central Station and on the island of Lesbos. Along with the keen willingness to help out, the tensions among volunteers can be understood as part of the complexities of local and diverse everyday humanitarianism(s). The social relation modality of humanitarianism suggests how humanitarianism can become more about the *right to help*, rather than a humanitarian gap for individuals to fill in and help out. While images from the media and Internet mobilized the volunteers to action, the encounters with 'those in need' through volunteering yet again changed their perception of what was possible, and how to enact 'doing good.' The social interaction with refugees and other migrants was characterized also by the volunteers' need to help, (Malkki, 2015), the sheer number of volunteers present in the field, and unquestionable the asymmetry built into the relation, including that the humanitarian actors had the freedom to leave the field again. The particular historical moment of EU's asylum system breaking down, and the social conditions within which the volunteers found themselves trying help out, set certain premises for the performance and expression of humanitarianism. As we will discuss next, as the volunteers returned home from Lesbos and, in the case of Northern Europe, as refugees moved into more secluded camps, volunteers' perception of being a humanitarian actor molded into a more reflexive modality.

## 6 Temporality of reflexivity: Ambivalence and doubt

In this modality, the temporality of volunteering at Lesbos and in Northern Europe had different meanings, relating on the one hand to volunteers' reflections as they were leaving Lesbos, and on the other, in Northern Europe to changing circumstances where the refugees became less visible in the public sphere and moved into reception centers elsewhere. These cases reflect different forms of temporalities, in the one case the volunteers are leaving the crisis, and in the other, the crisis are leaving the volunteers because it moves elsewhere. In both circumstances, however, this modality is characterized by thoughtful and self-scrutinizing moments of reflexivity. This reflexivity modality in both places con-

stituted a new relation to the 'suffering Other,' and new ethical links to the world were initiated and enabled.

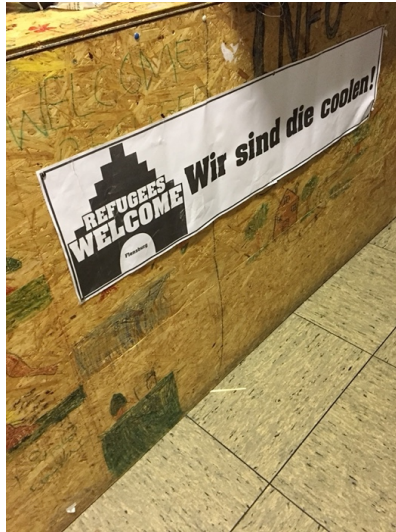
In the case of Lesbos, this phase for the volunteers took place merely 2–3 weeks after arrival and was not tied up to a changing socio-political context. Instead, this modality derived from volunteers' expression of their experiences of volunteering as they were leaving the field. Their imminent departure generated a different perception of their role as volunteers and initiated new insights into how to 'help' and their relations to those they had come to help. Bendixsen noticed how volunteers shortly before departing Lesbos, talked more openly about their fear that their work in the field had not improved the refugee's situation and expressed the limitation of their short voluntary stay. Some were frustrated that their abilities had not been brought to use, such as their teaching skills.

Catherine, for example, was modest about her volunteering contribution, and as other volunteers, the day before leaving she expressed her limitations: 'I have certainly gained more from this than the people I am imagining helping will gain from it.' Nonetheless, she, as others, was hoping in doubt that her immediate small acts (washing the toilets, playing with children outside Moria Camp, talking with young men living in the camp) made some, although limited, positive difference. Nina, another American volunteer in her 50ies, stated toward the end of her stay: 'I helped some. I showed real friendship at Open Café and helped the ladies take showers.' The day before leaving Lesbos, Nina expressed: 'I didn't know what I was getting into. I thought this would be the most depressing... But I didn't expect to come and help hundreds of people.' Because she had not worked inside Moria camp, it had been less depressing: 'I could have a cocktail in the evening and go to the beach.' She recognized her privileged position, yet found this unproblematic, as touristic activities made it possible for her to mentally cope with the volunteering situation. Simultaneously, Nina considered her contribution not to end on the flight back home: she planned to use her journalistic background, network and skills to inform others when returning home.

In the Malmö and Flensburg border landscapes, the reflection of volunteering and its practices took place over time, in particularly as refugees disappeared, as the train stations were again emptied, and less people needed help, simultaneously as the volunteer warehouses were more than ever filled with donations of shoes, clothes, blankets and baby strollers (Sandberg & Andersen, 2020b). The 'crisis' moved into a new stage; most refugees were in the process of applying for asylum, living in reception centers, less visible for the public. In this temporal stage of 'the long summer,' volunteers talked in retrospect of the time past with a certain melancholy and longing for a period when their help had been needed, when people came together in solidarity and when they had been part of something larger than themselves (Sandberg & Andersen, 2020a). Volunteering thus was given a different meaning—and for most it had been life changing.

During fieldwork in Flensburg 2018, Sandberg and research colleagues were invited on a small tour with members of the Refugee Welcome network to the Central Station in Flensburg. This Station had been the crucial 'hotspot' for arriving refugees during 2015. It was a central site for the Refugee Welcome Flensburg initiative where they had gathered, coordinated the upcoming arrivals, and handled the immense amounts of donations (Sandberg & Andersen, 2020a). When entering the premises, all the central props and furniture were still there, bearing witness to the days when 'it was all going on,' as Karin, one of the

coordinators of the network, explained. Together with a disassembled play corner, a huge desk made from wooden plates with the words imprinted 'Wir sind die coolen' ('we are the cool ones') was stored to the side in one of the rooms.



*Ill. 1: Flensburg Central Station (Photo Marie Sandberg, 2018)*

It was a time of challenge, as Karin recalled, and a time of self-confidence, that this way of acting, of trying to make a difference, was the right track to make. The many donations contributed to an atmosphere of recognition from co-citizens. Several photo collages put together by the volunteers capturing cheerful moments, smiling, and hugging people from the 'summer of welcome'. Yet, as Karin further recalled, the cheerful moments and feeling of 'coolness' and self-confidence was retrospectively followed by second-thoughts and doubt:

I think of the events as filled with euphoria, and then one tends to forget what the events in fact represented. [...] We only give people two hours of positive stay, and we have no idea whether they will get approved and are granted asylum after all. So, one needs to be careful not to think how much we have done. The only thing we have done is to show them a friendly face. And perhaps give them faith in other people wanting them to be all-right [...] However, we don't know what happened to them afterwards. So, I think a basic doubt has grown on me afterwards. (Interview 20180120)

The feeling of doing the right thing, came along with an aftermath of reflection about the momentary character of the assistance provided. Kareem, a volunteer activist based in the area of Gothenburg who took part in the reception of refugees arriving via Copenhagen to Malmö Central Station, likewise reflected on the aftermath of the 2015 refugee arrivals as troublesome, partly due to stress and partly due to uncertainty as to how and where the volunteer networks future would lead, and with what purpose. At the same time Kareem also recollects the reception work as a hopeful event:

I want to maintain the hope that because of the meetings I had with single individuals, that made a difference. It was the train staff that turned a blind eye and didn't ask for

tickets. The single mom that let people live and eat at her home. The Danish working-class man that helped us communicate about the whereabouts of the police and also hiding people at his home near Copenhagen central station. These are the people that gave me hope when our state failed to live up to the ideals it spewed for all of our lives. People still did amazing things, and this hope I think today has always been the only hope we have. But I could not see it clearly back then.

Keeping up faith in the meaningful dimension of the act of helping was center stage for Kareem. He linked his hopes for a better future to a more general critique of state policy and warfare politics:

We need to reframe the debate about migrants and refugees, we need to place the blame where it belongs, and we need to be considerate about who we will become when we choose to deny people a safe haven from the violence we perpetrate. By for example selling weapons we are not only watching from the sidelines, without wanting to take any responsibility, we also profit from this madness. We need to stop the bombings, not the refugees. That is the only ethical and dignified thing to do.

The temporality of volunteering thus engages with future visions for changing political grounds as part of a future-making process (Kleist & Jansen, 2009), closely connected to the feeling of ambivalence and doubt. As Karim's statement shows, the commitment to politics among the volunteers takes several shapes and transforms accordingly their increasingly wide-ranging recognition of what their practices were a part of. The increased use of humanitarian tropes in migration management and control, and in the externalization of borders by nation-states, means that NGOs and the more informal humanitarian work becomes unwittingly part of that process.

## 7 In conclusion: Provincializing everyday humanitarianism

Scholars have recognized that humanitarianism is a polysemic term, being 'an ethos, a cluster of sentiments, a set of laws, a moral imperative to intervene, and a form of government' (Ticktin, 2014, p. 274). We have suggested that to continuously provincialize humanitarianism, its logic and practice must be understood through a lens of temporality and the insights of ethnographic approaches. The temporal dimension offers a useful window into how humanitarianism comes to mean different things at different phases. The three suggested modalities of volunteering offer a way to analyze these differences in more systematic ways. In the first modality, we showed that the volunteers were driven by an urgency to act. This generated a commitment that is political, and transformed 'distance suffering' for the volunteers. The practice of volunteering situated the individual volunteers as part of a community of action to alleviate suffering. As Malkki (2015, p. 9) argues: 'The commitment to a particular cause and the rejection of injustice inevitably ties individuals and creates unity among them, allowing volunteers to feel part of something greater than themselves.' The incapacity or unwillingness of the different European states to sufficiently respond to the situation, impelled the citizens to partake in their voluntary work. The voluntariness and humanitarianism derived thus from the shortcoming of the nation-states and a felt urgency to respond to conditions of needs.

While there are clear limitations to this humanitarianism, 'to be concerned with the present is no small matter' (Boltanski, 1999, p. 192). Speaking up on distant suffering can

be understood as diminishing the distance between those suffering and themselves, and as bearing witness and narrowing the gap to distant suffering. While the volunteers could have opted for giving money to NGOs established in the field, as an individual act (ibid., p. 18), their volunteer participation contribute to a political modality which includes the constitution a collectivity of people responding toward suffering, developing a different politics of commitment toward alleviating suffering.

In the second modality, the volunteers sought to pursue humanitarian work in the field through offering here-and-now material relief (nutrition, basic commodities, and showers), immaterial assistance (hope, faith, and presence), and creating awareness on social media (Facebook). Through this social encounters with refugees and migrants, they became intensely aware and frustrated of the asymmetric power relations of the social relations endemic between them and those they attempted to 'help.' Their practices showed instances where the asymmetric relation was very clear (i.e. freedom of movement), and sometimes did more harm than good (playing with kids outside Moria Camp created sometimes chaos and fights among the children who wanted the toys when the volunteers left). They also came to recognize that their volunteering benefited themselves, in terms of self-development, improved their bad consciousness, and urgency to help (Malkki, 2015). Their own doubt of their contribution became part of their humanitarian practices and how they acted in the field. Despite their recognized limitations, they nonetheless insisted on humanitarian action and voluntarism to create new relationships based on what is human, as a form of action. Humanitarianism was also being friendly, and treating people with dignity, difference, and respect.

The third modality took place as an afterthought, as they were leaving the critical situation, or the migrants were moving out of their reach and thus their capacity to help. Leaving Moria camp to return to their homes, volunteers came to rethink what their contribution in the field had entailed and the limitations of their volunteering practices. Expressing ambivalent feelings, volunteers moved between doubt and hope that their presence had made a positive difference. In Northern Europe, as the refugees and migrants moved out of the train stations and into camps, the urgency of the situation grew into one of a state of *longue durée*. While insisting on a non-political position, the volunteers came to recognize that they had been used as service providers by the state, and that their work had contributed to maintain a system they did not support (see also Hoppe-Seyler, 2020). Some expressed a melancholy of volunteering when the spectacle was gone (see Sandberg & Andersen, 2020a), perhaps a longing to be part of something larger than themselves, although the characteristic of what they were longing for (a state of exception, but also a state of suffering), made such a state of the mind rather ethically problematic.

Together these modalities show how humanitarianism from the departure of volunteers is a process that changes over time, shaped by social encounters, and the socio-political situation. Humanitarianism for volunteers in Europe is multilayered; it is a commitment to distant suffering, trying to alleviate suffering here-and-now, and making distant suffering closer. While volunteering was only a period in their life, interviews with volunteers suggest that it continues shaping how they reflect about the world in which they are living. Speaking up about distant suffering might bring suffering closer to home and politicizing themselves and their surroundings. Remaining imperfect, everyday humanitarian voluntarism contributes to denaturalize the refugee situation in Europe, how

refugees are treated by the nation-states, bringing to light the situation as disturbing and in need of change.

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Guessing games with target groups: Securing a livelihood  
by supporting refugees in a hostile environment

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### Abstract

In the wake of mass-migrations of refugees seeking safety and stability in Europe, this contribution studies emerging grassroots organizations that support refugee status holders in Rotterdam, the Netherlands. The municipality expects these organizations to adhere to the European trend to incorporate immigrant integration priorities in interventions that apply to all residents. The article discusses the paradox of how bureaucratic classifications regarding preferred target groups cast certain grassroots responses as fringe-activities that are less legible bureaucratically. Based on a year of ethnographic fieldwork, this article shows how this lessened legibility translates into profound insecurities for grassroots organizers. The article discusses how these insecurities, in combination with the uncertainty grassroots organizers feel regarding their employability, motivate them to play guessing games and to give in to municipal preferences to boost their eligibility for funding. It argues that this process of giving in to municipal preferences should be understood as an attempt to render their endeavors legible, reduce precariousness, secure a livelihood, and turn affective labor into a life-sustaining practice. In so doing, this contribution evokes the story of a particular grassroots organizer—a woman of color with a forced migration background.

**Keywords:** migrant advocacy, classification, bureaucracy, integration policies, grassroots responses

## 1 Introduction

After the mayor of Rotterdam approved the construction of an asylum seekers center<sup>1</sup> (*asielzoekerscentrum*) in 2015, tensions in the vicinity were palpable. At an information meeting, groups of rioters threw stones and fireworks at police officers, chanted that the reception center should go, and damaged police cars. Multiple arrests were made that

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<sup>1</sup> A facility managed by the Central Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers, where asylum seekers wait for their asylum application to be reviewed and processed. Generally, successful applicants are then allocated housing in a Dutch municipality.

evening. In response to this riot, the solidarity platform *You Are Welcome* was established, an initiative that promotes ‘a culture of welcome’ (cf. Hamann & Karakayali, 2016) for refugees in Rotterdam. It was founded by a collective of churches, members of the Dutch Socialist Party (SP), and activist groups. Asked about its mission, Jozefien, one of the co-founders of the platform said to me: ‘We seek to enact solidarity with refugees and highlight what they add in terms of skills.’ The city of Rotterdam thus has a refugee support platform run by engaged residents, while migrant hostility pervades the city, too. In this ambivalent environment, aspiring grassroots organizers with a forced migration background seek to provide support to refugee status holders.<sup>2</sup>

This contribution evokes the story of a particular grassroots organizer, Aida, to demonstrate how, in an urban landscape in which migrant support and hostility converge, illegible bureaucratic classifications translate into profound insecurities for grassroots organizers who struggle to secure a livelihood. When I met Aida, she had just set up an initiative to help Eritrean refugee status holders with their paperwork. Aida longs for her labor to be recognized in the form of funding. What however stands in the way of obtaining the municipal funds, according to Aida, are contradictory requirements regarding target groups. Because of the European trend toward ‘mainstreaming integration governance’ (Scholten & Van Breugel, 2018a), the municipality expects resident initiatives to benefit the population of Rotterdam in general. The City Council, in other words, prefers ‘generic policies’ over specific interventions that assume ethno-racial differences. At the same time though, what is and what is not allowed in terms of targeting particular groups remains opaque, because, for instance, consecutive reports (KIS, 2017; The National Ombudsman, 2018; SCP, 2018) call for targeted interventions for people from Eritrean descent—and as such fly in the face of any ‘generic’ policy assumption. Moreover, different political parties that led subsequent coalitions during successive political periods in Rotterdam each introduced integration policy changes with different approaches to targeting (Dekker & Van Breugel, 2019). In trying to adhere to the seemingly inexecutable demand to follow ‘generic’ policies whilst at the same time articulating a clearly focused target group, Aida struggles to formulate her support activities for Eritrean refugee status holders in a way that applies to all residents.

When grassroots organizers prepare a funding application, they are hesitant to frame their initiative in ‘mono-ethnic’ terms because they could, as a result, lose the opportunity to receive municipal funding. Aida is a case in point. Her initiative largely focuses on Eritrean refugee status holders, yet in public, she downplays the specificities of this target group and attempts to diversify the composition of the people she works with. For instance, in a meeting with other grassroots initiatives, Aida introduced her initiative as consisting of ‘consultations, juridical advice and debt advice for the boys.’ When someone inquired whether she does so ‘specifically for Eritreans,’ she went around the question, and said, evasively: ‘sometimes also Syrians.’ Aida is often urged to be on guard regarding the

<sup>2</sup> To the Rotterdam City Council, a ‘status holder’ is ‘an asylum seeker whose claim to asylum has been approved and who has obtained a (legal) residency status’ (Rotterdam City Council, 2015a, p. 7) A broader rubric under which ‘status holders’ are subsumed, is the category of ‘migrant’. A ‘migrant’ is ‘someone who has emigrated to Rotterdam from another country, with the aim of eventually starting a new life here’—including labor migrants, ‘political refugees,’ and people that seek family reunification (Rotterdam City Council, 2015b, p. 5).

framing of her initiative, particularly by Truus,<sup>3</sup> a woman in her seventies, who informally provides Aida with professional advice. One time, in Aida's office, Truus instructed Aida to be 'really careful' in presenting her work to others. Aida, in response, tried to reassure Truus by demonstrating that she got the point, and said: 'We do something for refugees. But in fact, for everybody. Not only for Eritreans.' Truus nods, as if to signal that she approves of Aida's caution, and adds, referring to local politics and specifically to Livable Rotterdam (*Leefbaar Rotterdam*)—a far-right party in Rotterdam—that 'The Livable virus is not gone yet.'

'Livable' is vernacular for 'Livable Rotterdam'—the local anti-establishment, anti-immigrant and anti-Islam party. When I asked Aida's advisor, Truus, some days later, what she meant with 'Livable virus,' Truus responded that: 'Livable Rotterdam never allowed target group policies. "Young Eritreans need extra attention," that is something you cannot say.' I then ask Truus what it is exactly that Aida has to watch out for. 'She has only Eritreans. And that virus of target groups, it still lurks among civil servants. So, she still should not speak of one country,' Truus said. What Truus points to here is that, even though Livable Rotterdam is not part of the coalition governing the city at that point, the initiators of grassroots initiatives need to remain cautious to a strict interpretation of policies regarding target groups that is said to have crept into the bureaucratic mindset. Truus speaks of a 'virus,' suggesting it may pop up here and there, without a pattern or logic, and be difficult to get rid of. In fact, throughout my fieldwork, grassroots organizers consistently voiced insecurities regarding what is and what is not allowed in terms of defining target groups.

In the light of ambivalent group-making practices that emerge in conjunction with both a culture of welcome and a hostile environment, this contribution speaks to the ordering of populations that underpins practices of bordering (Hess & Kasparek, 2017, p. 59). Empirically, this article demonstrates that, notwithstanding the mainstreaming of integration governance, categorizations re-appear in the municipality's conduct. It shows how this re-appearance catalyzes bureaucratic illegibility and opacity and motivates the grassroots organization at focus to give in to municipal policy preferences. Analytically, this article forwards three claims. First, when 'generic' policies collide with the composition of beneficiaries sustained by grassroots organizations, this collision produces fringe-activities that are less legible bureaucratically. Second, this bureaucratic illegibility, which urges grassroots organizers into a vacillating process of playing guessing games regarding the groups that are eligible for interventions of care, pushes grassroots organizations to preemptively adjust their goals and become entangled with the local state. Third, instead of condemning or consolidating this imbrication of grassroots responses with the local state, this imbrication is cast against the background of grassroots organizers' precariousness and struggles to secure a livelihood by turning affective labor into a life-sustaining practice.

The material collected for this article originates from 12 months of ethnographic fieldwork in Rotterdam in 2018. During that year, I accompanied grassroots organizers who were in the process of setting up initiatives to provide support to migrants who had ar-

<sup>3</sup> In launching her initiative, Aida receives advice not only from Jozefien, the earlier-mentioned co-founder of the You Are Welcome platform, but also from Truus. Truus stages herself as 'retired professional' and an 'active resident.' During her career, Truus has worked at educational institutions, in local politics, and in trust funds. Truus advises Aida what funds to apply for and helps her to write funding applications.

rived in Rotterdam after 2015. These organizers provided an ethnographic starting point to investigate how grassroots initiatives try to find their way in the field of actors engaged with refugee support and reception in Rotterdam. I studied the networks of actors that these initiatives interacted with by joining aspiring organizers in their daily activities and by participating in events they organized. I also followed aspiring organizers in their endeavors to find collaborations, and accompanied them to meetings with advisors, with other initiatives, with funding organizations, and with civil servants. In addition, I conducted a range of open interviews with the organizers of these grassroots initiatives, as well as with policymakers, NGO personnel, civil servants, people who worked for funding organizations, and people who worked at the reception center. I use pseudonyms for all research participants and organizations mentioned in this article.

## 2 Context and background: Ambivalent group-making at the intersection of hostility and welcome

Whereas local discourses regarding diversity are usually more ‘positive’ than national discourses, Rotterdam is ‘the only exception to that rule’—a comparative research between fourteen European cities found (WRR, 2018, p. 59). In Rotterdam, the second largest city in the Netherlands, a political shift to the right can be traced back to 2002. In this year, the politician Pim Fortuyn, and his party *Livable Rotterdam*, rose to power. Until then, the Labor Party had been the largest political party in Rotterdam. Fortuyn positioned himself as anti-establishment, and ‘shot up like a rocket out of the Dutch political landscape’ (Lucassen & Lucassen, 2015, p. 72). Fortuyn gained popular support for his fierce criticism of Dutch integration policies and for his attacks on Islamic culture and religion (Van Ostaaijen, 2019, p. 87). More generally in the Netherlands, the idea that immigration would be harmful is widely<sup>4</sup> shared (Lucassen & Lucassen, 2015; Lucassen, 2018; Kešić & Duyvendak, 2019), and immigrant integration is framed in a negative way (Van Breugel & Scholten, 2018, p. 144). This specific political landscape affects the organizers of grassroots initiatives that support refugee status holders, who are cautious in framing and exposing their endeavors. As the organizer of one grassroots initiative expressed it, refugee-related initiatives are under a ‘magnifying glass.’

In their attempts to foster a culture of welcome within a hostile environment, grassroots responses in Rotterdam are an interesting case to study bottom-up practices and imaginations. Grassroots initiatives thrive in Rotterdam; in city-branding, the alleged hands-on mentality of its residents is emphasized, as well as their capacity to self-organize. Less attention has been paid to the newly emerging grassroots initiatives in Rotterdam that seek to help refugee status holders. These initiatives are often initiated by people with a forced migration background. Various refugee support initiatives in the Netherlands’ capital city, Amsterdam, have received scholarly attention (Rast & Ghorashi, 2018; Boersma et al., 2018; Rast et al., 2020), and in Rotterdam academic attention concentrated on a large-

<sup>4</sup> Restricting immigration has been a prominent theme in consecutive election campaigns. In 2017, the *Freedom Party* (PVV), that profiles as anti-establishment, anti-immigrant and anti-Islam, received the second highest share of votes in national elections. In that same year, the leading candidate of another party (FvD) compared ‘mixing with people from all over the world’ to ‘homeopathic dilution’ (Kešić & Duyvendak, 2019, p. 456).

scale municipal-supported housing and language program aimed at Syrian families (Van der Linden & Dagevos, 2019).

By starting a refugee support initiative, the grassroots organizers in this study enter the sector of welfare and social services. In the Netherlands, this sector is affected by decentralization programs (SCP, 2020), and Rotterdam specifically is said to move ‘away from a rationality based on conceptions of welfare’ (Van Houdt & Schinkel, 2013, p. 63). Generally, the provision of welfare and social services is plagued by privatizations and relies on ‘unpaid voluntary and care work’ (Harvey & Krohn-Hansen, 2018, p. 13, cf. Newman & Tonkens, 2011 and León, 2014). Such care work typically weighs on the shoulders of ‘marginal populations,’ who ‘bear the burden of providing such labour’ (Muehlebach, 2011, p. 68). In several European countries, both ‘the neoliberalisation of the state’ and the ‘illiberal and authoritarian turn’ (Cantat & Feischmidt, 2019, p. 396) played a role in the rigorous cutting in care services for vulnerable groups and the shifting of responsibility for the provision of these services to non-state actors.

In this context, what the organizers of the initiatives I studied share is that they scramble for funds and at some point hope to secure a livelihood—and make ends meet without depending on welfare allowances. Importantly, I do not imply that my interlocutors would directly employ funding to make ends meet. Rather, they hope for municipal actors to notice the value that underpins their affective labor (Muehlebach, 2011). They generally aspire toward being remunerated accordingly in the form of funding, and to feel ‘employable’ (Bloom, 2013). Beyond a mere wage-relationship, they dream of being recognized as (self-)entrepreneurs—a figure widely promoted by activating states as vehicle to ‘escape the shame of depending on state benefits’ (Narotzky 2018, p. 39; cf. Schwiertz & Schwenken, 2020, p. 497). Other features that the grassroots initiatives in this study have in common is that they are *de facto* bottom-up initiatives that emerged in response to the mass migrations of 2015, that they are supported by Rotterdam’s solidarity platform, and that they focus on people who experience types of vulnerability in part produced by the EU’s exclusionary politics of asylum (cf. New Keywords, 2016, p. 17). Another shared characteristic is that the initiatives I studied are in the start-up phase, and as such are still in the process of fine-tuning their focus and applying for subsidies. Focus areas, albeit transitory, include language support, empowerment, access to work, juridical counseling, administrative advice, and cultural exchange.

The City Council in Rotterdam motivates NGOs and civil society initiatives to take part in the implementation of refugee reception policies. It notes to ‘smartly use already existing procured products’ as well as ‘private initiatives for refugees and volunteer work’ and states that the executive ‘believes in the added value of civil society’ and ‘encourages such initiatives wholeheartedly’ (Rotterdam City Council, 2015a). ‘Creative and innovative initiatives from volunteer organizations give new energy and help integration,’ the City Council maintains. The Council explicitly attaches criteria to laudable organizations: municipal subsidy to ‘mono-ethnic/cultural organizations’ is ‘not desirable’ (Rotterdam City Council, 2015b, p. 7). The City Council states that ‘mono-ethnic and/or mono-religious activities will not be financed, unless there are substantive reasons to do otherwise,’ because activities should be ‘focused on participation<sup>5</sup> and integration’ (Rotterdam City Council,

<sup>5</sup> The ‘Declaration of Participation’ that all ‘status holders’ have to sign, was initially developed for Polish and Bulgarian migrants (De Waal, 2017). In this declaration, the status holder confirms to be ‘aware of

2015c, p. 15). In addition to these criteria, from 2018<sup>6</sup> onwards, the City Council in Rotterdam explicitly encourages people with a forced migration background to act as a ‘role model’ for those who were recently granted refugee status—via the idiom of ‘oldcomers for newcomers’ (*oudkomers voor nieuwkomers*) (Rotterdam City Council, 2018, p. 26). Despite this idiom, however, the shift away from targeted ‘mono-ethnic’ policies and toward generic policies that apply to all residents remained a decisive criterion, too. Although the Netherlands has a track record of targeted policies, this shift toward generic policies has been a political priority since the 2000s (Simon & Beaujeu, 2018, p. 33). As a result of this shift, there is evidence of a ‘declining consciousness of migrant integration concerns’ (Scholten & Van Breugel, 2018b, p. 238), because generic policies often fail to incorporate ‘immigrant integration priorities in the “mainstream”’ (Van Breugel & Scholten, 2020, pp. 10–11).

This proven difficulty to effectively address migrant concerns via policies that target all citizens alike is a continuous source of my interlocutor’s frustration. What similarly leads to confusion is that, for decades, the City Council in Rotterdam worked with shifting attitudes regarding the desirability of targeted policies. These shifts can be explained by shifts in the make-up of the city executive and City Council during successive political periods, in which different political parties that led subsequent coalitions each introduced different approaches to targeting (Dekker & Van Breugel, 2019). Other factors that render the admissibility of targeted interventions unclear for my interlocutors, is that ‘migration-related issues in the Netherlands still tend to be framed in group-specific terms’ (Van Breugel & Scholten, 2018, p. 133), and that reports (De Boom & Van Wensveen, 2019) that monitor the achievements of ‘people with a migration background’ run contrary to generic policy assumptions. Lastly, the municipal resolution in 2015 that resulted in the approval of interventions targeted at people from Somali descent, as well as the publication of consecutive reports (KIS, 2017; The National Ombudsman, 2018; SCP, 2018) that call for targeted interventions for people from Eritrean descent, give rise to mixed signals—that result in profound insecurities.

### 3 ‘Have more focus!’ but ‘not only on Eritreans’: A fringing grassroots initiative

Aida used to work flexible hours for the Dutch Refugee Council. She knows the drill of refugee integration policies. After the City Council contracted the Refugee Council in 2015—and later extended its competitive tendering contract and mandate—the organization’s contract was reduced substantively in 2018. For Aida, because of these re-organizations, establishing her own initiative felt like a move toward better job security. Although her expertise and motivation largely concern Eritrean status holders, Aida really tries to be ‘diverse.’ She organizes dinners for long-term Rotterdammers with little money, stresses

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the norms and values within the Dutch society, is willing to enforce these [norms and values] and will actively contribute to the society in the Netherlands and in Rotterdam’ (Rotterdam City Council, 2015a, pp. 15–16). When it became clear that, because of the principle of free movement for EU-citizens, this declaration could legally not be enforced on Middle and Eastern European migrants (De Waal, 2017), it became mandatory for status holders only.

<sup>6</sup> In March 2018, during the year of fieldwork, municipal elections took place in Rotterdam, which resulted in a changing make-up of the city executive and in the publication of new policy memoranda.

that she helps homeless people of all backgrounds, and cherishes the fact that people who fled from Syria increasingly seek out her help. All in all, she works hard to not be accused of focusing only on Eritreans. Her core business, however, is helping young Eritreans, who were allocated to Rotterdam between 2013 and 2015,<sup>7</sup> with their paperwork. The help Aida offers includes accompanying beneficiaries to their appointments in the town hall. ‘Sometimes I almost cry,’ Aida said to me once about these encounters. Aida certainly feels genuine compassion for her beneficiaries and goes to great lengths to help them. For instance, when one of her beneficiaries could not meet the municipal workfare measures he had to abide by, she temporarily appointed him as a volunteer in order to creatively relieve him from one of his administrative worries. She feels shaken when confronted with the lack of perspective that the people who turn to her for help have—and affectively refers to them as ‘my boys.’ In addition to her professional trajectory in the refugee support sector, Aida’s own im/mobility trajectory also is a form of capital: she speaks relevant languages, knows Eritrean history, and is well informed about the country’s contemporary challenges. Word of mouth proved effective in having Eritrean youngsters find her.

Yet despite Aida’s efforts, several of her attempts to apply to funding from the central municipality were denied. To challenge these decisions, she requested a series of meetings at the municipality with the policy advisors involved. Truus, one of Aida’s informal advisors, joined Aida at these meetings, and so did I. One of the policy advisors Aida spoke with, in explaining why she had rejected Aida’s funding applications, said, regarding Aida’s envisioned initiative, that she was ‘a little shocked with how broad it is,’ and that, at the same time, she was ‘worried’ when she ‘read about the homeless group’ in Aida’s applications. The other policy advisor confirmed that, although she considered Aida’s initiative ‘very sympathetic,’ the primary reason to reject Aida’s applications was ‘the target group.’ Specifically, the target group was considered ‘too difficult’ and ‘too diverse.’ Indeed, in Aida’s project proposal, Aida had written down that the people that turn to her for help include people who risk eviction and irregularity. But, as said, based on earlier conversations with Aida, I know that she had purposefully provided a rich and multifaceted description of her target group in her funding applications because she feared that her activities could appear to predominantly help ‘Eritrean people’ and thus to be catering to a mono-ethnic target group.

Later, when I spoke with this policy advisor, she confirmed that she understands Aida’s fear to be accused of failing to live up to the ‘generic’ policy approach,’ and said that the municipality had ‘warned’ Aida to ‘not only focus on Eritreans.’ When I asked the policy advisor why she declined Aida’s applications, she repeated what she had said to Aida earlier, and highlighted the fact that Aida included ‘homeless people and illegal people.’ She said: ‘Then I think: “Aida, please limit yourself, have more focus! You’ll run into a wall if everything is so mixed up”.’ At the same time, the policy advisor told me how, for her, the assessment of grassroots initiatives is a balancing act as well: ‘I have to make sure that I can account for how the money is spent. There are all these boxes! Even for me, it’s a challenge to keep an overview of all the boxes that are there.’ She then gets back to Aida’s case, and points out that: ‘The Aidas of this world, they are in some fringe area.’ She adds: ‘Aida is

<sup>7</sup> People who were allocated to Rotterdam before 2015 initially fell outside of Rotterdam’s integration policy framework—a framework emerged in the context of the ‘long summer of migration’ (Kasperek & Speer, 2015). Inclusion of this ‘group’ only happened after the local elections in 2018.

doing so much that it's not easily put in a box. I think that Aida tries to be an all-rounder.' In concluding, the policy advisor confesses that 'it's quite a quest when drafting new policies to not create new boxes.' Paradoxically, Aida's target group is thus considered 'too broad'—because it includes the alleged 'groups' of 'homeless people' and 'illegal people'—while on the other hand it risks being mono-ethnically targeted—because it primarily consists of Eritrean people. And given the complexity of accountability mechanisms—boxes to tick—and the ongoing bureaucratic imperative to classify—boxes to categorize—categorizations re-appear, despite a 'generic' policy approach (see discussion in next section).

As a result of the encounters with the policy advisors, Aida would repeatedly ask the policy advisors at the city hall to 'drop by' her initiative. In one meeting at the city hall, Aida explicitly requested for initiatives to be 'monitored from time to time'. Aida added, a little provokingly, that: 'Don't you [the policy advisor] want to know how all these beautiful initiatives work out in practice?' At the same time, Aida kept on trying to adjust the framing of her target group to what she thinks is considered bureaucratically desirable. By the end of 2018, when the idiom of 'oldcomers for newcomers' (Rotterdam City Council, 2018: 26) was introduced, Aida felt that emphasizing her own forced migration background could be helpful in producing legitimacy for her endeavors without having to play guessing games with target groups. In collaborating with some other NGOs and the You Are Welcome platform; Aida continues to support Eritrean refugee status holders. Still, however, she does not publicly accentuate the mono-ethnic composition of her target group and goes to great lengths to be somehow diversify. She plays safe to preemptively shield against a strict interpretation of policies regarding target groups that is said to have crept into Rotterdam's bureaucratic mind-set. And, in addition, Aida started to do other work, outside of the sector of welfare and social services, in an attempt to diminish the unsteadiness in her life in a way that is less likely to be affected by re-appearing categorizations.

#### 4 'The difference of no difference':<sup>8</sup> publics, preemption, and livelihood

By virtue of seeking to incorporate immigrant integration priorities in interventions that apply to all residents (Van Breugel & Scholten, 2020), 'generic' policies have the potential to foster imaginations that unite long-term Rotterdammers with so-called newcomers; they could be seen as an attempt to imagine 'forms of political communities and subjectivities that bring together refugees and citizens' (Cantat, 2016, p. 13; cf. Rozakou, 2016) and to attend to 'sites of overlapping struggle between refugees and diverse groups of citizens' (Cabot, 2018, p. 21, n. 20). Troublesome, however, is that imaginations of sameness may leave us with a grammar of indifference that allows for categories to re-appear (Haraway, 1997)—'the difference of no difference' (ibid., p. 265). Aida, much like the other community organizers I studied, is caught in a paradox: The municipality demands that clear groups are identified, yet it should be *particular* groups—not homeless people, not people without a residence permit. Aida, however, fears that narrowing down her focus would do injustice to the very existence of people with intersecting problems and aggravated living conditions produced by irregularity and homelessness. Importantly, she meant to evoke these characteristics to provide a description of the 'generic' problems her beneficiaries face—and to prevent those status holders who, for example, become homeless or lose their favorable

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Haraway, 1997, p. 265.

immigration status, would be beyond the mandate of her initiative. These characteristics, however, then turned into ‘re-appearing’ categorizations.

The ongoing bureaucratic imperative to classify—that resurfaces despite a ‘generic’ policy approach—collides with the public<sup>9</sup> (Dewey, 1927; Marres & Lezaun, 2011) Aida sustains. The persistent ‘groupism’ (Brubaker, 2004, p. 2) that underpins this bureaucratic imperative renders the public Aida sustains as fringe-activity that is less legible bureaucratically (cf. Das, 2004). Aida’s target group is considered ‘too broad’—because it includes the alleged ‘groups’ of ‘homeless people’ and ‘illegal people’—while on the other hand it risks being mono-ethnically targeted—because it primarily consists of Eritrean people. According to the policy advisors, Aida’s initiative is not ‘easily put in a box’ and therefore, it does not tick the right boxes. Rotterdam’s bureaucracy, in its hesitance to ‘create new boxes’ that could render endeavors like that of Aida’s more legible, consolidates existing bureaucratic categories of ‘homeless people’ and ‘illegal people,’ and invokes these categories to decline Aida’s funding applications. Aida, however, in these applications, only meant to provide a processual account of beneficiaries who risk eviction and irregularity to emphasize the ‘generic’ nature of the problem. What makes these dynamics particularly enigmatic is that ‘generic’ policies, as among the very instruments of bureaucratic legibility, *de facto* produce and mediate illegibility<sup>10</sup> and opacity (Hull, 2012, p. 166). As a consequence, grassroots organizers have difficulty understanding the illegible and opaque municipal policy frameworks and funding schemes regarding bureaucratically desirable framing of ‘groups’ eligible to be relieved from their position of vulnerability by the aspiring initiatives. For Aida, this ambivalence means that she strikes out blindly and has to ‘second-guess’ funders’ expectations to grapple for ‘elusive funds’ (Eliasoph, 2011, pp. 57–63).

One may object that grassroots organizers who miss out on funding may simply have written unconvincing project plans and ineffective funding applications and that the only thing that urges them to play guessing games is their alleged lack of inexperience. There are, however, several factors (see section 2) that strengthen the interpretation set out in the preceding—i.e., that illegibility and opacity are produced by the collision of emergent

<sup>9</sup> Regarding the identification of categories of difference, scholarship has long focused on practices of classification (cf. Bowker & Star, 1999)—and problematized the possibility of the existence and knowledge of clear-cut separations. Inspired by the work of Frederik Barth (1969), since the late 1990s and early 2000s onwards, scholars on borders and boundaries study the ‘properties and mechanisms of boundary processes, including how these are more fluid, policed, crossable, movable, and so on’ (Lamont, 2014, p. 815). Brubaker (2004) pointed out that ‘the tendency to take bounded groups as fundamental units of analysis (and basis constituents of the social world)’ is prevalent and allows for a situation in which ‘ethnic and other groups continue to be conceived as entities and cast as actors’—a tendency he calls ‘groupism’ (Brubaker, 2004, p. 2). What these approaches share, is that they are committed to ‘work out the trouble’ (Haraway 1997, p. 230) in group-making, and attend closely to the processes that assemble—and claim to represent—‘publics.’ The concept of ‘publics’ (Dewey, 1927; Marres & Lezaun, 2011) does exactly that. It highlights how institutional and political changes, for instance, mediate how forms of action are ‘convened,’ ‘sustained,’ ‘called into existence,’ ‘summoned’ and ‘assembled’ (Mahony et al., 2010; Walters & D’Aoust, 2015). All these practice-oriented present perfects have one thing in common: they try to highlight a process of becoming (Mahony et al., 2010, p. 8) that results in the production of ‘groups’—that are yet ‘contingent’ (Braun & Whatmore, 2010), ‘impermanent,’ ‘fluid,’ ‘mobile’ and ‘ambiguous’ (Mahony et al., 2010).

<sup>10</sup> Also see Karakayali and Rigo (2010) and Casas-Cortes (2015) on the categorization of groups in relation to forced migration regimes that have the goal to make people ‘intelligible.’

publics with ‘generic’ policies and catalyzed by the re-appearance of categories of difference. These factors include: the proven difficulty to effectively address migrant concerns via policies that target all citizens alike (Scholten & Van Breugel, 2018b, p. 238; Van Breugel & Scholten, 2020, pp. 10–11); ‘subsequent policy changes’ that ‘each introduced their own problem definitions and matching models and instruments for integration’ (Dekker & Van Breugel, 2019, p. 129); the fact that ‘migration-related issues in the Netherlands still tend to be framed in group-specific terms’ (Van Breugel & Scholten, 2018, p. 133; cf. De Boom & Van Wensveen); municipal resolutions such as the ‘Somali-motion’ in 2015 that resulted in the approval of interventions that target people from Somali descent; and reports that call for targeted interventions for people from Eritrean descent (KIS, 2017; The National Ombudsman, 2018; SCP, 2018). These factors inform the argument that bureaucratic illegibility and opacity cannot just be explained by grassroots organizers’ supposedly questionable performance.

And even beyond the factors that account for the *origins* of opacity and illegibility, the *effects* of this opacity and illegibility are real: they allow for profound insecurities for grassroots organizers. These insecurities, in turn, push grassroots organizations to preemptively adjust their goals toward municipal preferences. Scholarship commonly discusses such entanglements between grassroots organizations and the (local) state. Van Dam et al. (2014), for instance, have shown that governmental organizations in the Netherlands tend to give support and permission only to those resident initiatives that look ‘well organized’ and have established legal entities. And resident initiatives learned that ‘governmental organizations express their preference for those initiatives that operate in an organizational form that feels “sound” and “familiar”’ (Van Dam et al., 2015, p. 172). Therefore, they ‘institutionalize themselves in foundations or associations’ and ‘adapt themselves to the wishes and images of governmental institutions and play along’ (ibid.) to make cooperation with institutional partners more likely. Boersma et al. (2018), in the context of grassroots movements that assist refugees in Amsterdam, show how some of these movements ‘developed a conscious mode of professionalization’ (ibid., p. 73). And regarding German hospitality, Fleischmann and Steinhilper (2017) similarly highlight how welcome initiatives ‘are entangled with governmental actors’ (ibid., p. 22). These dynamics also apply to Aida’s case.

But in line with scholarship highlighting grassroots’ potential for political innovation (Vandevoordt, 2019; Feischmidt & Zakariás, 2019), I argue that solidifying this entanglement as something that should simply be denounced would downplay the complexity of grassroots organizers’ attempts to care for their surroundings—and for themselves. To attend to this complexity, I propose to shed light on organizers’ efforts in rendering legible their endeavors to the local state in order to turn affective labor into a life-sustaining practice that allows them to overcome vulnerability (cf. Muehlebach, 2011; Harvey & Krohn-Hansen, 2018; Narotzky, 2018). As a woman of color with a forced migration background who often proves to be emotionally attached to the care she provides, the value that underpins Aida’s work typically remains unremunerated—yet she hopes that the affective labor she provides at the same time is a route toward reducing precariousness. Like most of the founders of the initiatives I studied, Aida has long been on social benefits, and at some point, she hopes to secure a livelihood without depending on welfare. This paradox is also identified in the work of De Jong (2019), who found that, despite the fact that people with a forced migration background regularly gain access to front-line positions in the

migrant support sector, they run into a wall. Because their competences—linguistic and cultural—are often ‘regarded as “natural” skills or experiential knowledge’ (ibid., p. 324), career mobility in the sector of welfare and social services is ‘inadequate.’ Former refugees’ labor often remains ‘hidden, devalued, and unremunerated,’ (ibid., pp. 334–335), and disillusion is likely (Van der Veer, 2020). Indeed, it is Aida’s im/mobility background that got her into working for the Dutch Refugee Council, yet reorganizations compelled her to start a refugee support initiative herself. For community organizers like Aida, uncertainty and instability are motivations to calibrate a self-entrepreneurial project with municipal values. As they feel that their professional future is unpredictable, they pursue a form of participation that is legible to the local state – and it is in this sense that they yearn for the state, long for their recognition, desire its intervention, and crave its financial backing (cf. Jansen, 2015).

Importantly, however, this yearning for recognition does not imply that initiatives like Aida’s are ‘simple “instruments” and “transmission belts” of state [...] agencies’ (Pries, 2019, p. 13). By virtue of sustaining a public that is bureaucratically fringy, Aida de facto—and without deliberately seeking to—redefines, destabilizes, and challenges conventional boundaries that normally define and represent communities of beneficiaries (cf. Cantat & Feischmidt, 2019, p. 394). In helping Eritrean refugee status holders that were allocated to Rotterdam before 2015—and who therefore initially did have access to the support schemes that emerged in the context of the ‘long summer of migration’ (Kasperek & Speer, 2015)—yet who risked evacuation, indebtedness and irregularity, Aida’s work in a way made up for the local governments’ initial inertia regarding these beneficiaries. At the same time, Aida is concerned with reducing her own precariousness: she wants to secure a livelihood and hopes to be off benefits someday.

## 5 Conclusion

This contribution studied grassroots organizers’ struggles over bureaucratic classifications regarding target groups in the field of refugee support in Rotterdam—the second largest Dutch city where a culture of welcome coexists with migrant hostility. It analyzes how grassroots initiatives are affected by the trend to implement ‘generic’ policies that target the population in general without assuming ethno-racial differences. In Rotterdam, the implementation of these policies is associated with and promoted by the local anti-establishment, anti-immigrant and anti-Islam political party. ‘Generic’ policies have the potential to foster imaginations that bring together the struggles of refugee status holders and long-term Rotterdammers. However, grassroots organizers strike out blindly with regard to how they should characterize the profile of their beneficiaries without risking eligibility to municipal funding. Grassroots organizers are hesitant to frame their initiative in mono-ethnic terms and have difficulty interpreting municipal policies with regard to group-making. The story of a particular grassroots organizer is evoked to demonstrate how the convergence of solidarity and xenophobia may translate into illegible bureaucratic classifications, and results in profound insecurities for grassroots organizers with a forced migration background who yearn for the value that underpins their affective labor to be noticed and remunerated. I showed that, notwithstanding a ‘generic’ policy approach, categorizations re-appear in the municipality’s conduct, analyzed how this re-appearance

catalyzes bureaucratic illegibility and opacity, and demonstrated how this motivates grassroots organizers to adhere to municipal preferences. I forwarded the observation that, when ‘generic’ policies collide with the ‘emergent publics’ sustained by grassroots organizations, this produces fringe-activities that are less legible bureaucratically. This bureaucratic illegibility, which urges grassroots organizers to play guessing games with target groups, allows for grassroots organizations to preemptively adjust their goals and become entangled with the local state. Instead of consolidating this imbrication of grassroots responses with the local state, I cast this imbrication against the background of grassroots’ organizers precariousness and struggles to secure a livelihood. Rather than disregarding grassroots’ efforts to render legible their endeavors to the local state, I argued that these responses can be understood as attempts to reduce precariousness.

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Between supporting and reporting: Grassroots textual responses to the pushbacks at the fringes of EU

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### Abstract

In response to the 2015 mass mobilities disruption of the European Union border control regime, numerous self-organized, pro-migrant *ad hoc* solidarity groups proliferated across Europe. Depending on the local, national, and migratory contexts, these groups employed different methods and practices to support the people on the move and to challenge the inefficient, bureaucratized, discriminatory, and securitized modes of action of official, state, and humanitarian actors. Some practices that were developed in this framework of grassroots or vernacular humanitarianism with strong solidarity and a volunteer dimension (Brković, 2017; 2020; McGee & Pelham, 2017; Rozakou, 2017; Sandri, 2018) outgrew the initial crisis context and evolved over time into distinctive formats of response to the border restrictions, exclusions, and violence. One of them is still today a lasting practice of reporting of pushbacks by grassroots groups active at different locations on the southeastern territorial fringes of the EU. After reviewing the relevant literature and outlining the grassroots, self-organized, humanitarian, and human rights background of pushback reports and reporting practices, the author focuses on these reports as a form of writing. Interest in the style, narrative structure, and positionality of these reports opens questions of their parallels with ethnographic inquiries.

**Keywords:** Balkan migratory trail, ethnography, grassroots pro-migrant groups, humanitarianisms, human rights reporting, pushbacks

## 1 Introduction

The year 2015 can be understood as historical for the migration in Europe for several interconnected reasons. For most, it will be remembered for the dramatic media images of endless groups and columns of refugees heading from Greece to the center of the European Union. For others, the year will be remembered for mass mobilities disruption of the repressive border control regime and *in actu* demonstration of the agency and the power of the movements of migration. For some, it will also be remembered for mass spontaneous citizen engagement in diversified humanitarian assistance and embodied in the images

of, for example, people who gathered at the Munich train station to welcome refugees or *citizen-volunteers* helping them on the shores of Greek islands.

In Croatia people of different ages and with different personal histories and social backgrounds were also spontaneously arriving at the border crossing or checkpoints, to share food, offer a lift, provide information, or support newcomers in some other way (see e.g. Župarić-Iljić & Valenta, 2018, pp. 143–144). Anyone in mid-September 2015 at the Croatian capital Zagreb train or bus stations, or several weeks later at the makeshift border crossings on the green border with Serbia or Slovenia (such as Bapska on the border with Serbia or Ključ Brdovečki on the border with Slovenia) could observe vibrant citizen help and sympathy for the people on the move. Only in Zagreb within just a few weeks a dozen *ad hoc* initiatives and groups of different scales formed. Some of them assembled hundreds or more individuals, or even a notable number of civil society organizations and informal collectives (see e.g. Bužinkić, 2018), while some consisted of only a few close friends, colleagues from work or random acquaintances. Some were vocal in advocating for political change, while others were primarily interested in providing aid, making sandwiches, and collecting and distributing clothes. Some were composed of locals or those from nearby cities, while others were more national or even transnational.

Activities of these groups were fostered by divergent modes: personal and professional contact, history of common activist or related engagement, as well as by social media group exchanges and public calls. In these first spontaneous gatherings, differences among mostly self-organized supporters seemed obscured and power relations minimal, although some of the actors very quickly gained more dominant positions, depending on a range of reasons, varying from their habitus to group dynamics. Some of these groups grew with time into formal organizations active even today, some continued to act informally, some transnationally, some merged, some switched locations or interests, some further atomized, and some simply shrank as the movement of people shifted in another direction or became isolated once mobile detention of the Croatian section of the Balkan refugee corridor (Hameršak & Pleše, 2018b) was fully established at the end of 2015.

On the following pages, I would like to outline the recent literature about the phenomena of self-organized pro-migrant citizen initiatives and groups in the critical months of 2015 and 2016, as well as to analyze the commitment of self-organized groups and initiatives to document and denunciate border violence at the external EU border, in particular, pushbacks and deportations to neighboring non-EU countries. Following my previous research about the Croatian section of the Balkan refugee corridor (Hameršak & Pleše, 2017; 2018a; 2018b) and Croatia's direct involvement in pushback operations since then, this paper focuses on the Croatian context in the period from the Balkan corridor and the beginning of 2016 until today.

Although my deep involvement in the context, my participation in the collective writing of several such reports, as well as my long-term ethnographic research and activist engagement in the field, informed my approach and my insights, due to a plethora of ethical and methodological, personal and professional reasons, the interpretation that follows is not ethnography or autoethnography. It is, first of all, an exploration of texts of published reports and texts surrounding them. Circumventing urgent, but already at least informally tackled problems of (non)authoritativeness of some of these reports, their sometimes imprecise or incomplete representations, their multiple revisions and textual instability, as

well as the galloping problem of criminalization of groups and individuals involved in their production, this essay strives to approach pushbacks reports as a form of writing and to sketch their parallels with humanitarian agendas, human rights reporting, and ethnographic inquiries.

## 2 Grassroots pro-migrant supporting mobilization research

Mass citizen aid or self-organized—often spontaneously initiated—humanitarian engagement on the margins of established or in the official systems of help in the making is not a historically new phenomena, nor is it limited to the context of migration (see Brković, 2017; Fechte & Schwittay, 2019; Hamann & Karakayali, 2016, p. 74). Nevertheless, it only recently started to occupy broader research attention, often in relation to the events of 2015. A growing literature on the subject promptly dubbed this phenomenon as, to borrow from the titles of some recently published research volumes and special issues, ‘solidarity mobilizations in the “refugee crisis”’ (della Porta, 2018), ‘migrants’ and solidarity struggles’ (Birey et al., 2019), ‘citizen initiatives for global solidarity’ (Schulpen & Huyse, 2017) or ‘refugee protection and civil society in Europe’ (Feischmidt et al., 2019) etc. In the same context terms such as ‘volunteer humanitarianism’ (Sandri, 2017), ‘solidarity humanitarianism’ (Rozakou, 2017), ‘subversive humanitarianism’ (Vandevoordt, 2019) or ‘grassroots humanitarianism’ (McGee & Pelham, 2018) were introduced in order to highlight different aspects and specific manifestations of the phenomenon known also as ‘everyday humanitarianism’ or ‘vernacular humanitarianisms’ (Brković, 2016; 2017; 2020). Within that framework of interest, specific countries, like Greece (e.g., Cabot, 2019; Rozakou, 2016), or locations such as Calais (e.g., Agier et al., 2019; Sandri, 2018), Brussels (e.g., Vandevoordt, 2019), Budapest (e.g., Kallius et al., 2016) or Belgrade (e.g., Cantat, 2020; Jovanović, 2020; Milan, 2019) became places of often ethnographically informed research about self-organized citizen pro-migrant mobilization. Work of pro-migrant groups active along the Balkan migratory trail, such as the Welcome! Initiative (Croatia), Second Home (Slovenia) or the organization Youth for Refugees (Serbia) was also promptly addressed in the literature (e.g., Bužinkić, 2018; El-Shaarawi & Razsa, 2019; Kurnik & Razsa, 2020). Their positioning within local contexts, especially in relation to the 1990s war, postwar and anti-nationalist struggles was discussed, backing the conclusion about the ‘Balkan route as a history of old or *ad hoc* established collectives of independent volunteers’ (Kurnik, 2015: 239).

Although research of the Croatian context mainly focused on the work of large-scale ‘humanitarian enterprise’ (Pozniak, 2020; see Hameršak & Pleše, 2017; 2018b; Pozniak, 2019; Župarić-Iljić & Valenta, 2019) that dominated the highly professionalized and securitized Croatian section of the refugee corridor, grassroots engagements related to that context also found their place in the literature. Besides the already mentioned study about Welcome! Initiative, here one should mention in depth (auto)ethnographic accounts on volunteering in the context of the same initiative in the transit camps along the corridor (Grubiša, 2018; Jambrešić Kirin & Škokić, 2018), as well as vignettes and sketches of citizen assistance scattered across ethnographically founded literature about the corridor (see e.g., Hameršak & Bužinkić, 2018; Župarić-Iljić & Valenta, 2019).

In 2015, as well as in the following years, differences between grassroots pro-migrant

groups active at the outskirts of Europe and in the heart of the continent were distributed along the lines of *ad infinitum* divergent local and national historical and contemporary contexts, experiences, and power relations, as well as along, for example, different realities, aims and struggles of the migratory movements they support. Nevertheless, two general specifics of initiatives at the fringes of EU could be observed: the first is related to the international dimension of the groups at hand and the second is related to these groups' extensive and specialized textual report production. The following paragraphs explore if and how these specifics have been addressed in the literature and manifested on the ground.

The first, the international dimension of pro-migrants grassroots grouping along the migrant trail, at the fringes of the EU, can be connected to a variety of motives and factors. Media coverage of the 'crisis', the atmosphere of change and welcoming, hyper-mobility of young people of the West, as well as geographical proximity (see Cantat, 2020, p. 107; Fechter & Schwittay, 2019, p. 1772) fostered occasional or longer engagements of citizens mainly from central EU countries in the long-distance aid activities in transit hubs along the main migratory pathways at the outskirts of the EU. As mentioned on the marginalia of the literature about welcoming refugees, 'some volunteers from Southern Germany and Austria [...] went directly to Hungary or Croatia to pick up refugees' (Hamann & Karakayali, 2016, p. 75), while others went to stay for a few days, weeks or months and offer practical help on the ground. In sum, individuals and groups from mostly central EU states were arriving (self-organized or attached to small NGOs) in countries along transitory pathways, such as Greece, Serbia, or Croatia, with their 'know-how', donations, tents, vans, equipment, and funds for new supplies, joining organizations on the ground or working independently and helping out by, for example, installing improvised distribution spots or outdoor kitchens.

At least in Croatia and Serbia, the international background or the foreignness of some of the grassroots groups was highlighted already in the names they quickly obtained in local contexts. For example, a volunteer named as The Swedish Chef, a 27-year-old chef from Lund, Sweden,<sup>1</sup> prepared meals for refugees for weeks at the previously mentioned *ad hoc* border-crossing with Serbia, in Bapska, Croatia, while the group (self)named Czech Team was for months engaged only a few kilometers further in the transit camp Adaševci in Serbia and after 2018 also in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The so-called Hungarians, a group of several people coming from Hungary, were at Ključ Brdovečki—another previously mentioned improvised border-crossing installed in that period and closed after the transit redirected directly to Slovenia. In Dobova in Slovenia, two Austrian volunteers who were called 'the couple from Austria', established an aid tent at the train station for several weeks.<sup>2</sup> After the full closure of the corridor in Spring 2016 the engagement of international groups was reduced significantly in Croatia—an EU country determined to have 'closed border'

<sup>1</sup> See <https://www.unhcr.org/news/stories/2015/9/56ec1eb218/swedish-chef-serves-hot-meals-refugees.html>.

<sup>2</sup> The arrival of volunteers and activists from other countries to countries along the Balkan migratory pathway in that period is acknowledged in the literature about the situation along the Balkan corridor and after (Cantat, 2020, p. 107; Jovanović, 2020, pp. 131–132, *et passim*), although rarely for Croatia where international and independent volunteers are eventually marginally mentioned, as for example, in the map of first 'reception' sites which refers to an 'improvised outdoor kitchen from German volunteers' (Larsen et al., 2015, p. 36).

politics by any means. These politics repelled potential supporters to contexts that may seem as less hostile environments toward solidarity assistance to migrants, first of all to border areas of neighboring non-EU countries such as Serbia and also Bosnia and Herzegovina after 2018 (see Stojić Mitrović et al., 2020, pp. 56, 65, 78, *et passim*).

Cultural, political and class biases of these (mostly) self-organized international or transnational groups engaged at the fringes of EU were very diverse—some of them being close to what has been described as MNGOs (my own NGO), personalized aid initiatives in the Global South burdened with the legacies of interconnections between humanitarian aid and colonial administration (Fechter & Schwittay, 2019, p. 1770; see Schulpen & Huyse, 2017), while other self-organized groups had their background rooted in older European anti-racist, anti-restrictionist and pro-migrant activism inclined toward transnational spheres of action (Cantat, 2015; Schneider & Kopp, 2017; Stierl, 2019, p. 47; Walters, 2006). In practice, these different lines of engagement merged, accompanied sometimes by tensions and the production of hybrids, as noted in the reflections of one of these groups: ‘The so-called “Balkanroute” [...] seems to have turned into the place to be for emancipatory left German activists. [...] Within the German left, more and more car convoys aimed at transporting people across borders as well as kitchen collectives got organized and headed to Hungary, Serbia, Greece or Macedonia’ (ReflActionist, 2016). In an effort to distance themselves from the ‘voluntourism’ and ‘holidarity,’ as it is critically labeled, but also to address their own positionality, this group defined their position as that of ‘activist tourists’ (ReflActionist Collective, 2016).

### 3 Grassroots groups textual engagements: Reporting pushbacks

The second easily discerned point of differentiation between grassroots groups active in the core of the EU and countries along the Balkan migratory trajectory in 2015 and after is related to the later focus on documenting and reporting border violence or, more precisely, to the production of so-called ‘pushback reports.’<sup>3</sup> The pushback reports call for analytical engagements and contextualization not only as a specific format of the grassroots involvement at the fringes of EU but also as probably the most comprehensive, although not always most reliable, source of data about pushbacks from Croatia and neighboring countries at the moment. As both a form of documentation and paradigmatic artifacts of modern knowledge practices (see Riles, 2006, p. 2) and as a form of vernacular or ‘ordinary’ people writing (see Lyons, 2010), they furthermore seem to be relevant foci of discussion.

The first reports about pushbacks from Croatia were published in early 2016 (Banich et al., 2016a; Refugees et al., 2016) when the Balkan refugee corridor was still functioning, while official narratives of efficient and humanitarian fast-track transit of refugees

<sup>3</sup> Textual production of grassroots groups in Croatia was of significant local and regional importance from the first days of mass arrivals in 2015. Two of the largest and most prominent Croatian grassroots organizations, or collectives in the respective period, Are you Syrious? and Welcome! Initiative, regularly reported via social media about the situation on the ground and along the migratory path. Reporting at first was daily or even more often, while after the closure of the corridor it was weekly or every few days, but still regularly, being a stable source of information until today. Besides these general reports that served as both first-hand information about the situation on the ground, as well as a mobilizing tool, a number of grassroots groups situated in Croatia and neighboring countries in parallel specialized in the production of pushback reports which are the focus of this article.

through Croatia were yet widely perpetuated (Documenta, [2015]; European Economic and Social Committee, 2016; Larsen et al., 2016; Šelo Šabić & Borić, 2016). These reports were followed by reports about pushbacks from other countries along the corridor: Austria, North Macedonia, and Slovenia (Moving Europe, 2016b; 2016c; 2016d). Over the following months, new reports about border violence in the Croatian section of the corridor were published (Banich et al., 2016b; Inicijativa Dobrodošli, 2016). In 2017, after reports by some previously mentioned transnational (Moving Europe, 2016e) and local grassroots groups (Inicijativa Dobrodošli! & Are you Syrious, 2017a; 2017b; 2017c), prominent international human rights and humanitarian organizations (Human Rights Watch, 2017; Médecins Sans Frontières, 2017; Belgrade Centre for Human Rights etc., 2017) started to extensively report about pushbacks from Croatia.

From then on dozens of grassroots collectives located in Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, and Slovenia and in more or less close everyday contact with people on the move engaged in reporting pushbacks—most often in English, signaling the international or transnational dimension of this reporting practice. The most active or at least most systematic in reporting were international, often transnational self-organized groups situated at the outskirts of Serbia and the Bosnia and Herzegovina border with Croatia, where they would see and encounter people upon their pushback from EU member states. In 2018 when the migratory pathways proliferated also across Bosnia and Herzegovina grassroots reports of pushbacks started to be produced even with more vigor, in bigger numbers, by more groups.<sup>4</sup> The year 2019 saw the stabilization of reporting procedures and practices with efforts directed toward advocacy and dissemination of report findings in divergent formats, including in the form of maps (see Push-Back Map and Border Violence Monitoring Network Testimonies Database), which was more or less the situation before the 2020 and COVID-19 pandemic which at first resulted in the reduction of different activities, including grassroots reporting. Due to extensive and divergent reporting and advocacy work, supported by media coverage and investigations, pushbacks along the so-called Balkan route became a hallmark of relentlessness and violence of the re-stabilized European border regime (Hess & Kasperek, 2017) at the southeastern fringes of the EU.

The reports published by grassroots groups active in Croatia and neighboring countries

<sup>4</sup> Groups involved in reporting pushbacks, their number and names, can be roughly determined by the insight into the changes of the paratext (Genette, 1997), textual and nontextual elements surrounding the text (cover, introduction etc.), of one of the probably the longest-lasting periodical publication of pushback reports: monthly *Illegal Pushback [Push-backs] and Violence Reports* and since March 2020 *Balkan Region reports* (No Name Kitchen etc., 2018, 2019; Border Violence Monitoring Network 2019, 2020a, 2020b, <https://www.nonamekitchen.org/en/violence-reports/>; <https://www.borderviolence.eu/category/monthly-report/page/2/>). These reports were published mostly on the monthly basis by No name Kitchen and other groups (Border Violence Monitoring, [re:]ports Sarajevo, Escuela con Alma, Ljuta Krajina - SOS - Team Kladaša etc.) until July 2019 when Border Violence Monitoring Network this group is part of became the publisher. Starting from the report from June 2018 these reports are available via webpages of No Name Kitchen (<https://www.nonamekitchen.org/en/violence-reports/>) with latest report from January 2020 and Border Violence Network (<https://www.borderviolence.eu/category/monthly-report/>) with reports from December 2018-March 2019 till today (October 2020). Monthly reports issued from 2017 to May 2018 are not available online but were taken into the account in this paper. Changes in the title of these reports provide insight into the steadily spreading of the territory they cover, from reports from one specific location or border town such as Šid or Velika Kladaša to the reports from the specific country (Bosnia and Herzegovina) or the reports covering broader area (Balkan region).

from 2016 until the first few months of 2020 differ significantly in regard to their methodology, sources and outlook. Most of the reports, especially older ones, are based primarily on the direct contact of the group members with people who were pushed back (e.g., Banich, 2016a; 2016b; Inicijativa Dobrodošli!, 2017a; No Name Kitchen etc., 2018; 2019). Some are a combination of different sources (personal or other groups written or audio recordings of testimonies, media sources, reports of the authorities, other grassroots reports, human rights organization reports, etc.) (Inicijativa Dobrodošli! etc., 2017b; 2017c; Info Kolpa, 2019; Border Violence Monitoring Network, 2019; 2020a; 2020b). Some were published once (e.g., Info Kolpa, 2019), while most of them occasionally (e.g., Inicijativa Dobrodošli! etc., 2017a; 2017b; 2017c; Are you Syrious etc., 2018; Border Violence Monitoring Network etc., 2020), others regularly and monthly (No Name Kitchen etc., 2018; 2019; Border Violence Monitoring Network 2019; 2020a; 2020b).

The oldest reports were focused on publishing individual accounts—so-called testimonies or individual cases of pushbacks. They were included in the reports as appendixes to the core text (overview or analysis of the situation) of the report (e.g., Are you Syrious etc., 2018; Banich et al., 2016b) or they were the core of the reports. For example, monthly pushback reports, one of the long-running report publications (No Name Kitchen etc., 2018; 2019; Border Violence Monitoring Network, 2019; Border Violence Monitoring Network, 2019; 2020a; 2020b), in the first years were structured as collections of individual reports of pushbacks (No Name Kitchen etc., 2018; 2019), which will be discussed in more detail later in the text.

Finally, pushback reports were for a long time minimalistic in layout or in the paratextual (Genette, 1997) sense. The oldest reports usually had only the title of the publication, and the author or name of the group (source) (Inicijativa Dobrodošli! etc., 2017a; 2017b; 2017c; No Name Kitchen etc., 2018). Changes in the structure and layout or paratext of reports were followed by the shifts in the distribution, from minimal, internal distribution, to wide distribution via web, social media, email newsletter, maps and so on.

#### 4 Reporting pushbacks in a humanitarian and human rights perspective

The beginnings of the grassroots reporting of pushbacks from Croatia (e.g., Banich et al., 2016a; Moving Europe, 2016a) can easily be seen as a continuation of the work of older activists from European anti-racist and pro-migrant initiatives oriented toward denouncing and challenging discriminatory, securitized and violent European migration policies. However, this was not necessarily the case with grassroots pushback reports published after the closure of the corridor. In fact, for many grassroots groups involved since then, reporting was a reaction to the brutality of the context in which they in the first place intervened with the idea of emergency assistance and essential humanitarian support. As the webpage of one of the groups exemplifies, the group ‘began as a loose, self-organized group of people who in 2015 decided to respond to the humanitarian crisis by providing direct assistance,’ but after some time in the field, the group started to develop projects in three different directions: *humanitarian, political education and border violence monitoring*.<sup>5</sup> The founding narratives of other groups also mention this transformation of initial

<sup>5</sup> See <https://rigardu.de/en/aboutus/>

humanitarian impulses and grassroots organizing into active confrontation and denunciations of violence. As, for example, mentioned by this group:

born on February 3rd, 2017 in Belgrade. At that moment, the driving forces of the project, started to provide food and kitchen resources in order to cover, at least partially, the basic needs of all the refugees who lived in the old barracks of the train station. In collaboration with them, we got to distribute more than 500 meals per day, in a time period where the temperature dropped to -20 degrees.<sup>6</sup>

After several months this group moved out from Belgrade to the border area, where they organized diverse assistance for people on the move, as well 'engaged in the collection of testimonies from victims of border violence,' since 'the violent pushback and collective expulsion of people on the move is a daily occurrence in the area. To this end, certain volunteers from No Name Kitchen publish a monthly report on the situation with the testimonies of victims of this abuse.'<sup>7</sup>

In general, reporting in this context often figures as an outcome or byproduct of some other activity, most often it is done in parallel with providing basic aid: distributing food and clothes, providing showers, emergency medical help, etc. In accordance with this, the social media posts of this and other groups engaged in reporting alternate information about distribution of aid and expansion of border violence.<sup>8</sup> In some instances reporting is not parallel with distributing aid, but with providing 'independent information for people on the move'<sup>9</sup> or phone, email, or personal mediation between the migrants and the police organized to prevent pushback (Info Kolpa, 2019, p. 2; Are you Syrious etc., 2018, pp. 6–7).

Although this parallel providing basic help and challenging the authorities may at first sight seem dissonant with the modern official humanitarian imperatives of neutrality, impartiality and independence (see e.g., Barnett, 2011), it is not new in a humanitarian context. Quite the contrary, blending between providing aid and denouncing violence is one of the hallmarks of new forms of humanitarianism, influenced, among all, by the human rights discourse that dominated the moral sphere of the liberal international order of the late 20th century (Barnett, 2011, pp. 195–212). As summarized by Didier Fassin, 'publicly bearing witness of suffering and injustice is precisely what departs the first (International Red Cross) and second (Doctors without Borders, Doctors of the World) ages of humanitarianism' (2008, p. 555). Witnessing (*témoignage*), contested as a practice even within the MSF itself becomes a humanitarian 'duty' in that context (Redfield, 2013, p. 110). More precisely, 'historically, the emergence of the second age of humanitarianism, with "French doctors" returning from the war in Biafra, was a reaction to the silence of the Red Cross, wedded to its principle of neutrality. Testimony in favor of the victims becomes, for MSF and even more for Médecins du monde, a key dimension of their action' (Fassin, 2007, p. 516). Nevertheless, as MSF workers themselves insisted, witnessing is a secondary effect of humanitarian medical action, 'an essential byproduct, but a byproduct nonetheless' (Redfield, 2013, p. 110), as it is reporting for many grassroots groups discussed here. In this vein, these groups' engagement in reporting seems not as contradictory to humanitarian assistance, but in a way provoked by that assistance and even a necessary precondition for fur-

<sup>6</sup> See <https://www.nonamekitchen.org/en/>

<sup>7</sup> See <http://www.nonamekitchen.org/en/what-do-we-do/>

<sup>8</sup> See <https://www.facebook.com/NoNameKitchenBelgrade>

<sup>9</sup> See <http://moving-europe.org/>

ther provision of that assistance. As mentioned before, for solidarity-driven groups—and this is how most involved groups self-define or represent themselves<sup>10</sup>—reporting comes as a form of non-complying with the context in which they participate by the logic of humanitarian involvement. It is a way of self-distancing from re-production of borders in, what is termed in the literature, humanitarian borderwork (Pallister-Wilkins, 2017) or humanitarian border (Walters, 2011).

Besides humanitarian endeavors, grassroots pushback reports are comparable with human rights engagements. More precisely, they evoke comparison with human rights reports which, since the 1960s when Amnesty International pioneered their use, evolved into a distinct discursive genre (Buzzi, 2017). Similarities between grassroots pushback reports discussed here and human rights reports published by human rights organizations can be observed on the level of the terminology of the grassroots reports (their referring to human rights violations, collective expulsions, degrading treatment); the focus on the legal framework and argumentation, especially in the more recent reports (e.g., Border Violence Monitoring Network et al., 2020; Border Violence Monitoring Network, 2019; 2020a; 2020b); and on their general structure and layout. Far from a minimalistic graphic design, more recent reports often have discernible cover illustration, a designed layout, table of content and pagination. In fact, the writing style and graphic design of most of the recent pushback reports examined here (e.g., Border Violence Monitoring Network, 2020a; 2020b; Border Violence Monitoring Network et al., 2020) seem closer to the traditional genre of human rights reports than to the older reports of the same groups. Some of them have almost the canonical structure of human rights reports, described in literature (Cohen, 1996) as expressing concerns about the situation, stating the problem, setting the context, defining sources and methods, detailed allegations, an overview of international and domestic law and required actions or recommendations.<sup>11</sup> In sum, as many human rights reports, the most recent pushback reports are almost exclusively structured as overviews and analyses of the situation and of violations of human rights.

<sup>10</sup> See <https://www.nonamekitchen.org/en/>, <https://rigardu.de/en/aboutus/>, Bužinkić 2018 etc.

<sup>11</sup> Pushbacks came into the focus of human rights organizations reporting only relatively recently with new millennia and the expansion and brutalization of that bordering practice. In the human rights field, pushback reports were first addressed together with other human rights violations regarding right to international protection most often concerning the situation in Greece (Pro Asyl etc., 2007; see Norwegian Association for Asylum Seekers etc., 2009). Some of these reports were written in methodologically innovative ways, as already addressed in the literature (see Cabot, 2016). With series of reports about pushbacks at sea conducted by Italy, primary to Libya in the first decade of the 21st century (Human Rights Watch, 2006; 2009), pushbacks were recognized as recurrent and widespread violations of international and national law. In parallel, pushbacks conducted outside so-called pushback operations at the open sea also came into the fore of human rights reports, for example pushbacks from Greek land and sea borders to Turkey (Pro Asyl, 2007; Human Rights Watch, 2008) or pushbacks from Italy to Greece (Tsapopoulou et al., 2012). In the next decade pushbacks, still not always called as such, were promoted into the distinct subject of human right organizations reports, first in connection to the situation at the Aegean Sea and Greek land borders (Pro Asyl, 2013; Amnesty International, 2013; 2014a) and after in Bulgaria (Human Rights Watch, 2014), Hungary, North Macedonia, Serbia (Amnesty International, 2015), Spain (Amnesty International, 2015) or in relation to the restrictive and violent European border policies in general (Amnesty International, 2014b).

## 5 Individual accounts of pushbacks between factual and contextual

As mentioned before, grassroots pushback reports were not always structured as overviews or analyses of the situation and of human right violations. When the corridor was active and in the years after, individual accounts of pushbacks dominated the production of grassroots reports (e.g., Banich et al., 2016a; 2016b; No Name Kitchen etc., 2018; 2019; Are you Syrious et al., 2018). In fact, monthly pushback reports were for a long time (until December 2018 almost exclusively, and until April 2019 predominantly) structured as collections of individual reports or individual accounts of pushbacks. Their cumulative structure was highlighted already in their title as *Illegal Push-backs [Pushbacks] and Border Violence Reports* (No Name Kitchen et al, 2018). However, individual accounts included in those reports varied radically from one monthly report to another as well as within the same monthly reports. Roughly, it seems possible to discern two opposing tendencies of individual pushback accounts representation in these monthly collections of reports.

First, there is a tendency for the description of the individual pushback to be more factually, or even forensically founded, and action/incident-oriented, with simple, mostly one-dimensional and schematic structures, which consist of a departure, apprehension by the police, police misdoings, and pushback to the place where the report is made (e.g., No Name Kitchen etc., 2018, August, report 5 and 25, October, report 18). Additionally, this tendency of representation of individual accounts of pushbacks has distinctive characteristics including a persistent presentation of people who report about their experience of a pushback as anonymous even when the name is an element of a standardized form for reporting pushbacks (see e.g., No Name Kitchen etc., 2018, October, report 19), as well as the use of more formal language and technical terms such as ‘respondent’ (see e.g., No Name Kitchen etc., 2018, September, reports 14 and 17; 2019, February, report 1.9), ‘victim’ (e.g., No Name Kitchen etc., 2018, [August], report 25 and 28, September, report 4) and ‘interviewee’ (see e.g., No Name Kitchen etc., 2018, December, 1.13; 2019, January, reports 1.7, 1.9, 2.3). From the narratological perspective (Genette, 1980), individual pushback accounts which represent more factual and action/incident-oriented reporting of individual pushbacks, usually have an extradiegetic (external to the narrative) and heterodiegetic (absent from the narrative) narrator that ‘takes over’ the narrative from the person who is pushed back and attaches it to a supposedly neutral, external instance.

In contrast to this tendency, some individual accounts included in the monthly collections of pushback reports seem to belong to more personal, migrant and context-oriented reporting tendency. They are characterized by the predominant use of a personal names for the people who are pushed back, as well as extensive reference to the verbal and non-verbal interaction between volunteer/activist and that person (e.g., ‘At the end of the interview, Saraj told me’ / ‘Adan told me’ / ‘Rakan told me’; ‘Fajsan told me’ / ‘Amin told me’ / ‘Mohamad told me’ / ‘Mohamad showed me’ / ‘Adnann described the attack in the following way,’ No Name Kitchen etc., 2018, October). Furthermore, this migrant-oriented tendency of representation of individual pushback accounts is characterized by extensive use of direct speech, as illustrated in the following passages:

In the morning, Saad, 36 years old man from Palestine came to the showers close to the informal camp in Velika Kladuša, where the No Name Kitchen provides showers. Saad could barely walk and looked disoriented and tired. He sat down on a chair and explained that he was brutally attacked by the Croatian police at the Bosnian border

the previous night, when he and other 16 persons were being deported back to Bosnia: ‘They made a half circle in front of the car and one by one called out of the car and beating him. There were children and woman. They also beat the woman because she tried to hide her phone under her clothes and they found out, so they hit her by a baton. Her children and we could see it. Children were crying. But the police did not care. They kept telling me: “Fuck you, fuck your mother,” and after shouting at us, “Heidi, go back to Bosnia!” It was horrible, they were deporting us around 3 am and for three or four hours after, we were searching for each other in a forest. They were beating also an old man who was there with us and now has broken finger. [...] Do you have a cigarette? I have money [pulling ten marks out of his pocket], but I cannot go to the supermarket because I feel so dizzy and tired. I keep vomiting blood. I can’t eat anything as I vomit it out. I think I may have maybe internal bleeding from so many kicks into my body (Saad).’

Later in the afternoon, I met another four men who were together with Saad deported back to Bosnia. Mahmoud, 35 years old Syrian who could speak fluent English, explained to me what happened to him and his friends the previous night at the Croatian-Bosnian border. (e.g., No Name Kitchen etc., 2018, October, report 7)

This and other more contextual and migrant-oriented individual pushback accounts include descriptions of the process of documenting and reporting the pushback (‘In the morning, Saad, 36 years old...’; ‘Later in the afternoon, I met...’), as well as an individual account of the pushback presented as direct speech (‘They made a half circle...’) and related to the individual with a name (here ‘Saad’) (e.g., No Name Kitchen etc., 2018, August, report 3). Individuality of the personal account of the pushback and the process of its documentation within this tendency is furthermore acknowledged by the use of direct speech even within direct speech (e.g., ‘They kept telling me: “Fuck you, fuck your mother”’), linguistic plurality of the context (‘Heidi’ as distorted pronunciation and/or transcription of *hajde* meaning ‘go’ in Croatian) and registering the nonverbal aspects of communication (‘[pulling ten marks out of his pocket]’). Finally, reports belonging to this representational framework have two levels of narration and two narrators, one which narrates documenting the pushback and the other that narrates the pushback. The first narrator deals with the context, atmosphere, and events related to the process of documenting and the interaction with the person who was pushed back, as well as with the narrator’s reception of person pushed back narrative. Here we are dealing with a narrator involved in a narrative as a character: the volunteer/activist who is documenting the pushback. The second narrator is, in narratological terminology (Genette, 1980), intradiegetic, embedded into the narrative of the first narrator. This narrator is homodiegetic or a narrator-character: the person who experienced the pushback.

## 6 Grassroots pushback reporting and ethnography

The interest of some of the individual reports or accounts in various contexts and perspectives, and, in general, their inclination toward what is called thick description in anthropology (Geertz, 1973, pp. 3–30), calls for further investigation of the parallels between grassroots pushback reporting and ethnography.

According to Heath Cabot, it is the *story*, the *interview*, and the *case* that can be seen as ‘some perhaps obvious examples’ of meeting points between ethnographic research

and advocacy work, including reporting (Cabot, 2016, p. 8).<sup>12</sup> Indeed, as formulated by one of the groups at issue here, reporting pushbacks is driven by the idea to bring ‘often forgotten stories to public attention and demand that these practices stop immediately.’<sup>13</sup> According to the perspective of the members of another group, publishing individual accounts of pushbacks is based on the idea, not ‘to speak for victims’ but to ‘propel their voices and stories to the widest possible audience and build the case for an adherence to international law and safe sanctuary for all refugees’ (Campbell & Augustová, 2018). By highlighting stories or individual accounts, grassroots groups employ, in William Walters’ terms, ‘epistemic strategy’ that at the same time eventually assign “voice” to subjects who are presumed to have no place as political subjects in official debates’ and ‘acts as a tactic of empathy’ (Walters, 2011, p. 152).

Moreover, in the case of grassroots pushback reports, empathy is not only related to the modes of the reception of the reports, but it tackles also the methodology. Besides as a mode of reception, empathy functions here as the ‘ethnographic empathy,’ meaning inclination toward understanding perspective of others, and interest in the other and in his or her story *per se*, often represented by the extensive or exclusive use of direct speech, as in the example of Saad’s retelling of the pushback he experienced, cited in the previous section. By mobilizing direct speech for the presentation of individual accounts, these reports advocate for the autonomy of people who experienced pushbacks. The idea is that the protagonists, or, as described by members of one of the groups involved in reporting pushbacks, ‘the victims should have the autonomy to share their experiences’ and that reporters should ‘respect that narrative, giving respondents the opportunity to tell their part within this story of borders (a simple objective so often neglected in the media coverage of contestation sites such as national frontiers)’ (Campbell & Augustová, 2018). From a linguistic perspective, the use of direct speech implies perceiving ‘another’s utterance as a compact, indivisible, fixed, impenetrable whole’ (Voloshinov, 1973, p. 128). This approach is echoed in pushback monthly reports or collections of individual pushback accounts (No Name Kitchen et al., 2018; 2019), as well as in the reports published during the period of the Balkan refugee corridor (e.g., Banich 2016a; Moving Europe 2016b; 2016c) which encompass individual accounts of pushbacks in form of testimonies, uninterrupted direct speech even when they are derived from interviews.

The commitment of many, mostly older, grassroots pushback reports to document and present individual accounts of pushbacks in broadly speaking integral form, as individual accounts, stories or cases, brings into the discussion their parallels with ethnographic fieldnotes. At first, parallels between fieldnotes and individual reports seem obscured by an extensive reliance of individual accounts of pushbacks on ‘truth’ or ‘evidence’ devices represented by the attached medical documentation, photos of injuries or geolocations, as well as, tabular presentation of the individual accounts of pushbacks (in fact summaries of interviews) in monthly reports (No Name Kitchen et al., 2018; 2019). However, the representation of individual accounts of pushbacks in the format of a table with fixed sections (Type of the incident, Location, Victims, Date and time, Details, Description of the incident, Information about the perpetrators, Injuries and medical treatment, Photos of injuries; No

<sup>12</sup> Cabot also points to differences between advocacy and ethnographic research in refugee context, such as critical perspective of ethnographic work vs. reports work to defend existing knowledge frameworks or ethnographic valuing of inconsistency vs. reports striving to consistency (see Cabot, 2016, p. 8).

<sup>13</sup> See <https://www.borderviolence.eu/about/>

Name Kitchen etc., 2018, September) does not necessarily signal their incongruence with an ethnographic apparatus since tables based on the forms for gathering at least basic contextual data (about the informants, date and place etc.) were not so long-ago part of standard ethnographic fieldwork tools in some contexts (see Hameršak, 2012).

Finally, an overview of convergences between grassroots pushback reports and ethnography necessarily needs to tackle the issue of reporters' and interviewed migrants' (im)mobilities. As mentioned before, grassroots pushback reports examined here are very often based on the volunteer/activist leaving home, which is often located in one of the EU member states (Croatia, Slovenia, Germany, Italy etc.) to go to Serbia or Bosnia and Herzegovina, as the closest countries where people who are pushed back from EU reside and are prone to speak out. This constellation evidently strongly resonates with paradigmatic, although today more and more outdated, ethnographer's displacement. More striking convergences rise from the circumstances that reports are often based on the encounter of temporary immobilized migrants, with volunteers or activists who, as Ruben Andersson noticed regarding his research with Senegal's deportees, in a manner of prototypical ethnographer paradoxically 'came and went, taking their time and stories away with them' (Andersson, 2017, p. 91). Several reports based on the long-distance communication technologies and digital tools, exchange of phone text and email messages, online forms and calls eschew this type of relation characterized by the mobile reporters and immobile—returned or stuck—people on the move. One of them entails the immobility of both a reporter who stays at home and a correspondent in the camp (Inicijativa Dobrodošli, 2016) while others, written on the basis of exchanges of telephone messages between activists, police and people on the move, even reverse the above-described relationship (Info Kolpa, 2019). This report, namely, relies on the immobile activists who communicate from home with people on the move who, at the same time, struggle to maintain their mobility (Info Kolpa, 2019).

For groups situated at the outer fringes of the EU and now for years engaged in publishing regular monthly pushback reports, long-term, in continuity or periodical, presences in the field, another hallmark of ethnography, appears to be a crucial dimension of their reporting practice. As outlined in the discussion of the humanitarian background of grassroots pushback reports, reporters are, like ethnographers, engaged in participating in everyday realities of people who are excluded from the legal, political, and social order and routinely pushed back across borders from one state to another. Or, as it is explained in the introduction to one of the monthly pushback reports: 'The methodological process for these reports leverages the close social contact that we have as independent volunteers with refugees and migrants to monitor pushbacks from Croatia. When individuals return with significant injuries or stories of abuse, one of our violence reporting volunteers will sit down with the individuals to collect their testimonies' (No Name Kitchen etc., 2019, February). *Testimonies are collected* by the interviews done in a 'standardized framework' developed for the monthly pushback reports (No Name Kitchen etc., 2019, January), which in this context appears as the preferred method because the violence these reports strive to document is characterized by 'open aggression and assault' (Isakjee et al., 2020, p. 13) done far from the sight of reporters.

Finally, the (self)reflexive stances about production of pushback reports, such as those about reporting process cited above, together with the previously mentioned activists' reflections about *activist tourist* dimension of their work in Balkans, or, to introduce a new

example, activists' readiness to acknowledge that reports are not the 'most radical tool one can imagine' (Push-Back Map, s. a.) for challenging the system, open up further, and here concluding, lines of connection between these reports and ethnographic inquiries. These and others here not mentioned examples of self-reflection from relatively rich textual production of these groups or their members about their documenting and reporting work (Augustova & Sapoch, 2020; Bužinkić, 2018; Bužinkić & Avon, 2020; Campbell & Augustová, 2018; Info Kolpa, 2020; Push-Back Map Collective, 2020) make reports and reporting close to para-ethnographic accounts. In other words, they position grassroots reports as, in the terms of Douglas Holmes and George Marcus, 'self-conscious critical faculty operating in diverse domains as a way of dealing with contradictions, exceptions, and facts that are fugitive, suggesting a social realm and social processes not in alignment with conventional representations and reigning modes of knowledge and analysis' (2008, p. 596; see Holmes & Marcus, 2005).<sup>14</sup>

## 7 Between supporting and reporting

Although the fusion of bureaucratic technology such as reporting and spontaneous pro-migrant organizing may at first sight might seem incongruous, it fits well into the global documenting fever, which in a way haunts this article also—as suggested by the extensiveness of its bibliography. Far from being undervalued as a form of bureaucratic knowledge, documents, and documenting, including reports and reporting, are today embraced in different fields from arts and academia (see e.g., Kurtović, 2019) to grassroots pro-migrant initiatives.

Spontaneous pro-migrant groups and initiatives formed in the response to mobility breakthroughs of the restrictive EU border control regime in 2015 and 2016. They employed different methods and practices to support the people on the move and to challenge the inefficient, bureaucratized, discriminatory, and securitized modes of action of official, state, and humanitarian actors. Some practices that were developed in this framework of citizen engagements over time evolved into distinctive formats of response to the border restrictions, exclusions, and violence. One of them is still a lasting practice of reporting of pushbacks by grassroots groups active at different locations on the outskirts of the EU, in particular along the Balkan migratory pathway. By outlining the grassroots, self-organized, humanitarian, and human rights background of pushback reports and reporting practices related to Croatia, as well as their representational tendencies and further convergences with ethnographic inquiries, this paper hopefully sets a basic foundation for eventual future analysis of these reports as forms of textual struggles, as well as forms which not only resonate with ethnographic knowledge production, but also speak about the (self)positioning of that knowledge in the contemporary world.

<sup>14</sup> Of course, self-reflective positioning, as when reports highlight that 'only small sample from the experience of [...] activists' which boosts concerns that 'the number of illegal and violent push backs is much higher' (Inicijativa Dobrodošli!, 2017a, s. p.; Are you Syrious et al., 2018), can be sometimes function as reassurance of the argument, but in this context it is more often functioning as a call for critical rethinking.

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EDGAR CÓRDOVA MORALES

The black holes of Lesbos: Life and death at Moria camp. Border violence, asylum, and racisms at the edge of postcolonial Europe

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### Abstract

The EU-Turkey Deal of 2016 led to the enactment of a restrictive and specific asylum process for the Greek island of Lesbos, making the former Moria camp a detention center for thousands of migrants who failed to access international protection. Based on ethnographic evidence, I analyze and propose that the asylum process in Lesbos—a postcolonial border space under EU interference and control—derives from the colonial system of white supremacy. Based on historical and re-actualized racializations of migrant populations from different countries of the global south, the aim of the Greek asylum process has been to subject migrant populations in Moria to various processes of control, detention, illegalization and ultimately exposure to premature socio-physical death as in black holes: historical spaces of anti-black racism and humanitarian abandonment in the most hidden layers of Moria.

**Keywords:** EU–Turkey deal, black hole, asylum, racisms, deportability, anti-black policing

## 1 Introduction

The multiple fires that broke out and destroyed the former Moria camp—on the Greek island of Lesbos—the night of 8 September 2020 left 13,000 people in a situation of utter destitution for several weeks. This tragedy was the culmination of the exhaustion and fury of the migrants from Moria after five years of inhumane conditions, deaths, fires, riots, and demonstrations against the Greek government supported by the EU border regime. After the historic ‘long summer of migration’ (Heller et al., 2018) in 2015 when 876,232<sup>1</sup> people transited through Greece and managed to overcome the multiple barriers within Europe, Lesbos has been rapidly reconfigured as one of the main epicenters of a renewed violent phase of mobility control and militarization through the implementation of the ‘hotspot approach.’

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<sup>1</sup> Hellenic Police, Statistics: Arrests of Irregular Migrants in Greek Turkish land and sea borders (2015) <http://bit.ly/2kKe1Va> Accessed: 21-02-2021

Introduced by the European Agenda on Migration<sup>2</sup> as an emergency response, organizations such as the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (FRONTEX), the European Asylum Support Office (EASO) and the EU law enforcement agency (Europol) were deployed at the EU-external borders in order to assist, monitor and interfere with frontline states like Greece to ‘swiftly, register and fingerprint incoming migrants’ (European Commission, 2015, p. 6). A historical step toward the Europeanization of the border regulations in the Aegean Islands, this hotspot approach has contributed to the proliferation of buffer spaces like Lesbos, the reconfiguration of Moria as a violent EU hotspot on October 2015 and the subsequent entry into force of the EU-Turkey Deal of March 2016, which allowed the detention, illegalization and deportation of migrants on the basis of nationality and race—far from any possibility of international protection in Europe.

This article is based on a three-month research period between September and December 2016 in Lesbos where I conducted *ethnography-volunteering* in a small humanitarian organization in the family and vulnerables’ refugee camp ‘Kara Tepe’, five kilometers away from the former Moria camp. However, my interest in finding out the reasons why migrant populations of certain nationalities and races were surviving in Moria under conditions of prolonged detention, without humanitarian aid and without gaining access to the asylum process in Lesbos led me to leave ‘Kara Tepe’ to come into contact with them in the streets, public squares, and ports of Mytilene, the capital of Lesbos, and later in the depths of the Moria camp.

The ethnographic conversations and testimonies that I collected with dozens of migrants<sup>3</sup> mainly from North Africa and countries such as Cameroon, Congo, and to a lesser extent Pakistan, allowed me not only to know their grievances and their processes of seeking international protection in Moria but also to locate the causes for the state and European disciplinary violence on their bodies and subjectivities. Thus, the friendship bonds, the accompaniment in some of their demonstrations against Greek-European border policies and racism in Lesbos and my visit to Moria materialized this research where my voice was the common thread of people who not always know each other but who shared the experience of having been condemned to survive in Moria for trying to apply for international protection in a turbulent scenario of racism, riots, and deaths. Therefore, I situate this research in the genealogy of engaged anthropology whose interest arose not only out of academic concern, but also to critically analyze, question, and condemn the violent policies and practices taking place at the borders of Europe. Moreover, my interviews with agents of FRONTEX, EASO, the Hellenic Coast Guard and organizations such as The UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR)—after months of insistence, waiting, unanswered messages and constant rescheduling—allowed me to see how and why—from the perspective of Europe’s guardians—migrant populations are subjected to different spaces and temporalities under colonial logics by means of salvationist, humanitarian and security discourses.

At the beginning of my fieldwork, I tried to turn my back to Moria for analytical, ethical-epistemic, and logistical reasons. My research in Lesbos had initially focused on ‘Kara Tepe’ so I decided not to try to enter Moria unless it was truly necessary for my analytical objectives. As a border spectacle (De Genova, 2002), I hesitated to enter to avoid

<sup>2</sup> A European Agenda Migration, European Commission (2015) <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52015DC0240> Accessed: 21-02-2021.

<sup>3</sup> The names shown in this article are pseudonyms chosen by the migrants themselves. Their real names do not appear here to protect their identities.

reproducing a sort of morbidity, sensationalism for violence and misery of this infamous camp, turned into a famous field site for researchers, journalists, politicians and celebrities mostly from the global north where excessive, violent and paralyzing dystopian narratives with ‘common sense conclusions regarding mismanagement and technical insufficiencies’ have been produced, making us, researchers, many times ‘complicit in the epistemological reproduction of the border’ (Rozakou, 2019, pp. 79–80).

In this highly restricted space for civilians, my chances of entry were nil in the face of the silence, indifference and arrogance of the Greek-European powers that placed a young non-white scholar originally from Mexico, a country of the global south, as a suspect with only a tourist visa, not speaking Greek and culturally distant from Greek society. Probably classified as politically leftist and pro-migrant being a social science researcher, my brown skin color, my nationality, my lack of a European visa, the little time I had and above all the lack of any high profile academic and political contact—usually a key of entry for select groups of investors (ibid.)—were factors that prevented my access to this field despite my privileged situation as a student with a scholarship and a passport. But after the multiple tragedies that took place during my field stay, after learning that the totality of migrants’ experiences in Lesbos originated in Moria, and after noticing how certain groups of migrants lived in confinement and did not leave this camp for fear of being further racialized and criminalized, I decided that the camp of Moria could not be omitted from my analysis. Therefore, I decided to enter with one of my interlocutors through a hole in the fence, allowing me to carry out a *quick transgressive ethnography* where ironically my non-whiteness, which influenced my impossibility to access Moria, allowed me to be inside without being stopped as an intruder, making me confirm my intuitions about the importance of race and racism as key aspects in this space. Thus, this ethnography, in the wake of the EU-Turkey deal, was one of the first inside Moria in that period, while I tried to avoid reproducing the urgent border spectacle by locating this complex hierarchical space in a historical context of long-standing violence, moving away from the presentism that characterizes the discourses on migrations in the Mediterranean.

Three sections make up this article. In the first part, I describe and analyze some of the first violent consequences of the 2016 EU–Turkey deal on the bodies and subjectivities of ‘economic migrants’ evidencing their criminalization and detention starting from the conversion of the Moria camp into an EU detention center, the introduction of new and regulatory mechanisms, as well as the entrenchment of European agencies such as FRONTEX, which deepened Greece’s role as post-colony of the central economies of the EU and as a key insular border space in the Mediterranean. In the second section, I analyze, in-depth, the fast-track border procedure, a violent mechanism introduced specifically in the Aegean islands in 2016 to illegalize, immobilize and situate in the deportability zone (De Genova, 2002) as many applicants as possible under nationality and racial lines. Through prolonged detention processes, an absence of legal guidance, exclusionary and legally illegalizing laws, I suggest that the Greek Asylum Office and EASO, in collaboration with security agencies FRONTEX, predispose the voluntary renunciation to the right of asylum among North African Arab migrants living in Moria.

Subsequently, I propose the existence of certain spaces of Lesbos as black holes, where the most racialized and dehumanized populations of Lesbos are exposed to simultaneous practices of social policing and humanitarian abandonment by the EU border regime, ex-

posing them to a premature social and physical death. I argue that the black populations of Lesbos arrive in Lesbos already previously illegalized and dehumanized by means of a culture of anti-Black policing (Saucier & Woods, 2014) established since slavery and codified in disguise through the asylum process. The above leads me to evidence of the existence of a complex racialized architecture of hierarchization of different types of human beings within racial relations of power in Moria and more broadly in Lesbos.

## 2 The EU–Turkey statement, border violence, and the question of Europe in times of migrant immobility

The date was November 25th, 2016, and for the third time in three months, Moria camp was in flames once again. A 66-year-old Iraqi woman and her six-year-old grandson died, charred by the fire which consumed the tent that they lived in, and two other people, who were in the next tent, teetered between life and death for two weeks following the fire. The reason? They were using a small gas stove, simply trying to keep warm. With winter beginning, temperatures dipped to zero degrees Celsius at night, and the freezing wind was so strong that it felt like a continuous slap in the face.

As various Iraqi and Afghani groups confronted security forces—asserting their discontent with the precarious living conditions in Moria—rumors about the tragic fire began to circulate around Lesbos. People spoke of a new uprising that came as a protest to the extreme sluggishness of the asylum application process in Lesbos. Even if the events of that night had been purely gossip, other riots had broken out in this former camp. But this time, it wasn't the local newspapers who had alerted me to the news of this tragedy, but rather a text message from the old Nokia owned by Jack, a young Algerian living in Moria then: 'Some people are dying from burns. The situation is out of control [...] I finally got home; I found a way to get back.' Jack returned to Algeria without having succeeded in exercising his right to seek asylum in Greece—he preferred returning to the place he had escaped from to living with the uncertainty of an interminable and exhausting wait.

A few weeks earlier, I met Jack one night during one of the demonstrations against the EU migration and border policies in Lesbos. Young, tall, very thin and with small scars scattered across his cheeks—the result of shaving without a mirror. He was wearing an old jacket from a well-known basketball team that day. But the basketball games he had played in Oran, Algeria, after long days behind the wheel of his old taxi were a thing of the past; now his time was dedicated to fishing. Every day, Jack would gather with dozens of other Algerian migrants at the waterfront under the shade of two FRONTEX military boats which were anchored at the Mytilene port, waiting for something to bite. 'Wait and wait. That's what we do. There's nothing to do here,' is what I heard from many of these migrants. One can wait a long time to catch a fish, but one has to wait for a miracle in order to gain the right to leave the island, so highly monitored and militarized by FRONTEX and the Hellenic Coast Guard, which have guarded the maritime borders exhaustively since the implementation of the EU-Turkey Deal.

Jack's situation as well as that of thousands of migrants in Lesbos illustrates very well some of the violent consequences of the entry into force of the EU-Turkey statement on March 20, 2016. The aim of the deal was to legally allow the illegalization and deportation of migrants and to put an end to irregular migration from Turkey so that any migrant irregu-

larly arriving in Greece after March 20 and whose application for international protection was rejected would be deported to Turkey. A 1:1 scheme was also established whereby for every Syrian deported to Turkey; another Syrian would be resettled in Europe giving priority to those who had not been previously irregularized.<sup>4</sup>

As part of the effects of the deal, the Greek government decided to impose a geographical restriction on all migrants in Lesbos, prohibiting them from leaving the island during the examination of their applications for international protection. In this way, the Moria hotspot was reconfigured as a detention center for thousands of people like Jack who arrived after March 20, 2016. The situation meant an overpopulation and the collapse of the asylum procedures where around 5,000 people, in a space built for 2500 (Hänsel, 2020), were surviving in inhuman conditions in late 2016. These spatially imposed measures in the Aegean islands were evidence of the reconfiguration of Lesbos—once a space of fluid migratory transit—as an island prison whose asylum seekers were considered as detained until they proved to be deserving of international assistance.

After entering Moria from Turkey in summer 2016, Jack was immediately arrested and held in detention in the so-called pre-removal center: a highly secured detention area within Moria with a capacity to detain up to 420 people.<sup>5</sup> As an Algerian, Jack was subjected to the ‘Pilot Project’<sup>6</sup> of the Greek Police: a detention procedure, launched after the summer of 2016 and exclusively targeting single men coming from certain ‘low profile’ countries such as Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, although these practices were later extended to various groups of migrants under arbitrary and racist criteria. While the ultimate purpose was the deportation of these ‘undesirable aliens and economic migrants’ as described by the police circular of the Greek Ministry of Interior, the vast majority of people had usually been released and left to themselves in the Moria camp after three months of isolation, uncertainty and violence (Saranti, 2019).

From his container in the port of Mytilene, a member of the Hellenic Coast Guard who decided to remain anonymous, said: ‘If you look around, you can see that the refugees are free and can come here to Mytilene to take a walk and have a coffee. Our laws are not as unfair as they seem, rather we are dealing with an exceptional situation.’

From his office, he pointed to a group of refugees who were arriving in the city after having walked almost two hours from Moria, a route that runs along the shoulder of a road and involves numerous inclines. Jack and many others all laughed when I told them about the stance taken by the officials and these legal measures, which indeed are contrary to the humanitarian and international legal framework.

‘What is the use of leaving one prison, to enter another that is this island in the middle of the sea? What is the use of getting out of a prison if we can’t even get a coffee—if people look at us with distrust, if the police stop us at night?’ asked Jack ironically, while he attested that many migrants and families like his have spent up to three months in conditions of detention.

<sup>4</sup> European Council, 2016, EU-Turkey statement, 18 March 2016, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2016/03/18/eu-turkey-statement/> Accessed: 23-02-2021.

<sup>5</sup> Deportation Monitoring Aegean, 2018, The prison within the prison within the prison: the detention complex of Moria camp, <https://dm-aegean.bordermonitoring.eu/2018/09/23/the-prison-within-the-prison-within-the-prison-the-detention-complex-of-moria-camp/> Accessed: 18-02-2021

<sup>6</sup> This project was extended since 2017 for sub-Saharan and West African people of asylum recognition, i.e. less than 25 per cent.

As thousands of migrants arrived after March 20th, Jack was not only received by Europe with an arrest by the Hellenic Coast Guard on the beach, but he was immediately subjected to the dreaded debriefing interview by FRONTEX agents in Moria, the purpose of which is not explained to migrants throughout multiple conversations with them. In 2016, the debriefing process was part of the first stage that every person who sets foot in Europe is subjected to. According to several testimonies in 2016, long and tense interrogations carried out by agents—some without uniforms and some even with dogs—were not unusual in these interviews, as the case of Dana, a young 25-year-old Kurdish-Iraqi migrant who arrived in Lesbos in April 2016: ‘The day I landed I was interrogated for about five hours in a room and treated as if I were a terrorist. They kept me locked up in a room; there was a very big dog next to the agent, he was aggressive [...] They asked me a lot of things: they wanted names of the people who had brought me here, how much I had paid, but nothing about my personal situation as a refugee.’ When I asked him if he recognized the officer’s uniform, he said that the person was dressed as a civilian.

Evidently, the debriefing interview consists of interrogation with the purpose of collecting intelligence information about human trafficking and terrorist networks, which is then shared with the European security agency Europol. A press officer for FRONTEX, whose identity has been hidden for security purposes, put aside all euphemisms and told me that, according to her, the debriefing interview serves to find potential terrorists attempting to enter Europe. Meanwhile, in its press report the agency boasts that its mandate has been reinforced in order to respond more forcefully to the current ‘humanitarian crisis’ at European borders.

However, for John B., the Dutch head of FRONTEX operations in Moria at that time, this process was quite different from what is described by dozens of migrants that I met in Lesbos. From inside the very discrete container of the agency in the Mytilene port—whose address is not public and access to is denied to civilians—John insisted and emphasized that every person who arrived in Lesbos had received immediate humanitarian assistance and information about their legal rights and how to apply for asylum.

This explanation contradicts the vast majority of my conversations with and testimonies from individuals regarding their arrival process in Lesbos. Additionally, it demonstrates the way Moria’s security frame is a symptom of European policies, which view migration itself as a security, sociocultural and racial threat that has to be managed, repelled and dissuaded on its external borders. In effect, these current punitive and disciplinary policies based on distrust and hostility toward migrants lead to the deepening of xenophobia and racism through confinement practices in Moria and along the Mediterranean.

Thus, the normalization and reinforcement of practices of spatial restrictions exercised by the Greek state and FRONTEX to the detriment of the rights of migrants have characterized the current period of response to the growing migratory flows in the Mediterranean. Jack says he was never informed why he was detained, nor did he have legal representation, nor was it explained to him how to apply for international protection, for as Saranti (2019) states, the Pilot Project not only lacks legal basis in Greece, but transgresses Article 9 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights that stipulates that no one may be subjected to arbitrary imprisonment without being informed of his detention.

With enormous difficulty, Jack was only able to complete his registration and identification process and manage to survive in the violent pre-removal center of Moria. Once

released, Jack did not feel totally at liberty as he found himself in an even larger prison: The actual island called Lesbos, whose insularity naturally provides limits that are extremely difficult to overcome, including a long sea journey to the mainland. In the imagination of migrants from the Global South in Lesbos, Europe meant above all protection and security from the violent situations they escaped from, justice for the impunity and persecution that many experienced, and a place to rebuild their lives. But asylum seekers have encountered in Moria precisely what they fled, and which in itself is the embodiment of the contemporary EU border regime: continued violence—for being poor, for not being white, and for their national origins. For Jack and many others, there is neither humanity nor opportunities for them in Lesbos, their European mirage. They had no rights and no chance of mobility.

In 2016, it was common to hear from migrants and various foreign agents that Greece was not European enough for them; it is seen as a failed state in the face of immigration management—weak, irresponsible, and devastated by an endless imposed debt crisis, infected by institutional corruption and subjugated to the policies of European central economies. For his part, the local coast guard confessed that the violent migratory practices applied in Lesbos would not be legal and would even be less applied in most European countries. However, he justified this border violence as necessary for the protection of the continent in the face of an unprecedented flow of people from all over the world. From his point of view, the greater involvement, interference and protagonism of European agencies such as FRONTEX in Moria was necessary as it provided them with financial resources and training in intelligence and security.

Historically located on the margins of European imperialism but not colonized, Herzfeld (2002, p. 900) has argued that the modern Greek state has maintained a crypto-colonial relationship with the former European imperial powers. Thus, it embodied the need for ‘political independence at the expense of massive economic dependence (whose) relationship being articulated in the iconic guise of aggressively national culture fashioned to suit foreign models’. In the current period of border securitization, the deployment of European border powers is no longer only disguised through Greek institutions, but direct, on-site and hyper-visible by supranational agencies such as FRONTEX, EASO and Europol, whose foreign flags and languages characterize new border infrastructures (boats, cars, ships) as well as the historical key spaces of Greek national security and sovereignty. For different sectors of the local population with whom I spoke, this violent spectacle of European power on Lesbos has been traumatic, aggressive and humiliating but, in some cases, a necessary evil in the face of the growing military might of neighboring Turkey and the necessary disciplinary violence involved in the confinement of migrants in spaces like Moria.

To conclude, I suggest that in late 2016 Lesbos—and more broadly Greece—operated more as a post-colony of the central economies of the European Union than as a politically sovereign state in this community. In other words, my argument here demonstrated that Lesbos, as a key insular border space, and more widely Greece, as a peripheral economy, played an essential role for the Northern European countries as the main executor of the EU-Turkey statement, by modifying the administrative processes of camps like Moria, passing measures exclusively to the Greek islands and making their asylum system the

cornerstone of the illegalization of thousands of migrants in Moria, as will be discussed in the next section.

### 3 Asylum, migrant detention and power of deportability in Lesbos

Jack, along with hundreds of Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Algerian, and Cameroonian migrants have still been fishing, protesting and surviving in Moria camp because they belong to nationalities with an asylum recognition rate below 25 per cent of the EU average calculated by the Statistical Office of the EU (EUROSTAT) database, so their cases are considered as expendable and are not even taken into account for months—even years— by the Greek Asylum Office and EASO. As part of the effects of the EU-Turkey deal, Greece had to enact a new asylum law 4375/2016, which served as a repository of key elements of European regulations (Hänsel & Kasperek, 2020). Under coercion and assistance, I argue that the Europeanization of the new asylum law became one of the most effective colonial mechanisms of the EU border regime in recent years in Greece and the Mediterranean in that it created an exclusionary procedure in terms of nationality and race under international law. As a consequence, the Greek asylum process was fragmented into two parts: one for the mainland and another exclusively for the Aegean islands called a ‘fast-track border procedure,’ spatially reconfiguring Lesbos as a novel border laboratory with the aim of illegalizing and indefinitely immobilizing migrant populations under the horizon of deportation, instrumentalizing the distant insularity of Lesbos with respect to the core of the EU as space suitable ‘for the creative exclusion of migratory rights,’ as in different islands around the world (Hess & Kasperek, 2017, p. 6).

I, therefore, assert that the restrictive and violent fast-track border procedure was based above all on the channeling of asylum seekers into different but similarly exclusive procedural routes based on asylum recognition rates measured by nationalities and statistically calculated by EUROSTAT. At the end of 2016, migrants with high acceptance rates (above 25 per cent) or potential refugees such as Syrians were subjected to the controversial admissibility interview: a filter prior to asylum examinations aimed at preventing people with a high probability of protection according to the Geneva Refugee Convention from applying for asylum in Greece on the grounds that Turkey is considered a safe third country for asylum seekers, as established by the EU-Turkey deal.

With six-billion-euro support as part of this deal, Turkey became indispensable to the EU. However, as Hänsel (2020) has pointed out, the deportation of Syrians on admissibility goals was not achieved in part because of Turkey’s denial to be just a passive recipient of the EU border regime and because Turkey’s classification as a safe third country has been legally contested in Lesbos. In fact, during 2016, appeals against inadmissibility decisions were overwhelmingly successful before the State (Konstantinou et al., 2016). Consequently, the appeal commissions were promptly replaced by the Greek government under pressure from the European Union, leading to a drastic increase in refusals. In this way, in September 2017, the Greek Supreme Administrative Court ruled to deport two Syrians after they had appealed their inadmissibility decisions twice. Under the argument of considering Turkey as a safe third country, they were never able to apply for asylum in Greece.<sup>7</sup> This decision

<sup>7</sup> Refworld, UNHCR, 2017, Joint decisions 2347/2017 and 2348/2017, [http://www.refworld.org/cases,GRC\\_CS,5b1935024.html](http://www.refworld.org/cases,GRC_CS,5b1935024.html) Accessed: 11-05-2021

illustrated the first widespread but ultimately unsuccessful attempts to deport Syrians from Lesbos in the past few years; by the end of 2019, only 43 Syrians were deported to Turkey because their asylum applications were considered as inadmissible in Lesbos.<sup>8</sup>

While the vast majority of migrants have managed to stay on European soil in the face of the impossibility of their removal, I assert that the designation of Turkey as a safe third country under the fast-track border procedure nevertheless allowed the EU border regime to achieve a vital objective against thousands of potential Syrian refugees: to legally immobilize them for years in distant Lesbos, a situation that would not have happened under the former Greek asylum structure.

Migrants of nationalities with low recognition rates (less than 25 per cent), however, were directly filtered into the Greek asylum examination process. While this pathway was posed to be fast due to an ‘expected rejection’ (Hänsel & Kasperek, 2020) by the Greek Asylum Office and EASO, the detention experiences of Jack and dozens of others I met let me see how border procedures turned out to be even more violent, slow, opaque, and confusing for these ‘economic migrants’ than for potential refugees like Syrians.

As mentioned above, Jack and hundreds of other ‘low profile migrants’ were never even able to start their formal asylum process and even less aspired to survive in spaces with less violent living conditions than Moria; consequently, individual cases of persecution and violence which were experienced by all these migrants were never examined.

Indeed, migrants with little recognition of asylum are the target of suspicion and seen as illegitimate. For example, in 2016, being Algerian was synonymous with being a violent migrant seeking an escape from poverty and for a way to benefit from the German security system, according to FRONTEX officials, the Greek Asylum Office and interlocutors I spoke with. But none of them knew that Jack was threatened with death if he did not collaborate with drug trafficking in an area under terrorist presence.

‘You arrive and it’s like Russian roulette. Europeans decide the future of migrants based on their statistics, calculators and computers,’ said Jack when he found out that Algerians could in no way pursue the relocation program to other European countries, and that he would have minimal chances of obtaining asylum as a detainee without legal guidance and humanitarian aid.

Further, my stay in Lesbos allowed me to see how minors, sick and elderly people from North African countries—vulnerable groups under Article 14(8) L 4375/2016 and therefore exempted from the fast-track border procedure in Lesbos—were not usually transferred to other safer spaces on the island such as ‘Kara Tepe’ for belonging to the nationalities of ‘bad Arabs’ as Jack and his companions used to complain.

To tell the truth, administrative detention of migrants requesting international protection at liberty was not allowed on Lesbos in 2016 by Article 46 of the then-new asylum law 4375/2016, which regulated these systematic practices in Greece. Like Jack, thousands of migrants of nationalities with low acceptance rates orally manifested the will for protection as soon as they arrived on Lesbos, which automatically made them asylum seekers prior to their arrests and without knowing it; therefore, I agree with Saranti (2019) in considering these detentions as illegal.

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<sup>8</sup> UNHCR Greece, 2019, Returns from Greece to Turkey in the framework of the EU-TUR Statement, <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/73295> Accessed: 11-05-2021

However, the scaffolding of this law was designed to contour humanitarian law in that it outlawed those ‘bad Arabs’ under the legal justification of belonging to undesirable nationalities and thus constituting a danger to European security and the international public order. Jack was subjected to what Balibar (1991) has termed as ‘cultural racism’ whose socio-cultural classifications such as class, religion and nationality are actualized and attached to non-white races such as North African Arabs—never conceived as potential refugees but as Islamist threats to European security in the current context of global border securitization.

Therefore, I consider that the fast-track border procedure has generated in these years a self-fulfilling prophecy (Saranti, 2019) for the ‘low profile migrants’ in that the precarious detention conditions imposed substantially affect the reduction of possibilities for adequate preparation for the desired asylum interview—a phase that few in fact reach. Thus, the low acceptance rates of these nationalities are intentionally and continuously perpetuated by the Greek Asylum Office under the intervention of EASO, leading to a permanent illegalization of those ‘economic migrants.’ For Jack and thousands of North Africans, access to the law is like a mirage: Whenever he sought information about his rights, Jack ran into closed doors or rebuffs. He could only imagine from afar the few experts of the EASO and Greek Asylum Service who were almost always overwhelmed and often absent from their headquarters in Moria.

Although potential refugee Syrians whose suffering is backed by international media coverage of the conflicts they are fleeing from are a little more likely to obtain international protection in Greece, both migrants with high and low asylum recognition rates were placed in a zone of deportability (De Genova, 2002) and legal uncertainty as soon as they arrive in Moria due to the effects of the EU–Turkey Deal. In conclusion, I assert then that the fast-track border procedure under the new asylum law 4375/2016 is subjecting virtually all asylum seekers on Lesbos to processes of illegalization, immobility, and the possibility of deportation along the lines of nationality and race, with the aim to making them voluntarily renounce their right to asylum. Under coercion and assistance of the European Union, this procedure is an attempt of a legally institutionalized machine of *refoulement* so that the power to deport or impose that possibility is the cornerstone of this procedure, which generates feelings of anxiety, worry, suffering, and anger among migrants.

#### 4 Black holes, racisms, and anti-black policing in the ruins of empire

In the ‘Kara Tepe’ camp, I regularly interacted with migrants mostly from Arab and Central Asian countries living there. I also used to hang out with North African migrants like Jack who, after finishing their long detention processes in Moria, occasionally went out fishing, walking, and demonstrating in the streets of Mytilene. But after two months in Lesbos, I had spoken little with black migrants from West Africa although I knew there were hundreds in Moria. So I wondered: Why were there only 20 people from Congo, Cameroon and Central Africa in a camp for 1,000 people like Kara Tepe? What was their application process for international protection like? Was their real absence from the streets of Lesbos due to a racial issue?

Therefore, I decided to call Hiroshima, a Congolese friend of Jack who led me inside

that camp through a small hole in the fence covered by colorful clothes drying in the dim sunlight. Upon arriving at this clandestine entrance, well-known among the Black refugees from West Africa, we walked directly to the ground level section, under the open sky—the *African area*, as some of them called it. The landscape was bleak: dozens of thin fabric tents and UNHCR prefabricated tents, where hundreds of people lived, made up this place muddied by recent rains and strewn with garbage and even feces, creating a foul smell as a result of the outrageous absence of toilets in the area. The paths formed between the tents were full of improvised clotheslines, people smoking and playing dominoes in plastic chairs, and women cooking with firewood. At the end of this passage, a small, improvised church made of wood and a translucent rubber roof allowed you to see the silhouettes of several people on their knees praying. Upon reaching his friends' tent, Hiroshima let me in and introduced me to Nagasaki.

He—as well as dozens of his fellows from Cameroon, Congo, Senegal, or Mali—had been in Moria for more than eight months when we met, and he said that he had not yet had contact with the authorities in Lesbos. Being politically persecuted, they lamented being racialized by the Greek Asylum Office and EASO because they were Black and did not deserve international protection as they were considered only as 'economic migrants.' Many of these migrants said they were being ignored by the Greek state, the EU, and UNHCR, and they only recently had been able to do a part of the Registry and the digital fingerprints, with many things still missing.

'They don't favor Africans, much less us Black people. There are no concessions for us. It is a racist system that privileges white skin and Arabs fleeing mediatized wars—why are we not human to them? We live with our women and children here. We are also vulnerable,' Nagasaki said complaining that Europe remains colonial for them. These statements were telling to me because this was the first time in two months that I was seeing many groups of Black West African asylum seekers, except for a couple of Congolese family in 'Kara Tepe' whose director always said that Black Africans were solo migrant travelers and that this is why they are not sent to his camp. However, in this area, I saw dozens of families, elderly people, and children, and there were only a few tents donated by UNHCR.

In this violent context of riots and death and after having visited this area under the guidance of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, I could see better how Moria, a militarized and prison-like camp, operated similarly under a concentrated organizational system carried out by the Greek State, the European Union, and in cooperation with the humanitarian framework. Inspired by Suárez (2015), I conceived the Black Western African area as a black hole<sup>9</sup> of Moria. What is a black hole? I propose that it can be understood as a fragmented border space (Hänsel, 2020) where displaced Black bodies from the former European African colonies are racialized<sup>10</sup> and dehumanized through practices such as policing, isolation, and abandonment. These practices converge under opaque, changing, and illegible legal frameworks as the Greek Asylum procedure, creating 'grey zones' (Knudsen & Frederiksen, 2015), where the limits between legal and illegal are blurred for the restric-

<sup>9</sup> A term coined by Liliana Suárez (2015), who conceives the Mediterranean as a paradigmatic space, where the lack of protection for migrants reflects the current restriction of rights and the European process of entrenchment.

<sup>10</sup> Weheliye (2014, p. 3) understands racialization 'not as a biological or cultural descriptor but as a conglomerate of sociopolitical relations that discipline humanity into I humans, not-quite-humans and non-humans.'

tion of all types of rights, the physiological violence, the abandonment of humanitarian aid, promoting exposure to social (Cacho, 2012) and physical death of those who are entered into its gravitational field.

The black holes are those ruins of empire (Stoler, 2013) located in the limits of the Global North that could not be externalized outside the borders of Europe, so they are framed in a historical continuity of spatial re-actualization of specific violence against racialized bodies as Blacks (Mbembe, 2003). Therefore, I believe that they are not exceptional and novel spaces in the context of global securitization of borders but rather constantly renewed practices that derive from the colonial system of white supremacy originated in the enslavement of non-Western societies. What I want to highlight about Moria's black hole is its racial specificity in these borders where race, torture, and the phenomenon of mass incarceration are resurfacing as central problems in the international order. Speaking with Mbembe (2016, p. 25), I agree that 'procedures of differentiation, classification, and hierarchy for purposes of exclusion, expulsion, and even eradication are being reactivated throughout the world' as is the case of the Black West African area in particular. Thus, the black hole, and more broadly Moria, is part of the burgeoning enclosure industry, or processes of zoning, in border areas—whose practices consist of isolating and enclosing thousands of people in controlled spaces.

This leads me to Gilmore (2007, p. 28) in situating racism in the black hole and, more broadly, Moria as 'the state-sanctioned or extralegal production and exploitation of group-differentiated vulnerability to premature death.' The extreme violence materialized in the deaths of 2016 and the social death (Cacho, 2012) of Hiroshima and Nagasaki relegated to what Fanon (1963) conceptualizes as zones of not being constituted only a few cases among thousands of people from the Global South in the last years. Indeed, Fitzpatrick (1987) and Goldberg (2015) have affirmed that the race construct has ordered the primary Western socio-legal definitions and structures, evidenced by the fact that racism is not only compatible with the law but is inherent to the rule of law itself. Questioning this liberal vision of law, Goldberg (2015, p. 7) has pointed out that racism historically 'materialized as an expression of dehumanization as the geography of modern Europe took shape. Race established the lines of belonging and estrangement for modern European social (and legal) life [...] and was invoked to delineate a European 'we,' in defining contrast with those considered its constitutive outsiders.'

In this vein and more specifically, Wilderson (2003) asserts that the seizure and reification of the Black body during slavery was through gratuitous, non-contingent and instrumental violence for its suffering and dehumanization in this foundational scenario of modernity. This powerful argument dismantles the humanist conception of Western violence as a contingent, and defensive resource to locate it rather as an offensive and punitive methodology that places the Black body outside the category of the human since the very beginning of modernity, as proposed by Saucier and Woods (2014). Drawing on these authors, I therefore consider that asylum seekers like Hiroshima and Nagasaki were not only violently abandoned and illegalized for having arrived irregularly in Europe in the wake of the EU-Turkey Deal. Rather, their Black bodies daring to be/being outside of Africa at the gates of the former empire exposed them to the racist and gratuitous violence that precedes any of their acts in a white supremacist order. Thus, black holes are specifically governed primarily by the motivation and duty of the 'culture of anti-Black policing estab-

lished by slavery' codified through the fast-track border procedure, thus legalizing spatial confinement and humanitarian abandon for the perpetuation of dehumanization (Saucier & Woods, 2014, p. 62). Nagasaki's words as well as those of his companions from inside a crowded and small tent on the mud of winter rains while trying to warm up support these painful arguments: 'Here nobody listens to us, nobody sees us, we are not treated as political refugees [...] people die for anything. We have many things to say because in our countries they persecute us for political ideas.'

While Jack was intensely illegalized, placed in the deportability zone (De Genova, 2002) by FRONTEX in the Pre-removal Center and forced to voluntarily renounce his right to asylum after being racialized as a 'bad Arab' of an undesirable nationality, Hiroshima and Nagasaki, as well as several of their peers, were rendered neglected, abandoned and dehumanized as a product of the most primordial racism based on biological classifications in the most hidden layers of Moria. Like dozens of Black migrants with low asylum recognition rates, Hiroshima and Nagasaki did not need to be locked up in the Pre-removal Center or located under the specter of deportability like Jack because their bodies were previously illegalized and racialized centuries ago. They were not visible and humane enough to be subject to the fast-track border procedure, to overly interventionist powers in a reduced capacity prison (420 people), nor to sufficient humanitarian aid. Instead, they were openly excised from the human realm in the black holes for years until they were finally considered to begin their asylum process as an effect of the recurring riots, fires and anti-racist demonstrations.

While both Jack, Hiroshima, and Nagasaki were variously illegalized and racialized but similarly subjected to degrading forms of violence without succeeding in applying for international protection, their experiences revealed how the Greek asylum process, under the effects of the EU-Turkey statement, is based on a complex racialized and white supremacist structure that conceives, reproduces and perpetuates a clear and historical hierarchy of different types of humans based on both phenotypical and cultural differences, thus structuring them as threatening, dangerous or simply inferior and expendable. In the race relations of power in Moria, the black hole is the hidden and more savage face of the EU border regime behind the external administrative sophistication and legal denseness of the Greek asylum process.

Categorized as migrants, asylum seekers, or potential refugees, the de-racialized and neutral terminology (De Genova, 2017) fed by agencies such as, FRONTEX, the Greek Asylum Office, and EASO deny that the asylum process—that is, the law—is racist. The multiple agents with whom I spoke justify a rigorous and strict asylum process mainly on humanitarian and security grounds: they conceive the asylum process first and foremost as a necessary and selective filter of merit based on suffering legitimized by EASO, the Greek Asylum Office and more generally white European populations in a context of economic crisis, precariousness in the Euro-Mediterranean zone, omitting aspects such as xenophobia and islamophobia. Genova (2017) and Balibar (1991) have argued that, although the hegemonic discourses on migration in Europe have historically denied and disguised the racial question under the categories of migrants and refugees, the tens of thousands of corpses of non-white bodies in the Mediterranean and the dead in the Moria camp during the last years strongly evidence the racial specificity of the systematic production of death by the European border regime. I thus encourage challenging the de-racializing discourses

in Lesbos and more broadly the historical absence, dissimulation, and denial of race and racism in research on borders, migrations, and the State.

Beyond the racial hierarchies based on both biological and cultural classifications for the selection of a reduced percentage of protection deservers, I end by stating that, ultimately, the totality of the migrants from Moria have been subjected to a process of indefinite immobility in Lesbos that prevents them from pursuing their life projects. The detention and deportability of Jack, the abandonment and dehumanization of Congolese migrants like Hiroshima and Nagasaki and the deaths of the Iraqi migrants on November 25th, 2016, reflect the differentiated effects of racism, with anti-Black policing (Saucier & Woods, 2014) being the most visceral form of violence exerted by the Greek state and the EU. Likewise, the Greek asylum procedure has highlighted how the different groups racialized by white supremacy are undeniably experiencing ‘the becoming Black of the world’ (Mbembe, 2016): the order to bend to the imperial and slave logic, which at other times was reserved only for the Black subject.

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Mapping the field of turbulent changes around the issue  
of migration in Poland

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The issue of migration had become highly politicized in Poland already before the 2015 elections. The neoconservative Law and Justice (*Prawo i Sprawiedliwość, PiS*) party made it one of the key topics in the electoral campaign both for the parliamentary and for the presidential elections, both of which the party won. Poland has switched from a country with the highest acceptance rate of refugees in the EU to the one with the lowest rate within about a year.<sup>1</sup> The narrative about masses of refugees in Poland and at its borders threatening Polish culture, civilization and identity started to gather momentum and has provoked numerous intended and unintended consequences, political and social.

On the one hand such statements and politics have sparked an increase in hate speech and incidents, and violent actions.<sup>2</sup> On the other, as a reaction, there is an observable awakening of the civil society in Poland through more intensified actions of various groups and organizations. Both are outcomes of the situation in which the government and the ruling party take a strong and negative stance on the issue of migrants and refugees. At the same time, anti-racist activism has been instrumentalized as a tool for anti-government struggles, involving new actors into the struggle. The new alliances forged after 2015 are more than interesting and will be described below, based on the empirical research conducted for a comparative research project on anti-racist contention in the Baltic Sea region.<sup>3</sup> I will show particularly the nature of cooperation between grassroots groups (often radical) and the more moderate NGOs, activists (of both stripes) and civil servants as well as politicians; and here point to the specific role of municipalities and the city-level.

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<sup>1</sup> See <http://uchodzczy.info/infos/stosunek-polakow-do-uchodzcow/> and <https://www.rp.pl/Uchodzczy/306289893-Sondaz-Czy-Polska-powinna-przyjac-uchodzcow.html> for an overview. Accessed: 10-03-2021.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. [nigdywiecej.org/brunatna-ksiega](http://nigdywiecej.org/brunatna-ksiega) – a compendium of racist and hate-motivated attacks in Poland compiled by one of the Polish anti-racist NGO, Nigdy Więcej.

<sup>3</sup> Research project ‘Anti-racist contentions in the Baltic Sea region—a study of anti-racist activists’ interplay with politicians and civil servants’ conducted in the years 2017–2020 financed by The Baltic Sea Foundation.

## 1 The changes in the political system

In April 2016 Prime Minister Beata Szydło abolished the Council for the Prevention of Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, established in 2011 as a subsidiary body for the Council of Ministers, chaired by the Government Plenipotentiary for Equal Treatment. Its work consisted primarily in planning, coordinating, and evaluating the activities of government administration bodies and ensuring their cooperation with local governments in the fight against racism, xenophobia, and intolerance.

In November 2016, Mariusz Błaszczak, minister of Interior Affairs in the government led by the Law and Justice party, disbanded the Team for the Protection of Human Rights previously functioning within the police structures. The government also decided to discontinue internal education of police forces on racism and discrimination, on the basis of 'negatively portraying patriotic groups and their emblems' when presenting symbols of far-right groups, such as the triskelion (a three-arm swastika, used by South African white supremacists), the Celtic cross, or the Black Sun (Nazi symbol, *Schwarze Sonne*).

Another structural context is the existence of movements' allies in mainstream politics. In the period 2015–2019 the cooperation between activists and politicians looked different than nowadays, as there was no left-wing party in the Polish parliament. The Left party – a natural ally of progressive grassroots groups – became an ally in extra-parliamentary politics. This allowed left-wing party members to remain active on the streets and in grassroots groups as well as include such actions in the programme of the Left party.

## 2 Anti-racist struggles in the cities

The politics of anti-racist struggles in Poland should be analysed on different levels, national and local. Big cities in Poland are the stronghold of the liberal and the left opposition. In the recent local elections, none of the major cities elected a right-wing president or mayor, and the migrant/refugee policies have been used as one of the tools of anti-government struggles of the local municipalities. Some—like the mayor of Gdańsk, Paweł Adamowicz—organized their own anti-racist and/or antifascist protests, others—like Poznań's mayor, Jacek Jaśkowiak—showed up at and joined an antiracist demonstration organized by anarchists. Both instances were criticized by the activists deeply rooted in antiracist activism. The second—national—level relates not only to the messages sent by the politicians of the ruling party. Because of the politicization of various aspects of public life and the way of functioning of agencies and state offices, result in structural changes that affect the activism of all types of actors.

In Gdańsk, the Immigrant Integration Model was established in May 2015 in order to assess the available resources and capabilities to support the immigrants in Gdansk, and to identify their key needs and problems. It concerned efforts in various areas of policy-making and social services, including education, healthcare, social security, public security, labour market, housing, culture, and sports.

'Gdańsk has always been a welcoming multicultural city. It has been a destination for immigrants and a home to people from all around the world who chose it as a place to pursue their dreams and aspirations. Gdansk is a proof that cities need migrants to develop.'

said the late Mayor of Gdańsk, Paweł Adamowicz in March 2016 during a conference inaugurating the Immigrant Integration Model (Muszel, forthcoming).

This shows that pro-migrant and anti-racist policies became a tool for local authorities to organize an anti-government struggles. However, grassroots activists see this shift with reservations. When Paweł Adamowicz organized an ‘antifascist demonstration’ in Gdańsk against the policies of the government, local antifascist activists openly ignored and criticized the event:

This is not true antifascism—they said—you cannot be an antifascist and do not care about the people with housing needs, with disabilities, the excluded ones. And the EU flags handed out there... what has that to do with antifascism? If you look at the border policies of the EU, it’s pretty far from antifascism.

### 3 Changing relations between activists

There is, however, an observable change in relations between grassroots activists and other types of actors. Previously there were numerous tensions between activists from grassroots groups (more often leaning to the radical side) and NGO activists (usually more moderate in their claims and repertoires of action). Grassroots activists accused the moderate NGO members of ‘not doing politics in a serious way’ and ‘becoming sell-outs for the system’ (for more, see Piotrowski, 2009), conversely, NGO members criticized radical activists for politicization of their claims.

The ‘true’ activists do not seem to appreciate the developments bringing various factions (radical and moderate) and different actors (grassroots activists and civil servants and politicians) together. As one of the activists I have spoken with, an anarchist and a squatter involved for many years in pro-migrant/refugee initiatives (even helped refugees on the ‘Balkan Trail’) said:

For me the people from NGOs are there, because for them it’s a job, like any other job. When the [political] climate is in favour of migrants, they support migrants, if the climate turns to kittens, they do things for and around kittens. For us, it’s a calling, we help the migrants, not because its popular, we’re helping them, because it’s our struggle to abolish borders, abolish power and authority and to change society.

Observing the recent changes in Polish civil society and social activism, sociologist and activist Elżbieta Korolczuk (2017, p. 4) writes: ‘The current situation can bring good results, because it makes us finally question the fiction of the existence of civil society, which operates in isolation from politics, has no political agenda and is ideologically homogeneous.’ In previous analyses, the majority of politically oriented actions were excluded from the civil society discourse as being actions of social movements, advocacy groups and the like. However, with the politicization of more and more areas of life and activities (such as the education system, environmental issues, and topics connected to identity), this juxtaposition fails to accurately describe the current state of affairs.

With the high politicization of the (occasionally often non-political) actions of grassroots activists and NGOs, the obvious question arising is how actors more involved in politics are reflecting upon these changes. The openness of the political system and the existence of potential allies within the system is a key to success of the activists, according

to the concept of political opportunity structures approach. The growing cooperation between the activists and politicians and the changes in the rules of this cooperation suggest that the root of the changing nature of anti-racist activism lies in the structural context in which the movements operate. This also suggests that in many cases anti-racism is not part of the groups' DNA but is used instrumentally to achieve other goals or in everyday political struggle. This resulted among others in withdrawing from the no-logo-rule (no party and group banners, flags or colours at demonstrations), previously a *sine qua non* condition for any movement-party cooperation.

Overall, the Polish activists are sceptical about co-operating with political parties during protests. In particular, they see a risk that the political parties gain further political capital from such co-organized events, while the activists end up doing a disproportionate amount of the grass-roots level work. As I wrote elsewhere (Piotrowski & Wennerhag, 2015), Paweł, an activist of the Anarchist Federation, recalls a meeting about such a cooperation on 'the People's March' (*Marsz Ludności*). It had been decided that a 'no logo' strategy should be employed, meaning that flags or banners of the co-operating groups should not be displayed during the demonstration, and instead only a common 'logo' for the event should be used:

And they resisted it all the time and said that they wanted banners [...]. Well, after discussing it at our meeting, next time we went, and I said, 'ok, let's do it "logo"'. They breathed a sigh of relief. But I said, 'there are a hundred of us and every one of us will take a flag.' And the reaction was 'Oh no!' [...] 'But if you come in your hundreds it's a problem!' That's when it turned out that in the end they wanted 'no logo,' and it was 'no logo.'

In Poland grassroots activists have enforced the 'no logo' rule both during smaller events and within broader coalitions as, for instance, happened during the anti-ACTA protests of early 2012. This approach limits the party access to the microphone during the protests because the activists suspect party members of using their presence at a street demonstration to promote their own party.

Such an approach of grassroots activists does not seem to change much over time, however, in the case of strong polarization of the political scene, certain topics, and growing repression from the police and counter-movements, members of political parties are more and more accepted at demonstrations organized by grassroots activists or—in particular, the Left party—organize their events and invite activists to join. This can be a result of a generational turnaround within the ranks of the Polish Left party, many of whose MPs have activist experience in grassroots groups.

However, on the other hand – politicians in this case – are not happy with the collaboration with grassroots activists either. As one of the former leaders of the Left party, a member of its National Council, told me:

We went to all of these demonstrations supporting the migrants, refugees, against racism and fascism. We co-organized many of them, we also had all the necessary equipment, like the megaphones. But sometimes the radicals—mostly anarchists—were pushing for the 'no logo' rule: no party colours, no party or group banners. And we agreed to that, because it was more important to do something together, so we agreed on those terms. From today's perspective I think we should have been more persuasive in promoting our position and to show up at the demonstrations with our

flags and banners. Especially that we incorporated policies against racism, prejudice, and pro-migrant and refugee points into our programme.

#### 4 Conclusion

A few issues should emerge from this note that are worth stressing. Firstly, it is the instrumentalization of anti-racism as part of party-politics opposing the current regime in Poland and therefore adapting it to this purpose that includes other political parties but also municipal politicians and civil servants. Opposing the anti-immigrant and anti-refugee narrative and politics of the authorities brings issues of anti-racism into mainstream debates and internalises it within society and politics. Secondly, the observed reconfigurations within the civil society sector point to more intersections between civil society actors and state/municipal institutions, in particular when these are a self-positioned opposition to the current regime. There is an observable increase in cooperation between moderate and radical activists, but also between activists, (opposition) politicians and civil servants. Thirdly, the changes within the agenda of anti-racist organizations that are a reaction to the changing Political and Discursive Opportunity Structures result in processes observed in other movements in Poland: growing intersectionality of movements and issues and more inclusive programmes and claims.

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## Book Review

Elzbieta Drazkiewicz (2020) *Institutionalised dreams: The art of managing foreign aid*. New York and Oxford: Berghahn. 248 pages.

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Since Mauss' classic work on the gift, social scientists and in particular anthropologists have been aware that giving and receiving are deeply interconnected with power relations and the social construction of identities and categorisations. Boundaries and hierarchies are continuously created, altered and reshaped not only between givers and receivers, but also between those who receive and those who do not, despite their needs (the deserving and undeserving needy), as well as among those who give and those who do not do so. Critical approaches to giving, however, be it in the scholarly subfields dealing with charity, philanthropy, humanitarianism or development, tend to focus on the first aspect within this larger phenomenon—that is on power relations between donors and recipients. Many leave aside other aspects such as the stakes and processes of becoming a donor, or the socio-historical processes of selecting the needy to support and the establishment of donor-recipient attachments.

Development ethnographies, in particular, often focus on concrete projects, on their everyday operation and the life of development workers on the site of development, rarely extending beyond these limits, and leaving in the shadow major sites of knowledge production related to these projects. Firstly, the life-world of recipients of aid remains unseen due to epistemic limitations of aid projects. As the latter often disregard local perspectives, such epistemic limitations may easily become reflected in the limited horizon of anthropological accounts, too. Secondly, the social construction of development discourses, norms, values, categorisations, and identities of donors may also become veiled, not independently of the interest of donors to naturalise the latter as universal, objective, and thus unquestionable. By highlighting the case of foreign aid in Poland, Elzbieta Drazkiewicz's book, *Institutionalised dreams: The art of managing foreign aid* greatly contributes to exploring this second phenomenon. It reconstructs how foreign aid actors manoeuvre among historically evolving ideologies and economic, political, legal and cultural institutions, and how various levels and scales—global, European, individual and national—become intimately intertwined in the ongoing process of assembling Polish foreign aid.

A core move of the book is to embed this process into a European landscape of power built upon the discourse of modernisation that positions Central and Eastern European countries as lagging behind and in need of development *vis-à-vis* Western European countries, not only along economic characteristics, but also politically and culturally. Such discourse implies that 'Eastern' actors struggle for better positions along the modernisation hierarchy, and it also legitimates a disciplinary regard on the part of highly positioned ('developed' and 'civilised') Western actors over lower positioned ('less developed' and 'less civilised') Eastern ones.

While this discourse on the 'East–West slope' of modernisation (Melegh, 2006) as a totalising ideology appears in almost every domain of the social world, Drażkiewicz thoroughly explores its operation in the specific process of assembling Polish foreign aid during the last four decades. Firstly, becoming a recipient of Western foreign aid, due to the debt crisis of the 80s and later economic and social deterioration in Poland following post-transition market liberalisation (and related processes of privatisation, austerity measures and rising unemployment), positioned Poland as a poor and underdeveloped country compared to Western states. Such position, in turn, incited the urge to overcome the 'recipient' stigma by shifting roles, and becoming a 'donor'. According to a central statement of the book, Polish foreign aid is deeply anchored to the self-positioning of Poland as a donor country, aspiring to become 'developed' by lining up alongside illustrious development actors of the West. Secondly, Drażkiewicz shows that becoming a donor was motivated not only by the wish to eliminate the denigrating role of the aid recipient, but it was also implied by Western expectations. The discourse of modernisation, dominating the EU enlargement process and also the Polish accession, not only set up value hierarchies among European states and nations, but also legitimated a general disciplinary relationship allowing 'developed' Western actors to tutor Eastern ones in the political, legal, or economic fields. Under the label of helping postsocialist CEE countries to 'catch up with' and to 'return to Europe,' such tutoring aimed the enhancement of values of economic and political liberalism in these countries (this process was compellingly dubbed by Dace Dzenovska the 'School of Europeanness,' see Dzenovska, 2018). Among numerous other domains it also involved expectations to participate in international aid and development.

A central pillar of the power complex of the discourse of modernisation and, within it, of international development is the assumption of Western development endeavours being universalistic, rational, and ultimately neutral (a-political). Such characteristics rendering immense symbolic–disciplinary–power to the 'Western' way of international development are explored and dismantled in the book. Firstly, through the example of Polish foreign aid, *Institutionalised dreams* shows how diverse ideologies are brought together in various phases and configurations, national and religious particularistic as well as universalistic ones. This analytical reassembling of Polish foreign aid as based upon diversely interconnected ideologies, however, is not intended to demonstrate the peculiarity and exotic character of Polish development. On the contrary, it proposes a generalisable analytical model relevant for all types, including those (self)represented as universal. As the author formulates it: 'Development aid is not a culturally neutral phenomenon and in every case it is rooted in specific historical and contemporary political context. It is a reflection of country-specific domestic cultures of charity and moral economies; it resonates with the ways in which states and societies see themselves in the world, and construct their

national identity' (p. 60). Secondly, besides exposing how national institutions and particularistic ideologies relevant in various domestic contexts may play an essential role in creating foreign aid, the limits of rationality and universality are displayed at the level of formal procedures. Numerous Western but also local Polish actors interested in the promotion of international aid attempt to educate politicians, stakeholders, everyday people, as well as institutional practices to comply with 'proper' Western models of international development. These disciplinary attempts are shown in *Institutionalised dreams* as normative and prescriptive, eluding the scripts of rational argumentation of equal parties.

The majority of chapters and subchapters of the book illustrate these claims. Chapter 2 and 4 show how pre-existing ideological and institutional frameworks of various types of helping relevant in the domestic Polish context have been used to manufacture foreign aid for Poland, while Chapter 3, 6, and 7 focus on the operation of the East–West modernisation discourse. First, state and private voluntary aid initiated in the early 90s to support ethnic Polish communities living in post-Soviet states have been widened in the mid-2000s in their scope to include not only ethnic Poles, but entire countries to the east of Poland, such as Belarus, Ukraine or Kazakhstan. The concept of a pan-Slavic culture, the common experience of socialism, Eastern European identities, or common histories uniting territories in current-day distinct states (e.g. the Kresy) all became building blocks of a 'cultural proximity' narrative that legitimated Polish responsibilities to help these countries. Historical power struggles, conflicts and oppressions in the histories of these nations and states were shaded away by the implicitly assumed common enemy—Russian imperialism. Historical narratives of fighting for Polish national sovereignty in the last few centuries and personal and collective memories of the Solidarity movement of the 80s have resonated well with the experience of being the target of Western democracy promotion since the end of the 80s. This allowed the creation of a self-narrative of the Polish nation as an authentic and competent candidate to further enlarge Western efforts of promoting democracy towards the East, and more precisely to post-Soviet states and Russia. Chapter 2, 'To the West through the East and back,' convincingly argues that these narratives of cultural proximity and common experience of socialism and transition connected Poland with numerous Eastern European states, and activities of democracy promotion allowed Polish politicians and civic actors to give content to their new donor duties assigned to them in the EU enlargement process.

Ironically, despite the articulate presence of democracy promotion carried out by Western states and NGOs in Eastern Europe and in Poland (see Dzenovska, 2018), the reproduction of such discourses and activities by the Polish state and NGOs in post-Soviet states did not qualify in the eyes of Western and international actors as 'proper' international humanitarian and development aid. Such democracy promotion implied for Poland the inferior position of the 'emerging donor' *vis-à-vis* Western actors, and of one who is reluctant and incompetent, in further need of disciplining. The reconfiguration of Polish aid into 'proper' aid that is targeting Africa instead of Eastern Europe, and pursuing economic instead of political development, is described in Chapter 3, 'Global education: Discovering Africa for Polish aid.'

While aid for Eastern European states was legitimized by canonical national historical narratives and collective memories of the past, Drażkiewicz claims that, in the case of Africa, these historical narratives were not easily available. Past experience, narratives

and ideologies connecting the African continent with Poland, such as international aid and exchange in the Comecon framework with specific African states, Polish colonisation efforts, or Polish Catholic missionary work in Africa were deemed illegitimate and inappropriate from the perspective of post-transition hegemonic Western ideologies of development and modernisation. Chapter 3 describes the immense work carried out to make up for this ideological gap in order to connect Poland with the African continent, in a way that incites compassion and urges Poland to take responsibility and to help. This chapter shows how ideologies of 'global education' were evoked in the early 2000s among Polish actors interested in foreign aid. Historical narratives were created, pointing out journeys of Polish historical personalities in Africa. Also, sensory experience and emotions were staged and evoked by means of cultural events and exhibitions, all these with the aim of connecting Poland and Africa in the hearts and minds of citizens (often pupils and students), politicians, and other stakeholders. The author emphasizes the role of intellectual traditions of Polish nation-building through education and cooperative self-help activism in the 19th century as historically created dispositions behind such pedagogic efforts directed towards Poles 'ignorant' and 'uneducated' regarding 'Africa' (p. 89). The chapter also points to a major inherent paradox of humanitarianism and development, described by many: manufacturing attachments and connectivity going hand in hand with creating Otherness and hierarchies between the needy and underdeveloped recipient and the generous and developed donor.

Chapter 4, 'The moral economy of foreign aid: Religion and institutions,' explores yet another institutional framework that shaped the form and content of contemporary foreign aid in Poland. The chapter explains how Polish missionaries' work in Africa, starting from the early 90s provided, incubated and, through the influential role of the Catholic Church in the media and in education, disseminated ideological frameworks and narratives linking Poland to African lifeworlds. It also shows how missionary networks and related organisations, infrastructures, and 'local knowledge' became convenient building blocks in the practical construction of Polish aid in Africa.

According to this chapter, the traditional model of religious charity of the Polish Catholic church resonates well with the 'phenomenology' of African aid: both are characterised by depoliticised pleas for empathy and compassion, the goal of helping innocent and deserving passive victims, saving them from dehistoricised forms of poverty, and with the help of self-sacrificing workers and donors. While the author emphasizes that such analogies, and the role of religious institutions and organisations are not specific to the Polish context, the chapter succeeds in demonstrating that the pressures to hide this relationship between religion/the church and foreign aid, and to render it invisible could well differ between 'Western' and 'Eastern' cases. The stakes of becoming 'modern' and climbing up the modernisation hierarchy burdens the latter much more: becoming a 'proper' donor urges the concealment of ties of Polish foreign aid in Africa to the church that is, to a social institution considered to stand in opposition to modernity (as well as secularisation and rationalisation). This inclination may become even more acute in the Polish case, since Polish national identities and national discourses are more deeply connected to Catholicism—and carry the threat of its non-modern connotations—compared to other Central and Eastern European societies.

Chapter 5, 'The mission,' turns to the level of individual motivations of aid workers.

It shows the role of personal desires, ambitions, and dispositions behind more impersonal institutional discourses of aid and development. It shows how the desire for authenticity and the authentic Other, and individual ambitions for leadership and self-realisation become intimately entangled with a constant urge at the organisational-institutional level to enlarge and expand, to constantly discover broader and broader geographical regions for development activities.

Chapter 6, 'Vocation, profession or private enterprise?', explores the presence of various institutional narratives and metaphors in the everyday operation of development aid. First, staging and performing development work as personal calling, emotional dedication, and an overall subordination of the private and the personal for the greater cause of the 'mission' is alternated with the vision of development work as the site of rationality, professionalism, expertise, and bureaucratic discipline. The chapter shows how these two models of action are strategically used to mobilise various resources, and how this 'manoeuvring' depends on the situations, interactions of involved participants, and their interests, needs, and available resources. While the 'missionary' mode allows for mobilising public support of private donors and the public in Poland, as well as the control over the personal emotional resources of workers, the 'professional development' framework promises to live up to expectations of more established 'Western' aid actors, and the mobilisation of their material and financial, as well as symbolic support. The author analytically connects the coexistence and strategic use of these alternative frameworks to complement scholarly ideas that conceive of these two modes of development as a process of institutionalisation. At the same time, the reader may also think about possible links of this coexistence, and the role of the 'mission' mode in particular, to the recently growing presence of the 'private' and the 'emotional' in various organisational contexts, described in scholarly literature as 'affective governance' (Muehlebach, 2012).

After two chapters describing individual motivation frameworks and institutional legitimising narratives relevant in the everyday on-site operation of development projects, the last chapter, 'The system: Hope for a better future,' brings into the focus the level of governmental policymaking and legislation. It shows how paradoxical characteristics of development described in other settings and context, such as critical capacities and activism emerging in bureaucratic contexts, or the perpetual aspirations to mend insufficient policies unfold also in the case of Polish foreign aid. Moreover, and in line with the core insight of the book, it is also revealed how such processes become relegated, again, to the ideological framework of East-West modernisation discourse and, more specifically, to Western actors' disciplinary perspectives and practices as well as the ambitions of the East to 'catch up'.

In her seminal book on post-accession social transformations in Latvia, Dace Dzenovska has shown how various institutional processes, such as transformations of Latvian minority politics, or migration and border control reveal inherent paradoxes of the ideological foundations of Europe, comprising tensions between aspirations for universality and humanity, and particularistic exclusions and hierarchies. Drażkiewicz's fascinating book corroborates this claim with evidence from the specific terrain of Polish foreign aid.

*Institutionalised dreams* reveals how Western development discourses, despite their alleged rationality and affinity for critical thinking, operate with implicit and unquestionable hierarchies, selections and exclusions. Specific concepts, practices, and actors become

subordinated or even excluded from the approved and desirable repertoire of development not by rational argumentation, but by erasure, forgetting and delegitimation. Forgetting Comecon past and related development cooperation; delegitimizing religious practices, ideologies, institutions; delegitimizing the support of the national Polish diaspora, or of democratisation projects in CEE as improper foreign aid imply the secondary, subordinate position of Poland as an 'ignorant' 'emerging donor' *vis-à-vis* 'established', 'old' Western ones. Furthermore, all these erasures contribute to excluding specific aid practices and numerous target groups and potential recipients from the scope of Polish international development. Related to the role of particularistic ideologies in assembling foreign aid, *Institutionalised dreams* also provides an invaluable contribution to understanding the working of national ideologies in particular, and its intricate relation to universalising models of aid and humanitarianism. It shows three ways of such ideologies and institutions becoming building blocks in constructing the positions of the needy and of those capable of and responsible for helping them. It demonstrates the role of national ideologies and institutions in constructing attachments, solidarity, and belonging between these positions. First, as in the case of aid targeted to the Polish diaspora, nationhood may become relevant as the basis of supporting those perceived as same in national or cultural terms. Second, it is shown how such aid built on national similarity may become enlarged and transformed to cover wider groups of recipients, and absorb universalising ideologies of aid. Third, in the context of international development and humanitarianism the book reveals how nationhood and national categorisations may provide an ideological framework upon which the universalising contest for modernity and civilisation is projected (Zakariás & Feischmidt, 2020). Besides the role of national ideologies and institutions in constructing aid, *Institutionalised dreams* also shows that nationhood, ideologies, and institutions are not only background elements in the assemblage of aid, but are themselves outcomes of aid practices: they become altered, shaped and reconstructed in promoting, planning, and implementing foreign aid.

All these compelling results are derived from an enormous scope of empirical resources. Participant observation carried out in a specific aid project in Poland and South Sudan, and as government intern in Warsaw, a great number of interviews conducted among diverse actors in development NGOs and in related state and church institutions, and the analysis of media and policy documents are brought together in assembling this fascinating jigsaw puzzle of Polish foreign aid. Specific blind spots yet provide possibilities for further research. As the book presents how aid actors manoeuvre between Western aid discourses and domestic ideologies and institutions relevant in Poland, it is striking for the reader to notice the extent to which recipient perspectives in South Sudan were left out from such analysis. While this may be implied, as the author claims, in great part, by the severe limitations of recipients' participation and empowerment in development projects in general, a possible way forward could be to enlarge the scope of inquiry into this direction. Even if donors' attempts to mobilise recipients and include their 'voice' often fail, related processes and interactions can be highly informative. All the more so, as interviewees reveal their intentions and moral dedication to avoid such deficits of disregarding recipient perspectives, based not only on abstract postcolonial critique of aid, but also on their own personal memories of being Othered recipients. The author explores such processes to some extent in connection with the case of democracy promotion in

postsocialist countries. Exploring how such recipient experience becomes implicated in donor–recipient encounters also in South Sudanese and other African contexts, and how hegemonic discourses on ‘proper aid’ interact with the operation and effects of such self-narratives may be a further important contribution.

The book combines Latourian and discursive analytical perspectives in an organic way, and engages the reader by its ease and elegance of weaving together ethnography and historic analysis of institutions. Due to its diverse methodology and empirical data collected in multiple institutional contexts and multiple scales, the book may speak to various audiences. It may be of great interest for scholars and students of sociology and anthropology of development and humanitarianism, those working in NGOs and state institutions, and also for those interested in the domains of nationalism and geopolitics.

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Are anti-immigrant attitudes the Holy Grail of populists?  
A comparative analysis of attitudes towards immigrants,  
values, and political populism in Europe

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#### Abstract

In this paper we aim to discuss attitudes towards immigrants in a European context and analyse drivers of anti-immigrant attitudes such as the feeling of control, basic human values, political orientation and preferences related to right-wing populism. Based on data from the European Social Survey, we first describe how attitudes of people in Europe changed throughout a period of almost two decades (between 2002 and 2018). We will show that although attitudes are influenced by a number of demographic and subjective features of individuals, on the macro-level they seem to be surprisingly stable, yet hide significant cross-country differences. Then, we zoom in to the three most significant elements influencing attitudes towards immigrants: the feeling of control, basic human values, and political orientation. Applying a multi-level model we test the validity of three theories about factors informing attitudes towards immigrants—competition theory, locus of control, and the role of basic human values—and include time (pre- and post-2015 refugee-crisis periods) into the analysis. In the discussion we link ESS data to recent research on populism in Europe that categorizes populist parties across the continent, and establish that the degree to which anti-migrant feelings are linked to support for political populism varies significantly across European countries. We show that right-wing populist parties gather and feed that part of the population which is very negative towards migrants and migration in general, and this process is also driven by the significance awarded the value of security vis-à-vis humanitarianism.

**Keywords:** attitudes towards immigrants, basic human values, political preferences, political populism

## 1 Introduction

The inflow of refugees to Europe in 2015 caused deep political fractures within the EU and is still one of the key issues around which debates and ideological clashes in European politics crystalize. The mass arrival of people from the Middle East and Africa triggered a rise in political populism and became a key topic for populist political parties. But this is not the first time Europeans have experienced a mass inflow of asylum seekers. If we look at mass refugee flows in a historical context, we find that the most recent peak in the number of asylum seekers, which took place in the 1990s (triggered by the war in the Balkans and armed conflicts in the Middle East, Iran, Iraq, and Afghanistan, and the Horn of Africa [Somalia]), was of a similar size and composition. ‘...when we look at the total numbers per half a decade and compare the 1990s with the first half of the 2010s then the number and origin in recent years do not deviate from what Western Europe experienced two decades ago. [...] Furthermore, the sudden increase in numbers in 2014 and especially 2015 had a clear cause, the civil war in Syria, and there were no signs that indifferent masses of poor migrants from the Global South had been unleashed’ (Lucassen, 2018, p. 385). Still, the reception of this new wave of asylum seekers was met with an apocalyptic tone from mainstream politicians, and rising, untrammelled fear in public and political discourse, as well as in the media (Chouliaraki & Srolic, 2017; Gheorgiou & Zaborowski, 2017).

Fear of migration is embedded in the process of polarization and rising populism (Mudde, 2016; Kende & Krekó, 2020). Right-wing populist narratives are a crystallization of wider uncertainties within the population which are being brought about by global challenges, such as rapid technological transformation via digitalization and robotization, climate change, the increasing influence of social media and the rising significance of fake news sources, just to mention the major stressors. These phenomena are difficult for individuals to follow or explain, especially those with weak educational backgrounds or a low level of interest in grasping the complexities these issues entail. Quite a number of political forces in Europe (and the world) benefit from people’s growing insecurity by offering simplistic explanations for extremely complex phenomena and polarizing their populations. Migration, a phenomenon that can be interpreted within a simplistic nationalistic framework that divides society into groups of ‘us’ and ‘them,’ of ‘nationals’ and ‘foreigners,’ has become a focal point of right-wing populist political and public discourse in which these fears may condense.

In this paper, we aim to contribute to the discussion about the drivers of anti-immigrant attitudes and how they are linked to basic human values, political preferences, and an openness to political populism. We aim to arrive at a better understanding of how attitudes to migration evolved in the context of the mass inflow of immigrants (refugees) in 2015, and whether the role of factors identified as those shaping attitudes towards immigrants in former research became more or less influential in the four years following 2015. Based on data from the European Social Survey (ESS), we first analyse geographical and time-series trends in attitudes and show their differences across countries as well as changes since 2002. Then we zoom out to two of the most important determinants of attitudes: basic human values, and political preferences. In the next step, we offer a multilevel model for investigating the intersecting effects of the factors that trigger pro- and anti-migrant attitudes and compare the significance of these factors in time. Finally, in the discussion we analyse how openness to populist parties is linked to anti-immigrant attitudes and

what country-specific differences can be identified. Linking ESS data to recent research on populism in Europe (Roduijn et al., 2019) that categorizes populist parties across the continent, we try to establish the degree to which anti-migrant feelings are linked to support for political populism and whether this link has changed in the past five years.

## 2 Theoretical background and research questions stemming from this

An extensive amount of theoretical and empirical literature discusses the origins of anti-immigrant attitudes. Without striving for a complete overview, we will highlight the three theories that most inspired this analysis, and that we seek to test, including the element of time, by comparing pre- and post-2015 snapshots. We will look into the strength of association of factors described by traditional group conflict or competition theory, those explained by theories that link basic human values and attitudes, as well as political preferences and attitudes towards immigrants. In this part of the paper, we briefly introduce the theories that have been widely tested in the scholarly literature. We aim to analyse how the strength of the explanatory models has changed in time and test the validity of the latter on data collected before and after the 2015 refugee crisis.

### 2.1 *Group competition and control theory*

A frequently applied and tested theory concerns the economic rationale behind attitudes about migration. Group conflict theory (Blalock, 1967; Quillian, 1995; Mueleman et al., 2009) postulates that negative attitudes are driven by perceived competition for scarce goods such as jobs, housing, welfare services or wealth in the host society. Blalock (1967) proposed that the level of perceived group threat—the subjective *perception* of competition—plays a crucial mediating role in the evolution of negative outgroup attitudes. A number of empirical studies have tested this theory but their conclusions are not unanimous. Some argue that the size of the immigrant population has a significant impact (Quillian, 1995; Semyonov et al., 2006) while others find limited support for such a correlation (for example, Hjerm, 2007; Messing & Ságvári, 2018). However, many studies recognize that different groups of immigrants can trigger a variety of attitudes: these studies differentiate between immigrants in terms of their labour market potential or religious background when investigating the extent to which the local population perceives them as a threat to the local economy or culture. Low-skilled native workers, for example, are more likely to think that immigrants arriving from poor countries represent competition for them on the labour market (Scheve & Slaughter, 2001). In terms of whether economic or cultural grievances play a greater role in developing anti-immigration attitudes, research is multifaceted: findings regarding the labour-market competition hypothesis are highly contested (Chandler & Tsai, 2001; Citrin & Sides, 2008; Malhotra et al., 2013) and economic explanations are often understood as secondary (Lucassen & Lubbers, 2012), while cultural concerns about immigration at the individual level seem to have greater predictive power (Trifandafyllidou, 1998).

A recent theory that explains pro- and anti-migrant attitudes on an individual level perfectly fits the above argument. The concept of the *perception of control* was important inspiration for this paper as it links attitudes towards immigrants and openness to right-wing populism to the same root cause: a feeling of a lack of control. Harell et al. (2017)

argue that a feeling of control is one of the most important explanatory factors of attitudes towards and the acceptance of migrants. The latter use the concept of *locus of control*, which refers to a set of beliefs about the causes of events (for example, losing one's job) or conditions (for example, being poor) to either internal or external sources (Lefcourt, 1991; Rothbaum et al., 1982). The argument is as follows. Citizens who believe they are personally responsible for what happens in their lives, and are thus capable of effecting change in their lives and the wider society they live in, are less hostile towards immigrants. These citizens are less likely to feel threatened by a changing social milieu. The feeling of being 'in control' of one's own economic or social situation, in contrast to feelings of insecurity and unpredictability, leads to less fear of the unknown and thus more open attitudes to immigration. Another level of the perception of control relates to the wider community: people who feel that the government is in control of the social and economic processes in a country, including migration—both its inflow, and migrant inclusion—are likely to feel less threatened by migration. The third level of control refers to migrants themselves: if individuals feel that migrants are agents of their own social inclusion and (have the potential to) become contributing members of society, they will be less likely to feel threatened by migration and thus reject migrants in general. In short, perceptions of control—as applied to citizens, the government, and immigrants—have an important effect on attitudes toward immigrants. A lack of a feeling of control brings about anxiety, which also feeds into preferences for populist political parties that promise easy and simplistic answers to highly complex, diverse social phenomena, such as migration (Wodak, 2015; Rico et al., 2017).

By using ESS data we are able to test these theories not only in a static, cross-sectional setting by comparing attitudes across countries, but we can create a dynamic image of attitudes. *Following the logic of group competition theory and control theory, we propose that sudden changes in minority group size (such as following the 2015 migration crisis) or economic conditions (such as the 2008 financial crisis) are likely to change attitudes. Also, individuals who lack a feeling of being in control are likely to have stronger anti-immigrant attitudes than those who feel more existential and physical security.*

## **2.2 Basic human values as drivers of interethnic group attitudes**

Several studies have noted that individual human values are of overarching importance for explaining negative feelings towards immigrants (Davidov et al., 2008; Davidov & Meuleman, 2012; Grigoryan & Schwartz, 2020). These researchers have demonstrated that basic human values have great potential to explain attitudes—both the (dis)preferences of certain groups and of political ideologies. Values are broad, abstract principles that guide individuals' behaviour and opinions (such as honesty, freedom, equality, beauty, wisdom, etc.), thus it is meaningful to presume that they are correlated strongly with attitudes (including attitudes towards immigrants). Values and attitudes have the same roots: both are beliefs, but while values are beliefs in some end-state goals and the conduct preferable for achieving these goals, attitudes are an evaluative sum of many beliefs about a certain object or a group. Values occupy a more central position than attitudes (Hitlin & Piliavin, 2004) as they are abstract principles that guide attitudes towards concrete groups (Rokeach, 1968). Values stem from the primary agents of socialization: first and foremost, from family, but also from peers and school, and thus are very stable, while attitudes may change more eas-

ily as they depend on numerous beliefs that may be altered in many ways (Ball-Rokeach & Loges, 1994). Davidov et al. (2008), in a study that tested the relationship between basic human values and attitudes towards immigrants, concluded that ‘values of conservation and self-transcendence remained the strongest predictors for attitudes toward immigration’ after controlling for the effects of basic demographic and economic variables. He found that basic human values inform attitudes, rather than the other way round. Based on this set of literature, we formulate our second research question.

*The question we address in our paper is whether the strength of the relationship between human values and attitudes towards immigrants is the same across European countries. We also want to see whether, following 2015, the strength of the relationship between basic human values and attitudes towards immigrants remained unchanged, or if the arrival of masses of refugees strengthened the link between the value of security and of humanitarianism.*

### **2.3 Political preferences, right-wing populism (RWP), and anti-immigrant attitudes**

As indicated in the title, we hope to generate better understanding of how and under which circumstances anti-immigrant attitudes are linked to specific political attitudes, and, more specifically, to a preference/susceptibility to right-wing-populism (RWP) by comparing European countries in space and time. A vast literature shows a strong link between political preferences and attitudes towards immigrants. The focus of research is on the link between extreme right and anti-immigrant attitudes, and results about this are clear: far-right party success depends on mobilizing grievances over immigration to a great extent (Bohman, 2011; Bohman & Hjerm, 2016; Ivarsflaten, 2008). Several authors argue, however, that anti-immigrant attitudes are a tool by which right-wing populist political forces increase their influence rather than a response to threats posed by immigration. Kende and Krekó (2020) offered an explanation for why right-wing populist parties became very successful in East-Central Europe, concluding that the efficient instrumentalization of immigrants as a threat by leading right-wing politicians supported anxieties embedded in long-term historical fears, such as fragile national sovereignty and vulnerable national identity. The influx of refugees in 2015 gave momentum to RWP parties which were able to capitalize on a centuries-long identity crisis and existing prejudice to stigmatize visible minority groups. It is actually the political exploitation of ‘the immigrant threat’ (despite the negligible size of the immigrant population) that led to the spectacular success of RWP parties in the region. In some countries, RWP used immigrants as a means of enhancing a sense of moral panic (Cohen, 2011), and, based on the fears of the population of unknown immigrants, consciously pressed the moral panic button to polarize the population to the extreme, helping them maintain power through extending the sense of a continuous state of emergency (Geró & Sik, 2020).

Based on the above stream of literature, we aim to address the following set of questions: *Did the link between political preferences and attitudes towards immigrants become stronger following the 2015 mass inflow of refugees? Are anti-migrant attitudes more likely to be manifest in open rejection of immigrants in countries where right-wing populist parties are strong compared to countries in which these parties are weak or negligible?*

### 3 Data and measurement tools

The analysis is built on individual-level data from the European Social Survey's (ESS) nine consecutive rounds from 2002 to 2019 in the first analytical chapter, and R7 (2014/15), R8 (2016/17), and R9 (2018/19) in the chapters that analyse the influence of the 2015 migration crisis. R7 (2014/15) offers data prior to the events in 2015, R8 (2016/17) represents the situation directly after the mass inflow of refugees to the EU, and R9 (2018/19) offers insight into a more consolidated situation—when several years had passed since the 2015 crisis.

The ESS is considered to be one of the most trustworthy cross-national datasets, and even though we are aware of the biases inherent to measuring attitudes in surveys comparatively (Ságvári et al, 2019), we believe that there is currently no better publicly available time-series dataset with which to measure and compare attitudes in Europe. An additional source of data is recent research by Roduijn and colleagues who compiled a database of political parties in Member States of the European Union, categorizing them as right-wing populist, left-wing populist, and moderate (Roduijn, 2019).

In this paper we use the most widely applied approach to understanding the construction of attitudes—namely, the ABC model, which differentiates between affective (A), behavioural (B), and cognitive (C) components of attitudes (van den Berg, 2006; Eagly & Chaiken, 1998). Based on ESS data, we have created two indicators as independent variables to reflect the behavioural and cognitive elements of attitudes.<sup>1</sup>

(1) The **behavioural component** will be indicated by the *Rejection Index (RI)*, which denotes the share of those who would *reject the entry of any immigrants from poorer countries outside Europe* without consideration.<sup>2</sup> We argue that by using only the extreme response to migration as a single indicator we are able to capture unequivocal attitudes.

(2) The **cognitive component** of attitudes incorporates both symbolic and material elements. The perception of the consequences of migration on material life is gauged by an item that measures the perceived impact of migration on the economy through the following question: *'Would you say it is generally bad or good for [country]'s economy that people come to live here from other countries?'* Symbolic elements of attitudes are measured by the following question: *'Would you say that [country]'s cultural life is generally undermined or enriched by people coming to live here from other countries?'* The third item focused on a more general evaluation of the effect of migration: *'Is your country made a worse or a better place to live by people coming to live here from other countries?'* The 0–10 scale responses given to the three questions were summed up and converted into a *Perception Index (PI)* that was then converted to a 0–100 scale in order to facilitate harmonization and comparability with the values of the Rejection Index. In general, smaller values indicate more negative perceptions of migration, while larger values depict the opposite.

In order to check the internal consistency of the indicator we ran a separate reliability analysis for the Perception Index. The three elements were highly reliable when calculated for the total of 126 subsets of the dataset that included data from Round 1 to Round 9 for

<sup>1</sup> Since there are no questions in the ESS that could be used to measure the affective component, our analysis focuses on only two components of attitudes.

<sup>2</sup> This index is constructed from a single question: 'To what extent do you think [country] should allow people from the poorer countries outside Europe?' (1: Allow many to come and live here; 2: Allow some; 3: Allow a few; 4: Allow none; 8: Don't know) We recoded responses into a binary variable at the individual level, summing those 'allow none' answers versus all other responses.

15 countries. All Cronbach's Alpha values ranged between .713 and .900, indicating a high level of reliability (see Figure SI1 in the Supplementary Material section).

Another question to be clarified in the section on data and methods concerns the conceptualization of migrants. Migration is a very complex phenomenon involving a large variety of categories. Although the term 'migrant' is well defined in legal and policy contexts, it is still used in many senses, especially in non-scholarly public discourse. Questions which measure the cognitive element of attitudes in the survey refer to '*people coming to live here from other countries*,' thus 'migrants' are understood in the widest possible sense. Thus, we have no idea what image people had about immigrants when answering this question and it is very likely that a person in Berlin or London would have had a different image to one living in a Hungarian or Polish village, or in an Italian harbour town. The question measuring the behavioural element of attitudes is somewhat more specific: It inquires about '*people from the poorer countries outside Europe*.' Here again, though, respondents may have responded to the question with quite different conceptions in mind—with some visualising south-east-Asian IT workers, others Syrian/Afghani war refugees, and others desperate North Africans fleeing across the sea. This is definitely a weakness when measuring attitudes towards migrants with surveys and questionnaires, but the survey responses are nonetheless still the best sources for comparing attitudes across countries, regions, and time.

## 4 Analysis

### 4.1 Description of attitudes and their changes

First, we provide an overview of attitudes based on the nine consecutive rounds of the ESS survey (2002–2019) concerning attitudes towards immigrants in Europe measured by the two indicators described earlier in the paper.

Figure 1 summarizes the scores of the Perception (PI) and the Rejection (RI) indexes by country. The overall perception of migration in Europe is on average neutral ( $PI_{average}=53$ ). That is, people see as many advantages as disadvantages to worldwide mobility. Based on the sole values of the indicator, more countries have a positive (55+) perception of migration (thirteen countries altogether) than those which, on average, perceive the consequences of immigration negatively (five countries score below 45). As for the behavioural element of attitudes, the Rejection Index shows that 17 per cent of surveyed Europeans would unconditionally reject immigrants arriving from poorer countries outside Europe ( $RI_{average}=17$ ). Again, acceptance is a more common attitude than rejection: in fourteen countries out of twenty-seven, 10 per cent of the population or less would reject immigrants (from poorer countries outside Europe) settling in their countries, while in seven countries the share is greater than 20 per cent.

Another noteworthy finding is the distinctiveness of the cognitive and behavioural attitude components (Figure 1). Obviously, the two indexes are strongly correlated; nonetheless the relationship is non-linear and works quite differently in various countries (or country groups). While the cognitive element of attitudes (PI) fluctuates moderately between countries, the behavioural element (i.e. the rejection of migrants) does show significant outliers, such as Hungary, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, and Slovakia. The relationship between RI and PI does not follow similar patterns in old and new EU Member States;

compared to long-term democracies like Germany, Sweden, Norway, and Switzerland, in transition countries such as Hungary, the Czech Republic, Bulgaria, Estonia, and Lithuania, negative perceptions of the consequences of migration are more likely to be transformed into the unconditional rejection of immigrants. Perceptions of immigration (PI) in Italy (45) are more negative than in Lithuania, Estonia, or Latvia (52, 48, 55, respectively), but the upfront rejection of immigrants is less widespread in old EU Member States (such as

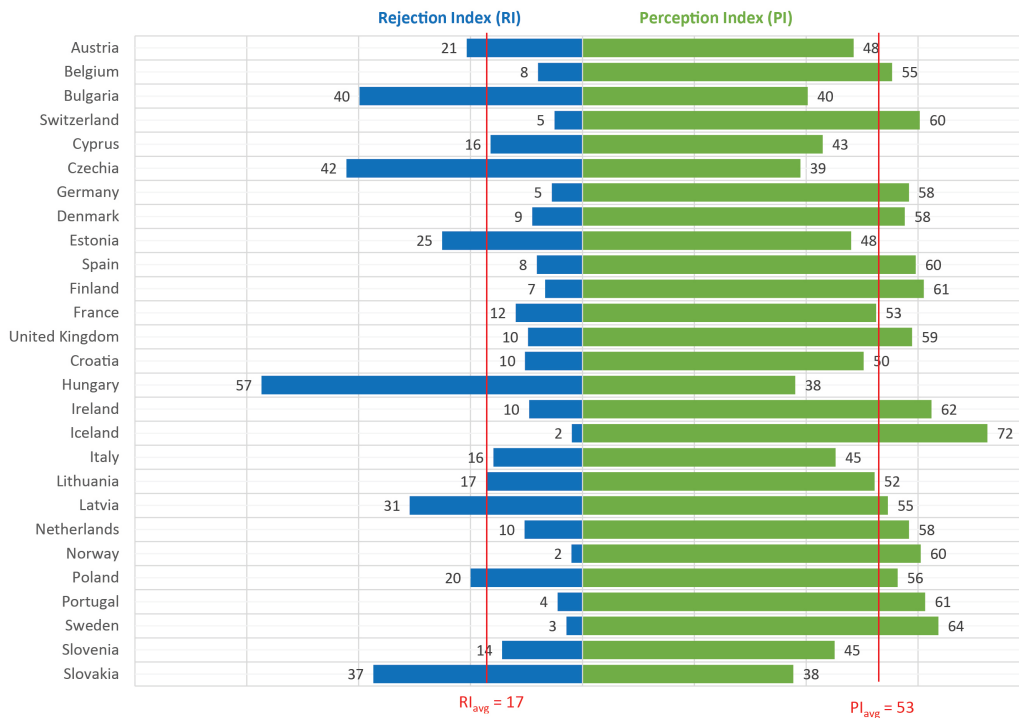


Figure 1. Rejection Index and Perception Index country averages in ESS R9 (2018/19)

Italy) than in the post-Soviet Baltic countries. Also, when comparing other post-communist countries with Austria and Italy, we see that although PI is slightly more negative in the former group of countries (Hungary, Bulgaria, and the Czech Republic) it does not explain the significantly stronger rejection in these countries compared to in Austria and Italy. We suspect that the strength of norms developed historically, but also influenced by ongoing political and public discourse is decisive in determining the degree to which the cognition of migration as having negative consequences for the host country is transformed into explicit rejection and exclusion. Rejection of immigrants is especially extreme in Hungary (57 per cent of Hungarians would reject the settling of migrants from poorer countries outside Europe). Such openly hostile attitudes in Hungary may be attributed to several intersecting factors: the small number of immigrants and consequent lack of personal experience and knowledge about them, together with the generally low levels of trust and social cohesion that characterise Hungarian society (Messing & Sagvari, 2018; 2019). A society in such a state proved to be extremely fertile terrain for the manipulative, anti-migrant propaganda that the Hungarian government put into action in early 2015 and has kept operating since

then in a de-pluralized media environment unparalleled in the EU (Bernáth & Messing, 2016; Barlai & Sik, 2017; Goździak & Márton, 2018; Bajomi-Lázár, 2019; Kende & Krekó, 2020).

To investigate whether attitudes are sensitive to macro-level societal and/or economic changes, we need to look into longer-term trends in attitudes. Data show surprising stability in Europe (concerning the weighted population of 15 countries participating in all eight rounds of the survey between 2002/3 and 2018/19<sup>3</sup>). The Perception Index (PI) (cognitive

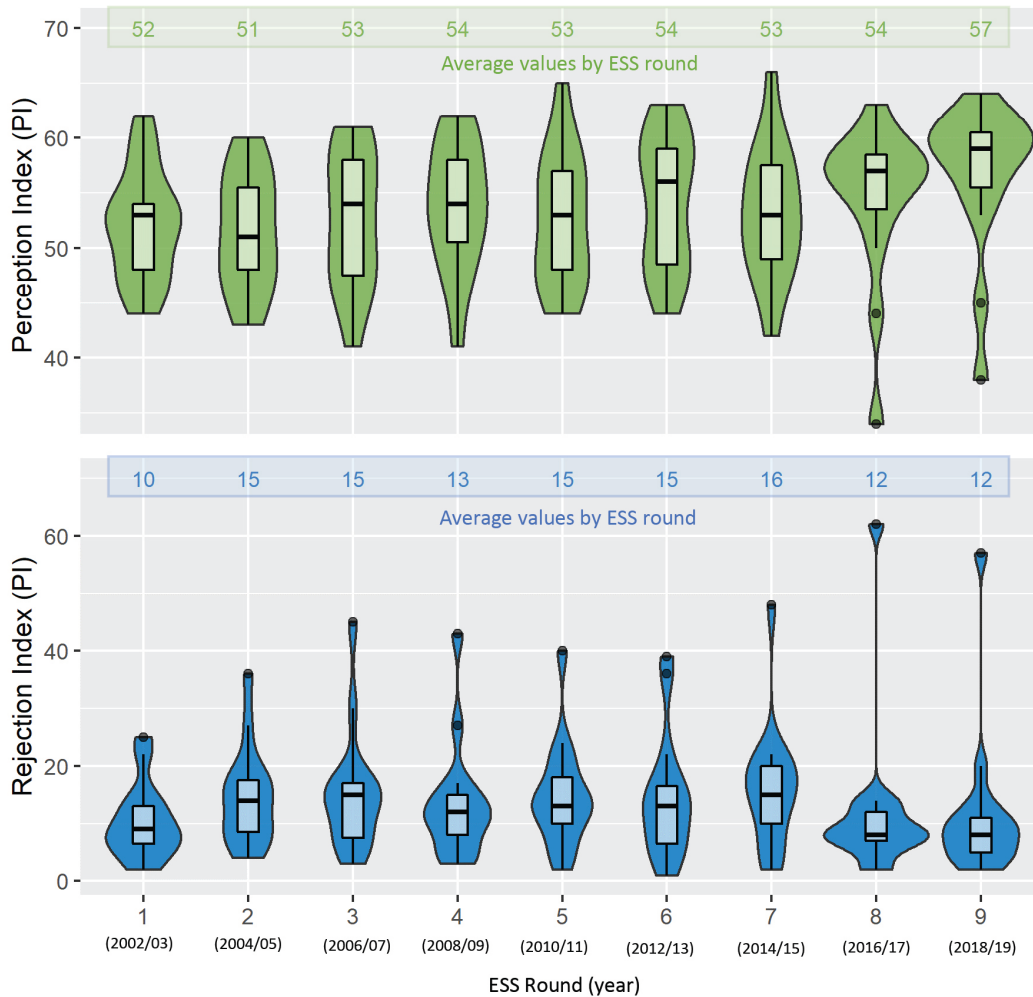


Figure 2. Change in Perception Index and Rejection Index between ESS R1 (2002) and R9 (2018/19) (15 countries, based on population weight)

<sup>3</sup> The countries include Belgium, Switzerland, Germany, Spain, Finland, France, United Kingdom, Hungary, Ireland, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Sweden, and Slovenia. Any indicators calculated for these 15 countries are far from the 'European average,' and as such, any generalizing conclusions that describe the European situation have to be formulated with caution.

element of attitudes) ranges between 51 and 57 points on a 100-point scale, showing that, in general, people in Europe judged migration to have advantages and disadvantages in roughly equal measure throughout almost two decades. Both the 2008 economic crisis and the mass arrival of refugees in 2015 have not changed radically the generally stable and neutral attitudes to immigrants and migration in the population of 15 European countries from a macro perspective. Furthermore, the Rejection Index (RI) varies across a limited range, reaching an overall maximum (16 per cent) in 2014/15, and minimum (10 per cent) in 2002/3.

There was a 5 per cent increase in refusal from 2002 to 2004, and a 4 per cent increase of acceptance around Europe from 2014/15 to 2016/17. The increase in the share of those rejecting third-country-national (TCN) migrants coming from poorer countries from 2002 to 2004 was likely triggered by fears related to the enlargement of the European Union in 2004. Insecurities attached to the unclear consequences of the accession of ten relatively poor, mostly Central East European countries concerning the domestic economy, labour markets, and norms might have had an important role in the slight rise in the rejection of migration. Between 2004 and 2012, the share of those rejecting migration remained stable: the 2008 economic crisis does not seem to have affected this. Looking into this index we may find again that the refugee crisis of 2015 has not brought about increasing refusal within Europe, but on the contrary, the share of people who would accept immigrants from poorer countries outside Europe increased from 2014/15 to 2016/17. But Figure 2 reveals another important trend behind the apparent stability of the index averages: the 2015 migration crisis and its political aftermath resulted in the appearance of a few outlier countries with far higher or lower values than the majority of countries. Concerning the first research question, we found that neither the financial crisis in 2008 nor the 2015 refugee crisis brought about deteriorating attitudes towards immigrants in terms of the European average. Just to the contrary: following the inflow of large numbers of refugees in 2015—in parallel with the visible process of polarization within Europe—rejection of immigrants decreased in Europe on average after 2015.

Looking beyond the macro data that characterizes all countries, certain important cross-country differences become visible, but actual exposure to the inflow of asylum seekers in 2015–16 has limited explanatory power. Table 1 illustrates changes in the perception and rejections indexes and their statistical significance in 20 countries participating in both R7 and R9 of the ESS. We used these two rounds because we can compare pre-2015 and the consolidated post-2015 moments. When comparing data in 2014/15 (R7) and in 2018/19 (R9) (using independent samples *t* tests) we can distinguish between three types of countries: (1) those where both the perception and rejection indexes have changed significantly; (2) countries in which there was no significant change; and, (3) countries where the change in the two indicators is asynchronous.

In most—eight out of twenty—countries a statistically significant and robust increase in pro-immigrant attitudes was recorded concerning both indicators (Belgium, Switzerland, Spain, Finland, France, UK, Ireland and Portugal). Attitudes became more pro-immigrant irrespective of whether we look at the cognitive or the behavioural element of attitudes. Out of the 20 countries, there was only one—Hungary—in which both indicators measuring attitudes towards immigrants deteriorated significantly in statistical terms between 2014 and 2018/19, reflecting the pre- and post-2015 migration crisis situation. There was

no statistically significant change in any of the indicators in Austria and in Germany. In the remaining nine countries, the change in the two indicators measuring attitudes was incoherent.

Country	Perception Index (PI)				Rejection Index (RI)			
	<i>T</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>Sig. (2-tailed)</i>	Mean Difference	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>Sig. (2-tailed)</i>	Mean Difference
Austria	-1.198	3880.8	0.231	+0.8	-1.852	3827.7	0.064	+2.3
Belgium	-8.673	3518.8	0.000	+5.4	8.694	3170.1	0.000	-9.7
Switzerland	-3.053	3055.4	0.002	+1.9	2.844	2888.6	0.004	-2.5
Czechia	0.283	4481.5	0.777	-0.2	-9.91	4411.8	0.000	+14.1
Germany	0.591	4919.1	0.555	-0.3	1.766	5187.8	0.077	-1.2
Denmark	-3.885	3040.6	0.000	+2.9	2.712	2929.1	0.007	-3.0
Estonia	3.756	3886.2	0.000	-2.4	2.969	3895.6	0.003	-4.2
Spain	-8.894	3398.3	0.000	+6.4	5.515	3288.7	0.000	-6.0
Finland	-3.661	3718.6	0.000	+2.2	8.813	3642.0	0.000	-8.8
France	-4.799	3903.7	0.000	+3.4	5.624	3688.2	0.000	-6.5
United Kingdom	-14.59	4455.9	0.000	+10.2	11.352	4028.9	0.000	-12.3
Hungary	5.67	3255.2	0.000	-3.9	-5.517	3170.0	0.000	+9.7
Ireland	-15.163	4568.4	0.000	+9.7	10.796	4232.2	0.000	-11.4
Lithuania	-1.241	3603.0	0.215	+0.8	6.599	3844.3	0.000	-8.7
Netherlands	-8.405	3558.7	0.000	+4.4	2.371	3529.0	0.018	-2.6
Norway	-5.434	2835.5	0.000	+3.8	2.365	2656.6	0.018	-1.4
Poland	-3.336	2989.5	0.001	+2.4	-4.973	2825.8	0.000	+6.8
Portugal	-14.546	2289.6	0.000	+12.5	12.467	1903.1	0.000	-16.5
Sweden	3.031	3206.2	0.002	-2.1	-1.789	2917.3	0.074	+1.0
Slovenia	0.659	2515.7	0.510	-0.6	2.922	2334.6	0.004	-4.4

Table 1. Change in PI and RI between ESS R7 and R9 with results of independent sample T tests

#### 4.2 How are attitudes to migration linked to basic human values?

We use the theoretical and methodological framework developed by S. Schwartz (1994) to map connections between basic human values and attitudes to migration. Applying a linear regression model to the Perception Index (with 21 individual items measuring 10 basic human values) to data from 15 countries that participated in all ESS survey rounds highlights that five items belonging to two basic value categories crystalize at both ends of the chart: security and humanitarianism<sup>4</sup> (Figure 3).

Our data support findings of previous research; namely, the importance of humanitarian and security-related values in developing attitudes towards immigrants (Davidov, 2008). Agreement with the first two statements—the importance of secure surroundings, and the importance of a strong government that ensures safety—signals that a strong value is attributed to stability and externally provided physical safety. The two statements at the bottom of the list signal strong attachment to humanitarian values, such as understand-

<sup>4</sup> The term ‘transcendence’ is used in the original theoretical model, but for this paper we have changed it to ‘humanitarianism’ because we think that this relates better to the topic of migration.

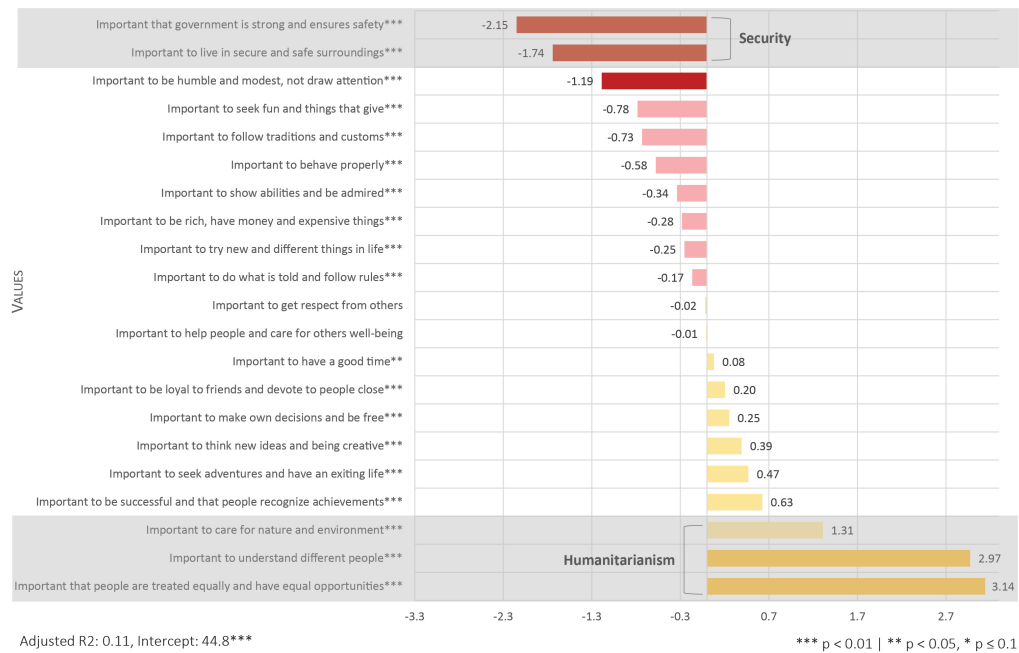


Figure 3. Linear regression coefficients (B) of the model explaining the Perception index using 21 value items. (ESS R1-R9 (2002/19))

ing, and respecting and treating one another equally. These two types of values are the strongest predictors of attitudes towards immigrants, but in a contrasting direction: those who attribute great significance to security tend to be more negative towards immigrants, while those who value equality and respect for other people are the least fearful of migrants. Other basic values measured by the remaining items (such as achievement, hedonism, power, self-direction, and stimulation) seem to have only a weak or non-existent relationship with how people think about migration, thus our analysis will focus on these two sets of values: universalism (humanitarian values) and security.

It might occur that a single point of measurement does not represent sufficiently the link between values and attitudes. Therefore, we analysed the Perception Index using these two types of basic human values for 15 countries participating in all rounds of the European Social Survey from 2002 to 2017, and found that—depending on country and fieldwork rounds—on average 8 per cent of the variance of PI is explained. However, the country-specific values indicate major differences across Europe in the role of basic human values in developing attitudes towards immigrants. The adjusted  $R^2$  statistics are well below average in Hungary, Portugal, Slovenia, and Poland (Figure 4A) meaning that in these countries human values play a less vital role in developing attitudes towards immigrants than in other countries.

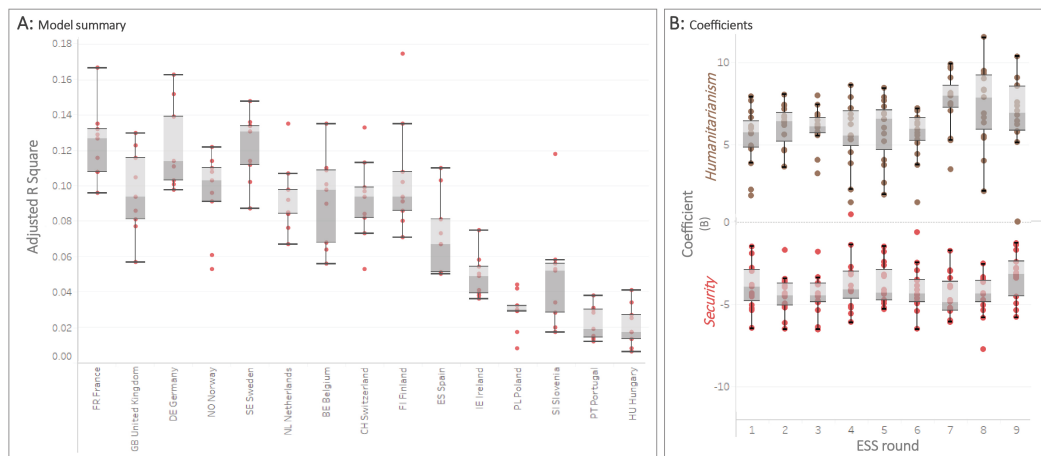


Figure 4. Results of separate OLS regression models of security and humanitarianism values explaining Perception index by countries and rounds of ESS data (R1 in 2002 to R9 in 2018/19)

The country-specific regression analysis applied to all ESS rounds separately (Figure 4B) shows that, generally, the importance of the security value stayed relatively stable across time, and most importantly did not—as one might have presumed—increase following the arrival of masses of refugees in 2015. Contrarily, the role of the value attached to humanitarianism on attitudes towards immigrants (PI), after staying fairly stable throughout the 12 years between Round 1 in 2002 and Round 6 in 2012, had increased by 2014/15 and remained high until 2016, thereby becoming a stronger predictor of attitudes (compared to security). Based on these data we may conclude that the refugee crisis activated the link between humanitarian values and attitudes towards immigrants (more specifically, its cognitive element measured by the perception index), and this might have contributed to the stability of attitudes and even lessened the rejection of immigrants in some countries.

#### 4.3 How are attitudes about migration linked to political preferences?

Figure 5 demonstrates the association between attitudes towards immigrants (Rejection and Perception Indexes) and the subjective evaluation of one's political orientation for the population of all countries participating in the eighth Round of the ESS in (2016/17). The question we employed here asked respondents to locate themselves on a scale ranging from political 'right' to political 'left'.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> We understand that the concept of 'left' and 'right' may have quite different connotations in different countries. (Aspelund et al., 2013). Nevertheless, even if the actual meaning of right and left is not the same, the relative positions on such a scale are rooted in similar predispositions and values (Piorko et al., 2011).

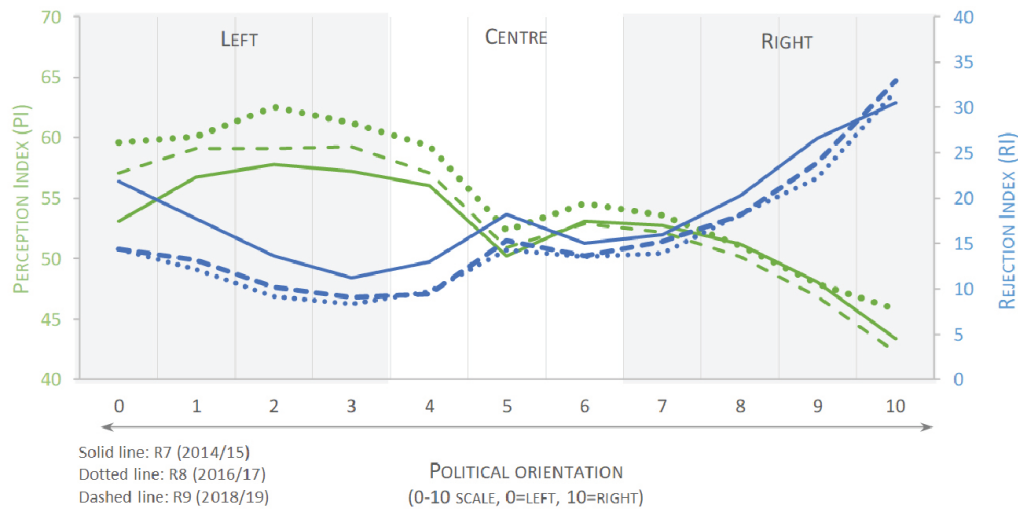


Figure 5. Rejection and Perception Indexes by political orientation measured on a left-right scale, aggregate data of 20 countries participating in ESS R7 (2014/15); R8 (2016/17); R9(2016/17) rounds

The chart shows a very clear pattern: those who self-identify as left-wing have a generally positive attitude towards immigrants, those in the centre of the political scale are relatively neutral, and those on the right have a generally negative attitude towards immigrants. This is no surprise. However, the gradient of the curve is notable: those self-identifying with the left were equally positive about migration (in 2016/17 and 2018/19), irrespective of how left-oriented they feel; i.e. people who position themselves on the extreme of the scale have very similar attitudes to those who think of themselves as moderately left-wing. At the right-wing end of the scale, we see a very different picture: the gradient of the curve is steep, meaning that political right-wing extremism correlates strongly with extreme anti-immigrant attitudes.

Our initial question for the research described in the paper concerns the impact of the 2015 migration crisis on the strength of the relationship between political orientation and attitudes towards immigrants. We ask whether political orientation predicts attitudes towards immigrants in the same way after 2015 than before it. Figure 5 shows that there is one important change from 2014/15 to 2016/17 and 2018/19; namely, that those who self-identify as strongly left-oriented became more tolerant towards immigrants after the 2015 refugee crisis.

The data also provides evidence for the hypothesis that in different countries the relationship between political orientation and attitudes towards immigrants may play out differently, and also, that the latter became slightly stronger after 2015. Looking at individual countries we see significant diversity in this respect (see Figure SI2 in Supplementary Information) Although the overall averages show a very clear pattern of correlation between political preferences and attitudes towards immigrants, on the country level these correlations are diverse and much less clear. In Austria, Germany, Belgium, Switzerland, Spain, France, and the UK the relationship between political orientation and attitudes towards immigrants is strong. There are however a few outliers: in the Czech Republic, Esto-

nia, and Lithuania the relationship is reversed: left-oriented respondents express stronger anti-immigrant attitudes than those in the centre or the right of the political spectrum. There are a few countries where the relationship is extremely weak or does not exist at all: Finland, Hungary, Ireland, and Poland.

As to how migration processes in 2015 influenced this relationship we see similar diversity. In Finland, France, Netherlands, and Slovenia it stayed unchanged. But in some important cases we see a polarizing effect: those on the right became more anti-immigrant and those who felt closer to the left had become more accepting of immigrants by 2018/9 compared to 2014/5 and 2016/7. Such countries include Austria, Germany, the UK, and Sweden most distinctively. In several East European countries—Hungary and Poland, but also Estonia and Czechia to some extent—a similar phenomenon is visible: a strong polarization of attitudes along political lines between 2014/5 and 2016/7 and a bounce back to rather homogeneous (ly negative) attitudes in 2018/9.

#### 4.4 Overview of factors that shape attitudes to migration: A multilevel model

In order to understand the composite effects of various factors that define one's overall perception of migration rather than looking at these factors individually, we developed a complex model that includes four groups of explanatory variables and takes into account the effect of country and time (pre- and post-2015) (Fairbrother, 2014). The data behind the model are limited to the last three rounds of the ESS (R7 to R9). Since respondents in the ESS are nested within higher level units (namely, countries), we used a hierarchical linear model for the analysis. As already discussed earlier in this paper, the Perception Index varies considerably across countries and time. In terms of numbers, the variability of the PI that is directly attributable to countries (interclass correlation, ICC) is .011 per cent for the three rounds overall, which is assessed as rather high (Model 0). This implies that the context of a given country (its historical, cultural, economic, political and media trajectories) immensely influences how people perceive migration. Based on our previous research (Messing & Ságvári, 2018; 2019) and the works of other authors (and of course considering the limits of the ESS data) we included the following groups of explanatory variables that reflect our theoretical framework into the model:<sup>6</sup>

- Basic demography: gender, age, education, foreign-born status
- Locus of control: subjective financial status, institutional trust, interpersonal trust, feeling of lack of physical safety
- Human values: humanitarianism-related values, security-related values
- Political orientation: placement on left-right scale

The model was built in stages by including groups of variables step by step (Table 1). In the simplest model (Model 1) basic individual demographic characteristics were entered, and the results showed that all variables significantly predict attitudes towards immigrants (more specifically, is cognitive element). Without taking into consideration the effect of country and time, female respondents generally tend to have somewhat lower PI values (however, the estimate is very small), and with an increase in age there is also a small decrease in PI. The total number of years spent in education seems to have a strong influence on attitudes towards immigrants. In modelling terms, each extra year in school increases

<sup>6</sup> See detailed description of the variables in the Supplementary Material section.

PI by 1.2 point, on average. Not surprisingly, not being born in the current country of residence or having parent(s) born in a different country also have a strong positive effect on perception (+5.4)

Models 3 to Model 5 include explanatory variables that are connected to our theoretical frameworks. The first group of variables in Model 3 includes variables related to people's general feeling of control. The results of the model suggest that both institutional and interpersonal trust indexes (measured on a 0 to 10 scale) are strongly related to our dependent variable. In general, higher levels of trust result in more positive perceptions about migration. The strength of the two trust indexes in altering perceptions is almost equal, indicating their dual effect in the model. On the other hand, a deprived financial status and feeling of a lack of physical safety are factors that lead to more negative perception—providing evidence of the importance of the role of control in the lives of individuals.

Security and humanitarianism—two of the human values (measured on a 1 to 6 scale) that proved to be significantly associated with attitudes towards immigrants (Figure 3)—were also included in the model (Davidov et al., 2008).<sup>7</sup> Both have very strong effect on the PI, but in the opposite direction (Model 4). Those who place strong value on security are more negative about migration and those who think that humanitarian values are important have generally more positive attitudes. This association remains strong, even if we discount the effect of demographic characteristics and proxies of the feeling of control.

Finally, we also included political orientation measured on a 0 (left) to 10 (right) scale (Model 5). The coefficient estimate of -1.2 in the model indicates that people on the right side of the political spectrum have lower PI values in general, again discounting the effect of basic demographic characteristics—of the proxies of feeling of control and identification with humanitarian and security-centred human values.

The last model (Model 6) includes information on time and the interaction of time and non-demographic variables. The initial time point in our model is ESS Round 7, for which the fieldwork took place during 2014 and 2015. We have argued that this period captured the last 'moment' before the 2015 migration crisis, so the next two rounds refer to the 'post-crisis' period: 2016/7 (R8) indicates the short-term while 2018/9 (R9) the more consolidated impact of the refugee crisis on public attitudes towards migration and immigrants. This change is reflected by the 'essround' variable in our model. Overall, this has a small positive effect, implying that at macro-level the perception of migration became more positive after 2015. However, the effect of the interaction terms is either non-significant or very small, supporting the idea that deeply rooted attitudes do not tend to change within a short period, while nor do relationships with the perception of migration show considerable stability if all potential intersecting factors (demography, human values, feeling of being in control, and political orientation) are discounted for. However, there are important country-level differences—as we have shown in the previous section—which are the consequence of a more complex web of interrelated factors stemming from politics, media discourse, historical and cultural traditions, and more.

<sup>7</sup> See Section 2.3 for an explanation of the use of these two specific value dimensions.

**Mixed model with the Perception Index (PI) as dependent variable**

Predictors	Model 0			Model 1			Model 2			Model 3			Model 4			Model 5			Model 6		
	Estimates	CI	p	Estimates	CI	p	Estimates	CI	p	Estimates	CI	p	Estimates	CI	p	Estimates	CI	p	Estimates	CI	p
(Intercept)	52.91	49.76 - 56.06	<0.001	36.14	33.09 - 39.20	<0.001	17.50	14.76 - 20.24	<0.001	11.99	9.35 - 14.63	<0.001	18.70	16.04 - 21.35	<0.001	17.00	14.13 - 19.86	<0.001	17.00	14.13 - 19.86	<0.001
Gender(male=1)	-0.44	-0.68 - -0.20	<0.001	-0.44	-0.68 - -0.20	<0.001	0.22	-0.01 - 0.45	0.063	0.02	-0.21 - 0.24	0.895	-0.20	-0.43 - 0.02	0.074	-0.21	-0.43 - 0.01	0.067	-0.21	-0.43 - 0.01	0.067
Age(entered)	-0.06	-0.07 - -0.05	<0.001	-0.06	-0.07 - -0.05	<0.001	-0.05	-0.06 - -0.05	<0.001	-0.05	-0.05 - -0.04	<0.001	-0.04	-0.05 - -0.04	<0.001	-0.05	-0.05 - -0.04	<0.001	-0.05	-0.05 - -0.04	<0.001
Years in education	1.24	1.21 - 1.27	<0.001	1.24	1.21 - 1.27	<0.001	0.95	0.92 - 0.98	<0.001	0.78	0.75 - 0.81	<0.001	0.78	0.74 - 0.81	<0.001	0.77	0.74 - 0.80	<0.001	0.77	0.74 - 0.80	<0.001
Parent(s) respondent not born in country	5.38	5.06 - 5.69	<0.001	5.38	5.06 - 5.69	<0.001	5.59	5.29 - 5.89	<0.001	5.48	5.19 - 5.78	<0.001	5.10	4.81 - 5.39	<0.001	5.09	4.80 - 5.38	<0.001	5.09	4.80 - 5.38	<0.001
Deprived financial status	-2.63	-3.22 - -2.03	<0.001	-2.83	-3.42 - -2.25	<0.001	-2.83	-3.42 - -2.25	<0.001	-3.12	-3.70 - -2.54	<0.001	-3.32	-3.90 - -2.74	<0.001	-3.32	-3.90 - -2.74	<0.001	-3.32	-3.90 - -2.74	<0.001
Institutional trust(index)	2.33	2.26 - 2.40	<0.001	2.38	2.31 - 2.44	<0.001	2.51	2.44 - 2.57	<0.001	2.51	2.44 - 2.57	<0.001	2.51	2.44 - 2.57	<0.001	2.54	2.44 - 2.64	<0.001	2.54	2.44 - 2.64	<0.001
Interpersonal trust(index)	2.12	2.05 - 2.20	<0.001	1.87	1.80 - 1.94	<0.001	1.86	1.79 - 1.93	<0.001	1.86	1.79 - 1.93	<0.001	1.86	1.79 - 1.93	<0.001	1.70	1.59 - 1.81	<0.001	1.70	1.59 - 1.81	<0.001
Feeling of physical unsafety	-4.10	-4.41 - -3.79	<0.001	-3.36	-3.66 - -3.06	<0.001	-3.32	-3.62 - -3.03	<0.001	-3.32	-3.62 - -3.03	<0.001	-2.77	-3.22 - -2.33	<0.001	-2.77	-3.22 - -2.33	<0.001	-2.77	-3.22 - -2.33	<0.001
Humanitarianism related values	5.02	4.86 - 5.18	<0.001	4.55	4.39 - 4.71	<0.001	4.55	4.39 - 4.71	<0.001	4.55	4.39 - 4.71	<0.001	5.01	4.77 - 5.25	<0.001	5.01	4.77 - 5.25	<0.001	5.01	4.77 - 5.25	<0.001
Security related values	-3.31	-3.43 - -3.19	<0.001	-3.02	-3.14 - -2.90	<0.001	-3.30	-3.42 - -3.18	<0.001	-3.30	-3.42 - -3.18	<0.001	-3.30	-3.42 - -3.18	<0.001	-3.30	-3.42 - -3.18	<0.001	-3.30	-3.42 - -3.18	<0.001
Political orientation (left-right)	-1.19	-1.25 - -1.14	<0.001	-1.19	-1.25 - -1.14	<0.001	-1.19	-1.25 - -1.14	<0.001	-1.19	-1.25 - -1.14	<0.001	-1.19	-1.25 - -1.14	<0.001	-1.19	-1.25 - -1.14	<0.001	-1.19	-1.25 - -1.14	<0.001
ESS Round (time)	1.86	0.78 - 2.95	0.001	0.25	-0.46 - 0.97	0.486	-0.05	-0.13 - 0.02	0.167	0.16	0.07 - 0.24	<0.001	-0.57	-0.92 - -0.21	0.002	0.30	0.16 - 0.44	<0.001	0.30	0.16 - 0.44	<0.001
Deprived financial status: ESS Round (time)	0.25	-0.46 - 0.97	0.486	0.16	0.07 - 0.24	<0.001	-0.57	-0.92 - -0.21	0.002	0.30	0.16 - 0.44	<0.001	-0.21	-0.28 - -0.15	<0.001	0.30	0.16 - 0.44	<0.001	0.30	0.16 - 0.44	<0.001
Institutional trust (index): ESS Round (time)	0.16	0.07 - 0.24	<0.001	-0.57	-0.92 - -0.21	0.002	0.30	0.16 - 0.44	<0.001	-0.21	-0.28 - -0.15	<0.001	0.30	0.16 - 0.44	<0.001	0.30	0.16 - 0.44	<0.001	0.30	0.16 - 0.44	<0.001
Interpersonal trust (index): ESS Round (time)	0.16	0.07 - 0.24	<0.001	-0.57	-0.92 - -0.21	0.002	0.30	0.16 - 0.44	<0.001	-0.21	-0.28 - -0.15	<0.001	0.30	0.16 - 0.44	<0.001	0.30	0.16 - 0.44	<0.001	0.30	0.16 - 0.44	<0.001
Feeling of physical unsafety: ESS Round (time)	0.16	0.07 - 0.24	<0.001	-0.57	-0.92 - -0.21	0.002	0.30	0.16 - 0.44	<0.001	-0.21	-0.28 - -0.15	<0.001	0.30	0.16 - 0.44	<0.001	0.30	0.16 - 0.44	<0.001	0.30	0.16 - 0.44	<0.001
Humanitarianism related values: ESS Round (time)	0.16	0.07 - 0.24	<0.001	-0.57	-0.92 - -0.21	0.002	0.30	0.16 - 0.44	<0.001	-0.21	-0.28 - -0.15	<0.001	0.30	0.16 - 0.44	<0.001	0.30	0.16 - 0.44	<0.001	0.30	0.16 - 0.44	<0.001
Security related values: ESS Round (time)	0.16	0.07 - 0.24	<0.001	-0.57	-0.92 - -0.21	0.002	0.30	0.16 - 0.44	<0.001	-0.21	-0.28 - -0.15	<0.001	0.30	0.16 - 0.44	<0.001	0.30	0.16 - 0.44	<0.001	0.30	0.16 - 0.44	<0.001
orientation (left-right): ESS Round (time)	0.16	0.07 - 0.24	<0.001	-0.57	-0.92 - -0.21	0.002	0.30	0.16 - 0.44	<0.001	-0.21	-0.28 - -0.15	<0.001	0.30	0.16 - 0.44	<0.001	0.30	0.16 - 0.44	<0.001	0.30	0.16 - 0.44	<0.001
<b>Random Effects</b>																					
$\sigma^2$	415.64			384.49			335.96			316.98			311.45			311.12					
$\tau_{00}$	49.03 entry			45.02 entry			35.59 entry			30.36 entry			30.38 entry			30.49 entry					
ICC	0.11			0.10			0.10			0.09			0.09			0.09					
N	19 entry			19 entry			19 entry			19 entry			19 entry			19 entry					
Observations	105510			104179			103078			101909			101909			101909					
Marginal R <sup>2</sup> / Conditional R <sup>2</sup>	0.000 / 0.106			0.071 / 0.169			0.209 / 0.285			0.259 / 0.323			0.270 / 0.335			0.271 / 0.336					

Table 2. Results of multilevel linear model on the perception of migration

## 5 Discussion: How are attitudes towards migration linked to openness to populism?

In the introduction to this paper, we raised the idea that anti-immigrant attitudes and rising populism may be strongly connected in Europe, and are transmitted through changes in the importance attributed to values of humanitarianism and security, as well as the feeling of control. A socio-psychological explanation of this link postulates that when people perceive an increase in disorder—something that they feel they (or their governments) are not in control of—they feel anxiety (Harell et al., 2017). Such anxiety leads to a need for security. Individuals strive to bring safety and stability back into their lives and are more likely to vote for right-wing populist political parties, which promise strength and order. Fear and frustration linked to migration have become symbols for this general feeling of uncertainty, and populist political forces have always fallen back on a fear of immigrants and the consequences of immigration. Analysis of populist politicians' speeches in Europe and the USA shows that migration is high on their agenda. The victory of Brexit, of Donald Trump, Viktor Orbán, Matteo Salvini, the Freedom Party in Austria, and the Law and Justice Party in Poland can all be attributed to this increased desire for stability and order, and all of these movements had anti-immigration at the top of their agendas (Yilmaz, 2012; Hooghe & Dassoneville, 2018; Wirz et al., 2018).

Using recent research on populism in Europe<sup>8</sup> to categorize populist parties in nine European countries, we tried to establish the degree to which anti-immigrant feelings are linked to support for political populism.<sup>9</sup> For this analysis, we used data from the eighth round of the ESS, harmonized with party categorization in time. This analysis of the connection between voting for a populist party and attitudes towards immigrants resulted in a very obvious conclusion: those with negative attitudes are much more likely to vote for right-wing populist parties.

Figure 6A illustrates the association between party preferences and attitudes towards immigrants (perception and Rejection indexes), while 6B highlights the differences between both cognitive (PI) and behavioural (RI) elements of attitudes between supporters of right-wing populist parties and others.

Data on attitudes of party supporters (Figure 6B) show very clearly that supporters of right-wing populist parties (such as AfD in Germany, the Front National in France,<sup>10</sup> the League in Italy, and the Swedish Democrats) have significantly more negative and exclusionary attitudes towards immigrants than supporters of any other parties on a national level. To put it plainly, these parties gather and feed that part of the population which is very negative towards immigrants and migration in general. Right-wing populist parties seem to provide terrain on which to openly express the rage fuelled by uncertainty and to

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/nov/20/measuring-populism-how-guardian-charted-rise-methodology>

<sup>9</sup> The following definition was used for the concept of populist parties: 'Parties that endorse the set of ideas that society is ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, "the pure people" versus "the corrupt elite," and which argue that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale*, or general will, of the people' (Mudde, 2014).

<sup>10</sup> Rassemblement National (National Rally) since June 2018.



Figure 6. Rejection and Perception Indexes among supporters of political parties in nine European countries. Right-wing populist and selected centre-left political parties (ESS Round 8, 2016/17)

blame immigrants. In almost all countries, one or two such parties exist: the difference lies rather in how powerful they are. They are tiny in Sweden and Norway, small but significant in Germany and France, large in Italy and Austria, and even form a super-majority government in Hungary. While Figure 6 demonstrates that in most countries right-wing populist parties attract the population with extreme anti-immigrant attitudes, in Hungary and Italy supporters of centrist or even left-wing political parties may hold very negative attitudes towards immigrants in European comparison.

There is another notable lesson from Figure 6: although supporters of right-wing political parties perceive consequences of migration (PI) quite similarly (very negatively) across countries, these negative perceptions translate into very different levels of rejection of immigrants: rejecting any kind of migration is most explicit in Hungary, while supporters of right-wing populist parties (FPÖ, FN, LN) in other countries, even if they may perceive migration more negatively, are more moderate in their rejection of immigrants. This data shows the degree to which dominant norms, defined by historical-political traditions and current mainstream politics, matter in terms of transforming aversion into the extreme rejection of immigrants. We would argue that the political power such parties wield, whether in government or in opposition, plays a critical role in determining the degree to which anti-migrant narratives are allowed to become the norm within society.

## 6 Summary and conclusion

Looking at longer-term trends in attitudes toward immigrants we found notable stability over a period of 16 years. The overall perception of migration, as well as the share of those supporting the explicit rejection of immigrants from poorer countries outside Europe, has not changed radically. Attitudes may have changed within shorter periods of time in certain countries, but in the longer term, and in general, they have remained rather stable across the continent. The first research question—whether attitudes towards immigrants have become more negative following the 2008 economic crisis and the 2015 refugee crisis—was thus answered in the negative. Contrary to expectations based on group conflict theory, the 2015 refugee crisis actually brought about slightly more openness towards immigrants: the share of those who would refuse the settlement of immigrants—on average, from the population of 20 countries—decreased from 15 to 10 per cent between 2014 and 2016. The multilevel model that discounts the effect of changes in demographic characteristics, changes in basic human values, or political attitudes, supports the above statement. However, intergroup conflict theory cannot be refuted either, as short-term, country-specific changes in attitudes occurred in spaces and times marked by uncertainty brought about by large-scale political changes, such as the enlargement of the EU in 2004. We claim therefore that group conflict theory on its own is not sufficient to explain all the differences in attitudes across time and location. A noteworthy finding of the analysis of the impact of time and geographic trends on attitudes is that, despite similar perceptions about the consequences of migration, people living in different countries reject immigrants in radically different levels. Data suggest that the level to which negative perceptions of migration result in (unconditional) rejection is a function of the general norms characteristic of a country, and is brought about by political and media discourse, historical experiences, and dominant social values.

The second set of research questions about the link between basic human values found that, contrary to our expectations, the strength of the link between values and attitudes towards immigrants is not homogeneous across countries or time. We found that the strength by which values of humanitarianism may explain attitudes towards immigrants slightly increased in 2015 and afterwards. The strength of this relationship also varies across countries: in countries with a communist authoritarian heritage this link is weaker, while in long-term welfare states, such as the Nordic countries and Germany, values predict attitudes much better. This finding suggests that certain conditions (i.e. the historical experiences of a country, or sudden changes such as an inflow of refugees) may activate or enhance the link between basic human values (more specifically, the value attributed to humanitarianism) and attitudes towards immigrants. In our conclusion we emphasize that security, a basic human value, is one of people's basic needs and that humanitarian values and related tolerance may come to the fore in an environment where people feel secure; most countries in Central and East European countries do not seem to have reached that stage.

The third part of our analysis looked into the relationship between attitudes towards immigrants and political preferences. There is nothing new about the finding that individuals' subjective position on the political scale correlates strongly with attitudes towards immigrants. This correlation, however, shows very different patterns across Europe: in many countries there is a linear link, while in a significant number of countries there

is hardly any association between political self-identification on the left-right scale and anti/pro-migrant attitudes. The multi-level model also showed that the strength of the association between political preferences and attitudes towards immigrants has not become significantly stronger since the 2015 refugee crisis.

Based on theories and earlier literature, we presumed that there is strong correlation between anti-immigrant attitudes and a preference for right-wing populism. Our analysis confirmed this correlation and found that anti-immigrant attitudes are more likely to manifest in open rejection of immigrants in countries where populist parties are strong or have even taken power. In all countries, right-wing populist parties gather and feed that part of the population which is the most negative towards immigrants and migration in general. However, a novel finding of the analysis is that it demonstrates cross-country variety concerning the level to which negative cognition of the consequences of migration are transformed into negative behavioural expectations among supporters of right-wing populist parties. Although the perception indexes of this subgroup are quite similar Europe-wide, the strength of rejection is very different: rejecting any kind of migration is most explicit in Hungary, while in other countries even the more negative perception of migration by supporters of right-wing populist parties (FPÖ, FN, LN, etc.) results in a smaller share of those rejecting immigrants. This data shows the degree to which dominant norms, political and historical traditions, and mainstream politics matter in terms of transforming aversion into the extreme rejection of immigrants. To answer the initial question of the paper, it may be assumed that anti-immigrant attitudes are indeed the Holy Grail of right-wing populism in Europe, and are activated by the importance attached to basic human values of security and humanitarianism. In countries where people feel insecure and are striving for stability (and where there is little presence of immigrants), right-wing populists may gain momentum by using anti-immigrant narratives.

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## Supplementary information

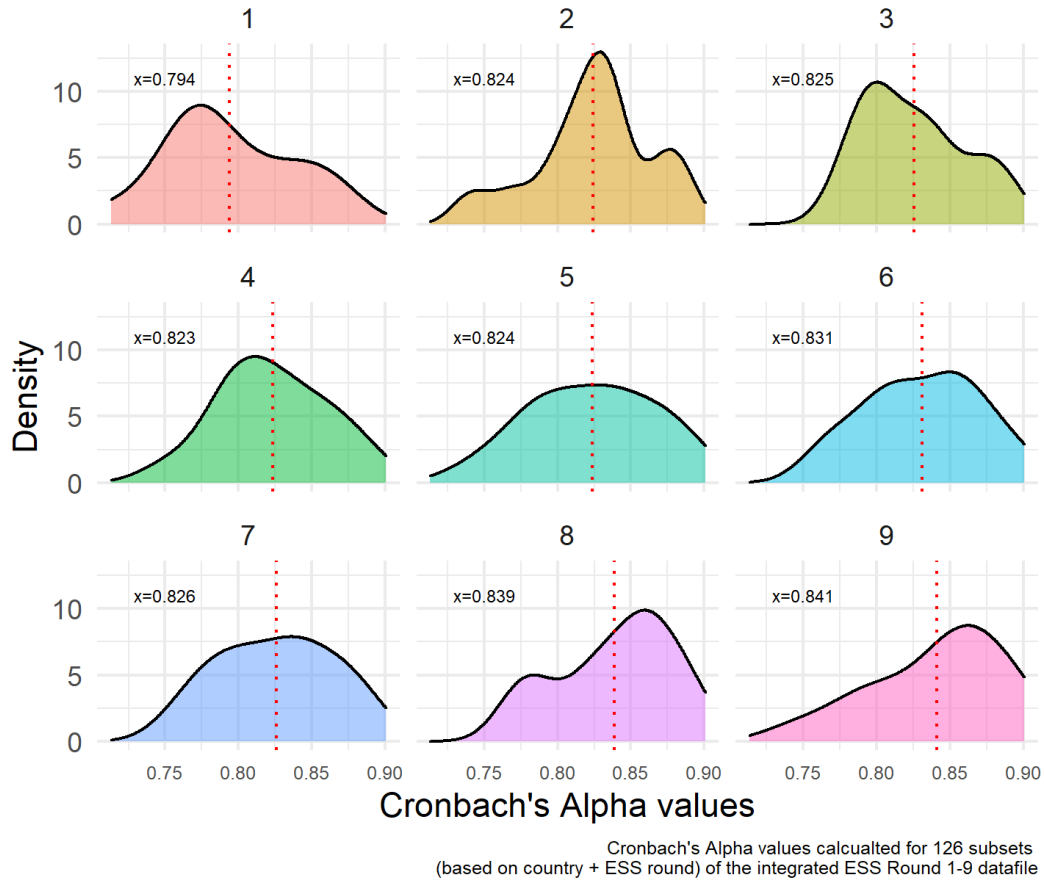
Reliability analysis  
(by ESS round)

Figure SI1. Reliability analysis of the Perception Index (PI)

	<b>Name</b>	<b>Label</b>	<b>Values</b>
<b>Basic demography</b>	gender	Gender of respondent	0:male, 1:female
	age	Age of respondent	Centered value around 44 years
	education	Level of education	Years spent in education
	foreign born status	Not being born in the current country of residence or having parent(s) born in a different country	0: no, 1:yes
	subjective financial status	Having financial difficulties	0: no, 1:yes
<b>Locus of control</b>	institutional trust	Institutional trust measured by the mean value of trust in parliament, legal system, government, political parties, politicians)	0: no trust, 10: full trust
	interpersonal trust	Interpersonal trust measured by the mean value of the following variables in the ESS dataset (ppltrst, pplfair, pplhlp)	0: no trust, 10: full trust
	feeling of physical unsafety	Feeling of lack of physical safety in the respondent's local neighbourhood	0: no, 1:yes
	security	Importance of security-related values (mean value of impsafe, ipstrgv)	1: low, 6: high
<b>Human values</b>	humanitarianism	Importance of humanitarianism-related values (mean value of ipeqopt, ipudrst, impenv)	1: low, 6: high
	lrscale2	Placement on left-right scale	0:left, 10:right
<b>Political orientation</b>			

Table SI1: Description of variables used in the multilevel model

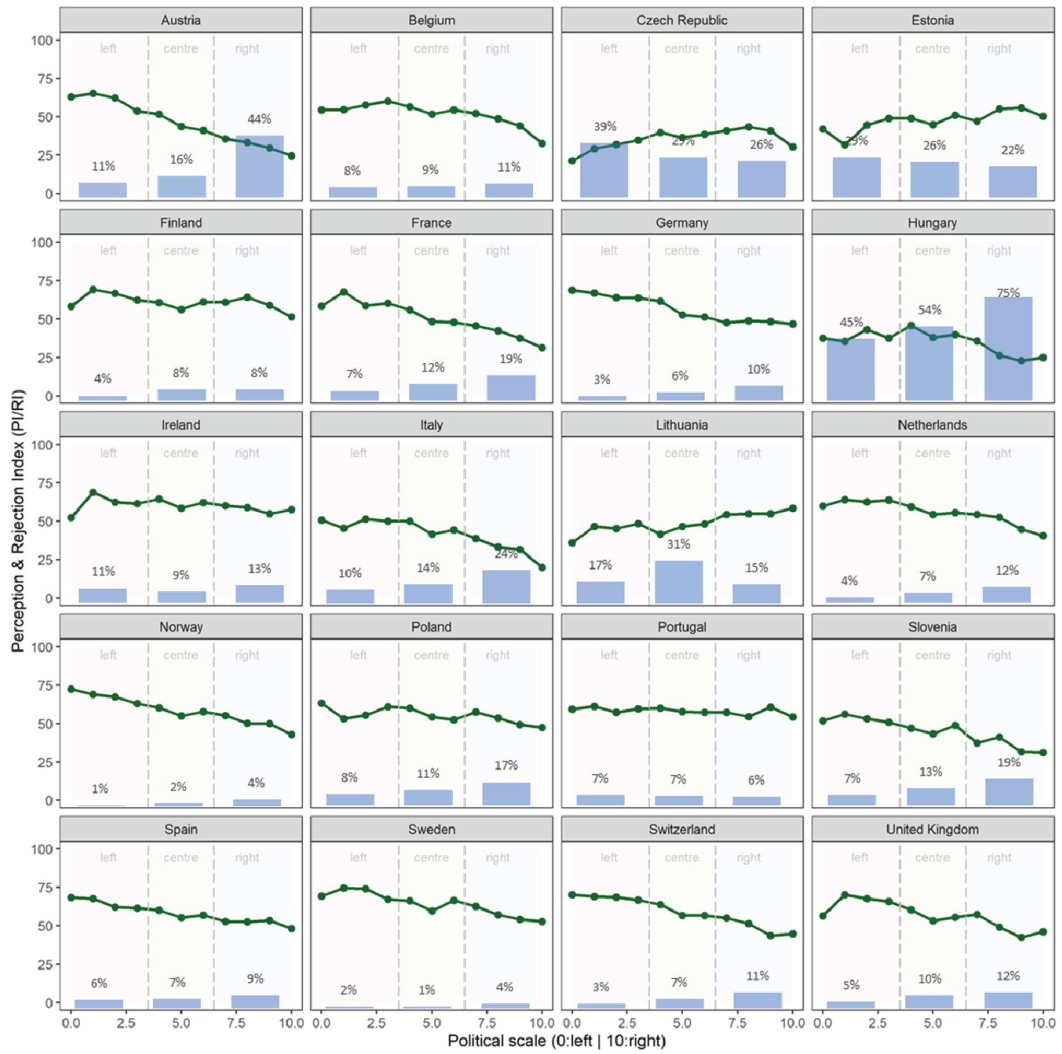


Figure SI2: Averages of the Perception and Rejection Indexes by left-right political orientation by country (ESS R8, 2016/17, PI=green line, RI=blue bar)

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## Counter-movement at a critical juncture: A neo-Polanyian interpretation of the rise of the illiberal Right in Poland

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### Abstract

This article seeks to explain the causes of the growing popularity of the illiberal right, taking the Polish political party Law and Justice as an example. The adopted analytical approach combines insights derived from the work of Karl Polanyi and the tradition of historical institutionalism. The victory of Law and Justice in the 2015 Polish parliamentary elections is argued to constitute a critical juncture that initiated a fundamental break with the liberal order. Following Polanyi, we argue that the seeds of the recent anti-liberal counter-revolution can be found in the malfunctioning of the Polish economic order built during the period of transition. However, Law and Justice has managed to make use of the critical juncture arising from social discontent and has used it instrumentally to dismantle liberal constitutionalism and the rule of law.

**Keywords:** illiberal democracy, economic liberalism, social discontent, power struggle

### 1 Introduction

One of the most astonishing features of present-day European politics is the rise of far-right political movements, which pose a threat to the liberal status quo that emerged after 1989 (Zielonka, 2018; Galston, 2018; see also Lee, 2019). The case of Poland constitutes a representative example of this political shift, and is often mentioned alongside that of Hungary, where Viktor Orbán has been prime minister since 2010. It is especially compelling if we recall that Poland was regarded as a poster boy for its market reforms. The long period of political consensus regarding liberal democracy and the neoliberal model of a ‘catching-up’ economy—which lasted from 1989 to 2015—brought admirable economic growth as well as political reforms aimed at institutionalizing liberal democracy. However, since the parliamentary election of 2015, which was won by the Law and Justice party (*Prawo i Sprawiedliwość*, henceforth: PiS), there has been an unprecedented turn away from

liberalism, manifesting in strong criticism of neoliberal economics, overt support for nationalist movements, rejection of the principles of tolerance and multiculturalism, anti-EU rhetoric, and a wholesale assault on the rule of law and the constitutional system of checks and balances. This puzzling turnaround constitutes the subject matter of our inquiry.

In Central and Eastern Europe, the fall of the Berlin Wall and the ‘turbulent period around 1989’ (Zielonka, 2018: ix) are often interpreted as the symbolic beginning of a distinct political period and characterized as a time of transition from real socialism to market economy and liberal democracy. Admittedly, Poland never fully severed its ties with the past because the former communist elites played an important role in the process of political and economic change. Nevertheless, the post-communist elites fully endorsed the overall goals defined during the transition period. For this reason, it is possible to identify the ‘turbulent period around 1989’ as constituting a critical juncture both in terms of regime change and general policy orientation. Since then, Polish politics has been defined by wholehearted acceptance of the key principles of political liberalism and neoliberal economics, as well as by the fact that it has embraced so-called ‘Western values.’ We believe, however, that the victory of PiS in the 2015 parliamentary elections marks the end of the liberal era. The year 2015 would thus represent a second critical juncture in recent Polish history or, as Jan Zielonka puts it, ‘a move from revolution to counter-revolution’ (2018, p. 1). Of course, the language of revolution should not be taken literally. What is really at stake here, we argue, is the desire to diverge from the path dependence laid down in 1989, and to take a new, non-liberal direction of political development.

In order to prove this thesis, we rely on two analytical approaches. First, we employ the theoretical apparatus of historical institutionalism, from which we borrow the notions of path dependence and critical juncture. As indicated above, we believe that the political and economic order that was established after 1989 followed the path dependence embodied in liberal democracy and the neoliberal economic model (see Kowalik, 2012). However, the 2015 seizure of power by PiS marks a critical juncture characterized by an attempt to reshape the Polish political system in such a way that it will be impossible to return to the previous order. Second, we use the concept of countermovement, borrowed from Karl Polanyi, in order to explain how the critical juncture of 2015 was made possible. We argue that the marriage of political and economic liberalism, despite overall sound economic performance and the apparent stability of liberal democracy, carried the seeds of its own demise. Mounting economic inequality, the increasing instability of the labor market, and intensified cultural conflicts ultimately undermined popular support for liberal democracy. In our view, the 2015 victory of PiS was an expression of social discontent with the malfunctioning of neoliberal economy, even if the result of these elections was not broadly interpreted in those terms. This does not imply, however, that the goal of PiS has been to restore social justice or provide an ambitious social democratic platform. Far from aiming to establish a more socially embedded economy, PiS has adopted selective protectionist policies to consolidate its political power to an extent unseen in the years 1989–2015. In other words, both social reforms and a new narrative that rejects neoliberalism in favor of greater social solidarity have been instrumentally employed to win the political support necessary for dismantling liberal constitutionalism and the rule of law.

The paper is divided into four parts. The first section discusses recent literature that addresses the rise of illiberal movements in the West. The following section introduces

in greater detail the notions of double movement, critical juncture, and path dependence. The third section offers reflection on the political and economic order in the years 1989–2015, which caused an accumulation of social tension, ultimately leading to the rise of the discussed countermovement. Finally, the fourth section elaborates on the critical juncture started by the government formed by PiS in 2015, focusing on the political and economic reforms it carried out, and on the new institutional arrangements resulting from their implementation. The conclusion recapitulates the main points and speculates about possible future developments in Polish politics.

## 2 Literature review: The rise of illiberal democracy

Arguably, the triumph of PiS in the 2015 elections is part of the much wider phenomena of anti-liberal revolts in contemporary politics. Important similarities can be detected in the words and actions of such political figures as Jarosław Kaczyński, Victor Orbán, Donald Trump, Marine Le Pen, Beppe Grillo, and others. Writing at the end of the twentieth century, Fareed Zakaria challenged the prevalent belief in the worldwide spread of liberal democracy after the fall of communism. He noted that while democracy has been flourishing, constitutional liberalism has not (Zakaria, 1997, p. 23). Instead, we are witnessing the ‘rise of a disturbing phenomenon in international life—illiberal democracy’ (p. 22). By this term, he means that although political systems have been marked by relatively free and fair elections, the principles of liberal constitutionalism have not been followed. Hence, Zakaria predicts that ‘the problems of governance in the 21st century will likely be problems *within* democracy’ and they are likely to boil down to a conflict between liberal and illiberal tendencies (p. 42; emphasis preserved). According to many journalists and academics, recent events in Eastern Europe confirm Zakaria’s prediction that illiberal democracy is on the rise. While the latter concentrated only on the problem of political liberalism, others argue that certain important tenets of economic and cultural liberalism are also under attack. Hence, as Zielonka (2018) argues, the retreat from liberalism seems to be the most general characteristic of contemporary political developments in Poland and elsewhere.

As indicated earlier, the substance of what the PiS government does consists of the blatant rejection of the key tenets of political, cultural, and economic liberalism. As far as political liberalism is concerned, institutions guaranteeing the rule of law and the balance of power have come under attack, leading to a conflict with the European Union over the meaning of the rule of law (Sadurski, 2018). Second, the new authorities have consequently ignored key principles of cultural liberalism such as openness and tolerance, especially regarding minorities. Representatives of PiS have systematically used hateful rhetoric directed against various groups such as Muslims, immigrants, feminists, environmental activists, vegans, selected occupational groups, and most recently, sexual minorities (see Memorandum, 2020; Szczyńska, 2020). Further, the party’s rhetoric involves an assault on the principles of economic liberalism by embracing a more statist outlook (e.g. Morawiecki, 2016). Still, despite vocal criticism of neoliberal ideology and its chief proponent, Professor Leszek Balcerowicz, actual reforms in this area have been limited. Nevertheless, it is possible to argue that changes at the level of both ideology and policy amount to nothing less than a wholesale rejection of the key tenets of liberalism.

As noted above, the rise of illiberal right is by no means a local phenomenon. In general,

literature has provided two modes of accounting for the rise of populism and illiberalism in recent years. The first focuses on material deprivation, which is connected with economic development around the world, and rooted in neoliberal globalization and the deindustrialization of advanced capitalist systems. Few have benefited from these processes, while most have experienced insecurity, income stagnation, job losses, and existential anxiety (see Guiso et al. 2019; 2017; Rodrik, 2018; Colantone & Stanig, 2018). In Western democracies, voters have shown their discontent at the voting booth by turning their backs on the establishment and trusting those who promise an easy way out, even though they may actually have insufficient power or flexibility to deliver on their promises. The second explanation relates primarily to the social sphere. In recent decades, factors like technological innovation, changes in morality, as well as global migration and multiculturalism, have created a new social reality. The world of twenty or thirty years ago no longer exists, which makes people feel insecure and alienated (Norris & Inglehart, 2019; Eatwell & Goodwin, 2018). Consequently, people vote for those politicians who promise to halt these processes and restore 'normality.' Nevertheless, the worsening quality of life (both in economic and social terms) has contributed greatly to the radical changes in Western democratic systems.

Similar explanations have been offered regarding the reasons for the victory of PiS. For instance, Piotr Sztompka (2016) and Radosław Markowski (2017) favor a socio-cultural interpretation, stressing factors such as cultural lag, civilizational incompetence, and the axiology of *Homo Sovieticus*. Mirosława Marody claims that illiberal politics in Poland feeds on the conservative backlash against 'changes in attitudes regarding politics (increased acceptance of democratic solutions) and religion (secularization tendencies), norms regulating sexual relations (greater liberalism), and the position of women in society (equal rights)' (2019, p. 66). In the context of growing cultural polarization, PiS leader Jarosław Kaczyński managed to present himself as a defender of the traditional axiological order. On the other hand, surveys and in-depth interviews conducted by Sławomir Sierakowski and Przemysław Sadura reveal that new PiS voters find social programs far more important than the conservative and authoritarian values proclaimed by party leadership (Sadura & Sierakowski, 2019). The same study suggests that PiS-led attempts to dismantle liberal institutions and monopolize power have met with a fair dose of mistrust, even among the party's most fervent supporters.

Other authors tend to link the rise of illiberalism with real or imagined deficiencies of the Eastern European model of 'catch-up capitalism.' Ivan Krastev and Stephen Holmes (2018) have suggested that Eastern European countries have grown tired of imitating the Western model of democracy and capitalism due to psychological and political backlash, which eventually bred feelings of inferiority and inadequacy, as well as led to a feeling of a loss of identity. Others, like David Ost (2016), have emphasized the destabilizing consequences of neoliberal reforms. In his earlier book *Defeat of Solidarity: Anger and Politics in Postcommunist Europe*, Ost argues that illiberal tendencies stem from the failure to organize worker discontent along class lines. As Ost explains, 'illiberals [...] are able to score great successes as they organize economic anger along noneconomic cleavages' (Ost, 2005, p. 9). He suggests that the root causes of illiberalism are economic in nature, even if they are sometimes expressed in the cultural idiom of identity politics. Arguably, this mode of analysis can be extended to the study of the reasons for PiS's rise to power in 2015.

Far from denying the existence of cultural cleavages in Poland, we are convinced that the turn away from the liberal regime cannot be explained by referring only to cultural factors. In our view, the root causes behind the rise of populism—both in Poland and elsewhere—are linked to the destabilizing effects of globalization and neoliberal economic reforms. Following Ost, we assume that discontent with economic realities can be expressed in cultural terms, reflecting the peculiarities of national political traditions and the relative power of various competing political ideologies. Hence, this paper examines both economic frustrations and the socio-cultural discourses in which they are articulated.

### 3 Theoretical considerations: Double movement, path dependence, and critical juncture

Our approach to political analysis is broadly institutional. For the purpose of the present argument we have selected three categories from the institutional toolbox: double movement, path dependence, and critical juncture. This section discusses them in detail.

The category of double movement was introduced by Karl Polanyi in his groundbreaking study *The Great Transformation: Political and Economic Origins of Our Time* (Polanyi, 2001). In this book, he holds that the creation of the modern market society led to the conflict between laissez-faireism and social protection—a tendency that Polanyi termed ‘double movement.’ He believed that after World War II the double movement halted due to the crumbling of liberal capitalism. However, the neoliberal revolution of the 1980s and the 1990s brought the double movement back into contemporary politics. In hindsight, the post-war social compromise resembles a temporary armistice in the ongoing conflict between pro-market and anti-market forces (Blyth, 2002). As Mark Blyth put it, ‘the political struggle between disembedding and reembedding the market continues today, even though its contours have shifted’ (2002, p. 4). Following Fred Block, we argue that the notion of double movement offers a hypothesis regarding the political dynamics of modern market society (Block, 2008). In fact, subsequent scholarship has demonstrated that Polanyi’s key concept can be applied to a wide variety of phenomena, ranging from anti-austerity protests in Greece to the movement against modern football (Webber, 2017; Kentikelenis, 2018).

Double movement can be depicted as a permanent struggle between two opposing principles of social organization (Polanyi, 2001, p. 138). The first one is that of economic liberalism. The goal of the latter is to create a self-regulating market, preferably on a global scale. The second one is that of social protection. This tries to limit the market in certain respects, especially when the interests of key social groups are at stake. For the purpose of this article, it is important to highlight four important aspects of the double movement thesis. First, Polanyi believes that there is a certain asymmetry between the two sides of double movement: the pro-market forces are the aggressive side, whereas protectionism is merely a reaction to them. For this reason, Polanyi calls it a counter-movement. Furthermore, while proponents of marketization share a single, unified ideology, the movement for social protection is much more diversified in ideological terms. It can be progressive or conservative, leftist or rightist, social-democratic or fascist, technocratic or populist, nationalist or internationalist, wishing to preserve liberal democracy or determined to see it collapse. Second, Polanyi maintains that the double movement manifests primarily in

the sphere of so-called fictitious commodities—that is labor, land, and capital (or money). Third, Polanyi argues that each side of the double movement relies on the support of different social classes. More specifically, marketization is supported by the middle class and internationally oriented capitalists who often operate on financial markets. In contrast, protectionism is backed by the working class, farmers, and nationally-oriented capitalists who seek protection from the global market. Fourth, Polanyi argues that the dynamics of double movement can explain the rise of anti-liberal movements such as fascism or authoritarian populism. According to Polanyi, such movements exploit the weaknesses of the market order and use protectionist policies instrumentally to gain mass support for the dismantling of liberal political institutions. In fact, we claim that PiS is an example of an anti-liberal counter-movement.

Historical institutionalism offers two important concepts that are employed in the present analysis: path dependence and critical juncture. This strand of research concentrates on examining ‘how temporal processes and events influence the origin and transformation of institutions that govern political and economic relations’ (Fioretos et al., 2016, p. 3). It emphasizes the role of timing and sequence of events in generating institutional arrangements, as well as investigates how institutions emerge and influence public policies and the distribution of power. Historical institutionalism takes into consideration collective interests as well as the formation of political preferences over time. In order to explain political phenomena, this brand of institutionalism refers not so much to economic rationality but to ideas, beliefs, and values. Thus, it displays a close affinity with ideational or discursive institutionalism (Schmidt, 2008). The chief analytical advantage of the concept of path dependence is that it can explain how a particular configuration of institutions created in the past structures or constrains collective preferences and interests today. In other words, institutions pose formidable barriers to political contestation in the struggle for power. Also, path dependence points to the fact that some institutional arrangements persist even if they are contested or suboptimal. They last because they generate increasing returns or positive feedback, benefiting influential political actors (Pierson, 2004).

According to the classic article by Ruth Berins Collier and David Collier (1991, p. 29), critical juncture is a ‘period of significant change’ that is supposed to ‘produce distinct legacies.’ Giovanni Capoccia and R. Daniel Kelemen (2007) define critical junctures as ‘relatively short periods of time during which there is a substantially heightened probability that agents’ choices will affect the outcome of interest’; thus, ‘critical junctures trigger a path dependent process that constrains future choices’ (p. 348). At a particular historical moment, politics as usual is suddenly broadened, incorporating new, previously unavailable options. The choices made in this brief period of time most probably have a significant impact on future possibilities and may set in motion new path-dependent processes. Importantly, such changes are not random occurrences but result from conscious choices of viable policy options (Capoccia & Kelemen, 2007, p. 355). This, however, ‘requires a careful reconstruction of the background conditions and the more immediate context of key decisions during the critical juncture’ (Capoccia, 2016, p. 94). Critical juncture often requires a reconceptualization of public discourse to give change some legitimacy (see Capoccia, 2016, pp. 96–98). The role of the new political narrative is to generate sufficient support for the proposed political agenda to facilitate change (especially radical change). One useful means of achieving this is constructing a crisis narrative (see Hay, 1996, as an informative

example), in which political actors may impose a particular interpretation of social or economic problems, and pledge to solve them after seizing power. It may also be helpful to involve specific interests, symbols, and preferences with which the masses can identify.

Concepts of critical juncture and path dependence are closely related. A critical juncture marks the onset of a path-dependent process. However, such changes always take place in a different context and are differently timed, which explains the existence of divergent legacies within the political orders present in various countries. Hillel David Soifer (2012) suggests that the distinction between permissive and productive conditions can be a useful tool for the study of critical junctures. The former are related to the loosening of external or internal constraints (often concerning more than one country), which allows for change to occur, whereas the latter constitute a transformative force (new ideas, political coalitions, or an altered distribution of power).

The next section attempts to apply this analytical framework to explain how PiS rose to power. We shall demonstrate how exploiting economic and social cleavages facilitated the rise of a counter-movement, especially because the success of illiberal movements elsewhere created favorable conditions for undermining liberal democracy at home. Further, we shall investigate whether (and if so, to what extent) the reforms enacted by the PiS government are sufficient to mark out a new path of political and economic development. Hence, we shall critically explore the multifaceted political legacies of the Polish illiberal right.

#### 4 The rise of a counter-movement, or the accumulation of discontent in Poland after 1989

The attempt to use Polanyi's work to shed some light on the political and economic developments in Eastern Europe is by no means new. Heterodox economists, sociologists, and anthropologists have employed ideas derived from *The Great Transformation* to expose the limitations of neoliberal economic utopianism and provide a richer institutional and anthropological account of the changes occurring in the region (Bryant & Mokrzycki, 1994; Glasman, 1996; Kregel, 2006; Hann, 2011; Bohle & Greskovits, 2012). Arguably, one of the problems on which Polanyi's work can shed new light is social resistance to market reforms. In *The Great Transformation* the latter argues that 'in order to comprehend German fascism, we must revert to Ricardian England' (Polanyi, 2001, p. 32). This indicates Polanyi's belief that the success of illiberal movements cannot be understood without acknowledging the disruptive consequences of economic liberalism. Our thesis is analogous to that of Polanyi's. We maintain that the current rise of illiberal right in Poland cannot be explained without taking into account the phase of neoliberal transition.

The liberal regime introduced as a result of implementing the Balcerowicz Plan and subsequent reforms differed significantly from the social democratic consensus reached during the Round Table Talks. Neoliberal arrangements were also at odds with egalitarian attitudes represented by significant sections of Polish society and inherited from the previous regime. Even after two decades of transition, some surveys showed consistent support for egalitarian and interventionist policies among Poles (Rae, 2017; Marody, 2019). Despite being inconsistent with the economic views held by a large section of society, the Polish version of capitalism (indeed, a rather liberal one) managed to gain substantial popular

support. While detailed discussion of political developments in the period 1989–2015 are beyond the scope of this paper, it would be useful to list the major factors that contributed to the relative stability of the liberal regime. Consumerist values associated with a Western lifestyle considerably appealed to Poles, who were dissatisfied with the limited range of consumer goods available under real socialism. Hardships associated with market reforms were justified as being the cost of ‘rejoining the West’ (i.e., integration with NATO and EU)—an idea that enjoyed mass popular support. Equally importantly, the consensus behind the Western orientation of Polish politics was backed by the majority of the political elite, both post-communists and former opposition members. Moreover, rapid economic growth produced a sizeable middle class, which was the chief beneficiary of the liberal regime. Especially in the early 1990s, the opportunity of rapid career growth opened up in such new industries as banking, media, IT, and advertising. The alliance formed by the elites defending what they regarded as their legacy, and by the upwardly mobile middle class was strong enough to keep any contenders at bay. For more than two decades, the logic of path dependence protected the post-1989 liberal consensus.

However, the liberal regime of 1989–2015 was not free from destabilizing tendencies in the sphere of fictitious commodities. PiS is the first Polish political party that managed to unify the interests and sentiments of all sections of the counter movement representing land, labor, and domestic capital. In what follows, we employ four arguments to support this claim. In the sphere of land, PiS managed to capitalize on agricultural protests following the demise of Self-Defense (*Samoobrona*), the party of rural unrest. After the 2011 suicide of Andrzej Lepper, the leader of Self-Defense, PiS managed to fashion itself as the party concerned with the fate of the poorer countryside, whereas the Polish Peasant Party (*Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe*) would represent those farmers who benefited most from EU agricultural subsidies. Second, in the field of labor PiS secured the backing of Solidarity, one of the biggest Polish trade unions. Third, PiS deployed the rhetoric of economic nationalism to militate against foreign capital. As Polanyi argues in *The Great Transformation*, it is not only land and labor but also the capitalist organization of production that needs to be protected from the operations of the market (Polanyi, 2001, p. 137). During the Polish transition, the attempt to protect domestic production took the form of intense criticism of the process of privatization, which was often depicted in terms of selling the country to foreigners. Moreover, the influx of foreign capital into Poland after its accession to the EU fomented discontent among small- and medium-sized companies, which were forced to compete with much bigger and more effective ones. The discourse of vehement opposition to foreign capital is popular in radical and religious rightist movements, which are centered on particular media (e.g. the ultra-conservative Catholic radio station Radio Maryja), most of which have formed an alliance with PiS.

The second argument concerns the political consequences of the labor market’s instability. Under the previous government Civic Platform (*Platforma Obywatelska*), Poland was depicted as the so-called ‘green island’—i.e. the only country in Europe that managed to evade the economic crisis of 2008–2010. However, the reality was much bleaker. Relying on data about labor market instability collected within the project *Living With Hard Times. How Citizens React to Economic Crises and Their Social and Political Consequences* (Kurowska & Theiss, 2018; Kurowska et al., 2017), one can argue that the burden of the crisis in Poland was shouldered by workers. To start with, after 2009 the rate of unem-

ployment in Poland among people under twenty-nine exceeded 25 per cent, second only to that of Greece. Moreover, a large proportion of Polish workers were employed on the basis of civil law agreements rather than regular employment contracts. In 2013, as many as 1.4 million people (i.e. 13 per cent of the entire workforce) had so-called junk jobs. Further, we may note that in 2015 more than 22 per cent of Polish workers had only temporary employment contracts, which was a record high number in Europe at that time. Finally, wages in the public sector stagnated, especially in the civil service. Public employees did not benefit from economic growth. Anna Kurowska and Maria Theiss (2018) believe that the insecurity in the labor market was a major contributor to the loss of legitimacy of the liberal political regime.

Third, the rise of income inequality in Poland also contributed to the undermining of political support for democratic political institutions. According to the findings of Piketty-inspired research conducted by Paweł Bukowski and Filip Novokment (2017), the benefits of economic growth during the transition era were not distributed equally. According to the data they present, the income share of the top 1 per cent increased in the years 1989–2015 from 4 per cent to 14 per cent, whereas the share of the top 10 per cent in the same period rose from 23 per cent to 40 per cent. At the same time, the income share of the bottom 50 per cent fell from 31 per cent to 23 per cent. Also, while virtually all sectors of the population benefited economically during the transition era, the dividends of growth were distributed unequally. Between 1989 and 2015, the incomes of the top 1 per cent increased by 458 per cent and the incomes of the top 10 per cent by 190 per cent. In the same period, the bottom 50 per cent of the population observed only modest growth of 38 per cent. Furthermore, a study on the political effects of economic inequalities in Poland (Brzezinski et al., 2014) demonstrated that the highly unequal distribution of income and other benefits contributed to the loss of legitimacy of the liberal political regime. Both income inequality and labor market instability help to explain the relatively weak identification with the established political system in Poland. In the 2015 elections, PiS won by a very narrow margin, obtaining only 37 per cent of all votes and securing 51 per cent of seats in parliament. It is significant, however, that the party managed to retain a high level of popular support after introducing a series of non-constitutional acts (Poll, n.d.). Moreover, in the 2019 parliamentary elections, PiS gathered as many as 43.6 per cent of votes, with a record high turnout of 61.7 per cent. This also appears to indicate a widespread loss of faith in liberal democracy.

Finally, we believe that some of the cultural conflicts manifesting in Polish public debate are related to contemporary economic problems. Generally, hate campaigns against feminists, environmentalists, immigrants or the LGBT community can be seen as a typical far-right response to globalization, involving venting people's anger on certain minorities. More specifically, PiS politicians often talk about 'restoring dignity' to ordinary people, the former which was supposedly abused by the arrogant, progressive and cosmopolitan elites. Certainly, there is merit to this claim when it is regarded from a certain perspective. As Karl Polanyi noted, one of the likely outcomes of market transformation is the splitting of society into two separate groups: the rich, and the poor, or—in the Polish case—the victors and the victims of market reforms. Moreover, in notes on Disraeli's *Two Nations' and the Problem of Colored Races* Polanyi observes the affinity between the language employed to describe the poor and the 'uncivilized nations' in the colonies (Polanyi,

2001, pp. 300–303; Balibar, 2010). Both the poor and ‘the colonials’ were depicted as lazy, demoralized, and unruly. One of the most peculiar products of Polish public discourse during the period of transition was the figure of so-called ‘*Homo Sovieticus*’ (Buchowski, 2006; Tyszka, 2009). Philosophers, sociologists, and journalists referred to this rather mysterious figure to indicate purported mental barriers to building liberal democracy and a market economy—barriers thus rooted in the communist regime. Hence, the *Homo Sovieticus* syndrome consisted of learned helplessness, civilizational incompetence, collectivism, and a lack of individual initiative, excessive reliance on the state, etc. The 2015 victory of PiS can be interpreted as the revenge of *Homo Sovieticus*. Although the stigmatizing rhetoric was preserved, it was directed against pro-Western modernizers. For instance, when Jarosław Kaczyński, the leader of PiS, spoke about ‘Poles of the worse sort’ (Lyman & Berendt, 2015), he clearly meant the cosmopolitan elites, not those struggling to find their place in the contemporary market economy. PiS has not solved any real problems of those sections of population that benefited the least from economic reforms. However, it offered them symbolic vindication of any resentment and anger they might be feeling.<sup>1</sup>

It would be unfair to claim that there were no attempts to organize counter-movements in Poland after 1989. Labor and rural protests were frequent and often called for the protection of those interests that were bound to the social structure inherited from the communist regime (Mokrzycki, 1993). The Social Democratic Alliance (*Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej*, henceforth: SLD), a leftist party of post-communist origins, employed anti-neoliberal rhetoric in electoral campaigns, only to drop it entirely when in power. Still, the first SLD government significantly slowed the tempo of neoliberal reforms, allowing for a more gradual social adjustment. Neoliberalism was vigorously challenged by the aforementioned rural-populist Self-Defense, but this party proved incapable of developing a coherent alternative. Finally, the short rule of the 2005–2007 PiS government, formed in coalition with Self-Defense and the League of Polish Families (*Liga Polskich Rodzin*), can be regarded as a prefiguration of the illiberal policies adopted after 2015. Nevertheless, before 2015 the different counter-movements were isolated, erratic, organizationally weak, and ideologically incoherent. Despite the fact that dissent was widespread, all of the above-mentioned counter-movements were unable to seriously threaten the dominant liberal and pro-Western orientation of Polish politics, which was protected by the consensus of the powerful political-, intellectual-, and media elites.

However, the prevalence of the pro-Western narrative slowly began to fade after the achievement of some of the major goals of Polish geopolitical strategy—i.e., integration with NATO structures and accession to the EU. The prolonged crisis of the post-communist party SLD, discredited by corruption scandals and its open embrace of neoliberalism, created a political vacuum on the Polish left. PiS seized this political opportunity and gathered all major sections of the counter-movement under one political umbrella. In other words, PiS decided to take advantage of the generative cleavages produced by the liberal order that generated discontent in that part of society that was sensitive to radical rhetoric. Thus, the absence of genuinely leftist parties and the discrediting of liberal movements caused the opposition to neoliberalism to take on more right-wing and illiberal forms (Krastev, 2007).

<sup>1</sup> Interestingly enough, recent sociological research conducted by Przemysław Sadura and Sławomir Sierakowski revealed strong anti-elitist sentiments among the PiS electorate (Sadura & Sierakowski, 2019, pp. 7–9). Some respondents who participated in focused interviews expressed the conviction that the liberal cultural elites actually despise them and their way of life.

Moreover, the success of illiberal movements elsewhere in the region—most importantly, in Hungary—as well as the international crisis of neoliberal orthodoxy following the recession of 2008, created permissive conditions for the above-mentioned substantial change of the Polish political order. Domestically, scandals erupting within the Civic Platform party (chiefly ones related to leaked tapes containing private conversations of its most prominent politicians), as well as mounting inequalities and labor market instability all contributed to the opening of new political possibilities. To employ the theoretical idiom of historical institutionalism, one could say that there emerged a new critical juncture. The next section explores how the PiS government has been able to exploit that opportunity, and to what extent.

## 5 Second critical juncture: The illiberal Right in power

In 2015, PiS triumphed twice: first in May, when Andrzej Duda defeated Bronisław Komorowski in the presidential election, and then in October, winning the parliamentary elections and receiving over two million votes more than the ruling Civic Platform. This double electoral victory enabled PiS to take over both centers of power in the Polish political system, paving the way for a revision of the unjust post-communist order. While it is fair to say that PiS is a catch-all party that addresses all social classes, it nevertheless secured a disproportionately high proportion of votes among those sections of the electorate that were negatively affected by economic reforms. This broad category includes voters with a lower level of education, people living in small towns and villages, the elderly, and inhabitants of the country's eastern regions. Equally importantly, PiS was able to exploit the conservative, religious, and nationalist attitudes widespread in Polish society. Further, it relied on the steady support of the Polish Roman Catholic Church, which 'has been dominated by option inimical to pluralism and liberal democracy' (Marody & Mandes, 2017, p. 248). Hence, the core electorate of PiS can be described as economically underprivileged and culturally conservative.

It may be instructive to briefly compare the PiS government formed in 2015 with the party's previous term in office between 2005 and 2007. In contrast to the coalition-based rule in the years 2005–2007, PiS was able to form its own government without taking other parties into consideration. Since 2007, PiS evolved both in terms of ideology and political strategy. In ideological terms, Anne Applebaum (2018) suggest that PiS drifted away from a traditional right-wing agenda. Unlike any typical Christian democratic party, PiS embraced a more militant ideology, seeking to restore national sovereignty, which was allegedly endangered by liberal and cosmopolitan forces. Arguably, an anti-liberal ideology was not fully crystallized yet when PiS took power for the first time. Moreover, the experiences of Viktor Orbán's government in Hungary demonstrated the usefulness of selective protectionist policies for the right-wing agenda. In the first PiS government, the position of the Minister of Finance was occupied by Zyta Gilowska, a professor of economics known for her neoliberal views. After the 2015 election, however, PiS decided to firmly dissociate itself from the neoliberal economic doctrine.

Also in 2015, much effort was put into creating strong legitimacy for change. PiS managed to spin a successful narrative aimed at generating the necessary mass support for the reconstruction of the broad institutional arrangements of Polish polity. The party based its

message on the necessity of finally breaking with post-communism and installing a truly national order. However, their actual opponents were former liberal elites, not communists. Thus, PiS politicians would publicly doubt the historical role and personal integrity of Lech Wałęsa, playing down the importance of symbolic events such as the Round Table Agreement or the first semi-free elections that took place on June 4, 1989. In the electoral campaign, the leading message was that the liberal rule had left Poland ‘in ruins.’ Therefore, PiS argued, the country needed a ‘good change,’ allowing ordinary people to finally ‘lift themselves from their knees.’ The campaign rhetoric and election program offered by PiS created two expectations. First, PiS committed itself to the implementation of anti-neoliberal economic policies, which would rebalance the relations between capital and labor. In particular, the power of big (and usually foreign) capital was to be mitigated both by empowering small (and usually national) businesses and by granting new labor rights. Second, PiS promised to reverse several of the measures introduced by previous governments, including educational reform, pension system reform, alterations in the structure of government, tax reforms, and the realignment of guidelines for the country’s economic development. Importantly, all of these changes could be introduced more or less successfully under the existing institutional regime. However, PiS chose to take a different path, unleashing an impressive offensive on the institutions of the rule of law and the system of checks and balances (see Sadurski, 2018). This included the capturing and paralyzing of the Constitutional Tribunal, the subordination of the Supreme Court and the National Council of Judiciary, as well as wide reorganization of the common courts. This was complemented by an assault on individual rights and liberties concerning, *inter alia*, the right to assemble and freedom of speech.

Despite these worrisome developments, the project of consolidating power in the hands of PiS is not yet complete. Despite heavy political pressure, common courts continue to struggle to maintain judicial independence from political interference. Equally importantly, private media are relatively free from political pressure by the ruling party. This might be attributed to the fact that the TVN group, one of the biggest media complexes opposing the government, is owned by the American company Discovery Communications. Hence, any attempts to interfere with its operations could lead to an unwanted diplomatic dispute with the United States. Nonetheless, PiS has recently managed to take control of the Polska Press publisher, which owns 20 regional newspapers, over 120 weeklies, and over 500 websites (Cienski & Tamma, 2020), reaching almost 17.5 million readers. Unlike in Hungary and Russia, Poland has so far avoided creating a significant class of entrepreneurs and oligarchs who owe their status to the political support of the ruling party (Csillag & Szelenyi, 2015). Still, the recent meteoric rise of Daniel Obajtek, the new executive chairman of the state-controlled petrol retailer and oil refiner PKN Orlen, might suggest that PiS is compensating for the lack of its own oligarchy with state-owned enterprises.

Some commentators criticize the concept of illiberal democracy and argue that illiberal regimes cannot be truly democratic in the long term (Sadurski, 2018, p. 8; Müller, 2017, p. 56). While we agree that the anti-liberal reforms of PiS pose a potential threat to democracy, we nevertheless insist that the present Polish regime can still be regarded as democratic. All recent elections—European ones in May 2019, parliamentary in October 2019, and presidential in May 2020—were won by PiS, which defeated all opponents, including the left, the center, and the far-right. Although defeated, all opposition parties

recognized the validity of these elections. Moreover, the political campaign was conducted in the context of media pluralism, notwithstanding the biased and one-sided approach of public television. Consequently, not only were the elections procedurally fair, but the electorate also had an opportunity to make a genuine choice. Hence, there are no sufficient grounds to label the present Polish political regime authoritarian, even in the less restrictive sense of competitive authoritarianism (see Levitsky & Way, 2002). As things stand, the concept of illiberal democracy, despite its shortcomings, seems to be the best available term to describe the political order created by PiS.

Probably the most pronounced part of PiS's electoral program was its promise to change the economic policy. The party has thus successfully stirred up the resentment at the neoliberal model of economy by promising to alleviate the rule of markets and big capital. In this vein, the government introduced a number of social policies, thereby increasing the disposable income of many citizens. This includes the so-called 'family 500+' child allowance program (500 PLN per child), the school starter kit program (300 PLN per child that starts a school year), and bonus, thirteenth-month pension. The widely applauded reforms also include the reversal of the former pension reform, the former which involved lowering the retirement age from 67 to 65 for men and from 67 to 60 for women, as well as the steep rise in the minimum wage from 1750 PLN in 2015 to 2250 PLN in 2019. Other significant government initiatives include the introduction of non-commercial Sundays and the rather unsuccessful state-financed housing investment program. However, some of the proposals have failed, like free medicine for the elderly, and the taxation of large supermarkets. The extension of public transfers, previously perceived as damaging to the self-regulatory mechanisms of the market, are now considered to be an undeniable success of PiS, especially since this has not impaired the stability of public finances (Morawski, 2018). Nevertheless, the overall effect of the new social policies is still disputed, especially with regard to limiting inequality and alleviating poverty. For instance, recent data from Statistics Poland show that poverty in Poland increased in 2018, despite the social programs introduced by PiS. As many as 5.4 per cent of the population experienced extreme poverty in 2018 (in comparison to 4.3 per cent in 2017), while 14.2 per cent of the population were living in relative poverty (compared to 13.4 per cent in 2017) (Statistics Poland, 2018).

Besides expanding its welfare policies, PiS also attempted to redefine the role of the state in the economy. Inspired by Mariana Mazzucato's idea of the entrepreneurial state (Mazzucato, 2015), Mateusz Morawiecki, Minister of Development in 2015–2016 and Prime Minister since 2017, formulated the Responsible Development Plan according to which the state should be involved in economic affairs to a much greater degree than before. It should stimulate industrial investment, as well as individual entrepreneurship and innovation. Moreover, it should actively promote exports and the accumulation of national capital for large investment. The establishment of the Polish Development Fund in 2016 is an example of this. However, extensive projects connected with electromobility, clean energy, and anti-smog solutions have so far failed to materialize. Similarly, the construction of a central airport and a waterway connecting the port in Elbląg to the sea have both remained political gestures rather than sensible investments. The only successful examples of new industrial policy so far are the renationalization (or 're-Polonization') of banks (Alior Bank and Pekao) and the subordination of energy companies to government-defined priorities.

Arguably, these success stories are the outcome of ad hoc political decisions that are unrelated to any long-term strategy. Hence, speaking of permanent change in the sphere of state intervention may be regarded as premature. So far, the 'good change' in this area boils down to grand announcements and isolated political decisions. Real achievements are yet to come. In contrast to social policy, the pro-interventionist stance can easily be changed when the situation requires it.

At the same time, we can also see that some policies enacted by the government are in line with neoliberal guidelines. The controversial expansion of markets can clearly be noticed in terms of the commodification of nature. Primary examples of this include the liberalization of regulations with regard to logging and hunting, disregard for environmentally protected areas, and the facilitation of commercial real-estate investment by enabling investors to evade restrictions defined by local governments. So far, PiS has also failed to reform labor market regulations, which insufficiently protect workers' rights and support low-paid, junk jobs, with Poland being the leader in this category in the EU. According to national statistical data, over 1.2 million workers had a junk job in 2017 and over 3 million workers signed temporary contracts in 2018. Although the flexibility of employment was extensively criticized in the electoral campaign, it still continues, and the Chief Labor Inspectorate remains quite powerless. The division of the labor market into two parts—well-paid and secure employment for well-qualified workers on the one hand, and poor working conditions with low wages for the rest—prevails under PiS rule. Recent research shows that the Polish tax system is highly regressive and benefits high earners and individual entrepreneurs, while workers and those who receive a low income are burdened with disproportionately high fiscal levies (Sawulski, 2019). Alas, reform of the Polish tax code was never high on PiS's political agenda.

Another aspect of the state that has not been reformed by the PiS government is public services, which are in poor condition. Recent data shows that the share of wages within the public sector in relation to GDP fell from almost 12 per cent to 10 per cent in the period 2004–2018 (Morawski, 2019). Contrastingly, the share of wages in the private sector rose from 14.5 per cent in 2005 to 17 per cent in 2018. Low wages and chaos induced by badly prepared reforms led to the teachers' strike in 2019, one of the largest labor disputes in recent Polish history. Moreover, government expenditure on public services remains rather low compared to other EU or OECD countries. For instance, according to OECD data, public spending on healthcare amounted to 4.5 per cent with an additional 1.8 per cent of GDP spent privately (OECD, 2019). The overall level of spending on healthcare, both private and public, is thus significantly lower than the OECD average of 8.8 per cent of GDP. Inadequate healthcare continues to be a sensitive political issue in Poland. The PiS government announced a plan for increasing public spending on health to 6 per cent of GDP, but the prospects of fulfilling this promise in the predictable future remain rather bleak. All in all, the Polish public sector appears poorly financed and badly organized, while public employees remain underpaid, and citizens are widely disappointed with the quality of services. This situation has been aptly described by John Kenneth Galbraith in terms of a strange coexistence of 'private opulence and public squalor' (Galbraith, 1958, p. 203). In contemporary Polish political discourse, the problem of the starved public sector has become known as the phenomenon of 'the cardboard state'—a metaphor indicating impotence and sluggishness on the part of state officials in many spheres of social life.

To recapitulate, so far PiS has not solved any of the systemic problems of Poland's rather non-egalitarian version of capitalism. Income inequalities, labor market instability, and underfinanced public services persist and can potentially undermine support for the governing party. It would be inaccurate to interpret PiS as a defender of the interests of ordinary people, or a slightly more conservative version of social democracy. In fact, we believe that PiS has employed many social policies instrumentally to win political support for their anti-liberal agenda. Obviously, illiberal political reforms are widely contested by the opposition. However, even if PiS were to lose political power, dismantling illiberal democracy may prove to be a daunting task. PiS has secured long-term appointments for its nominees in several pivotal posts (Davies, 2018), including ones on the Constitutional Court, the Supreme Court, and the National Council of the Judiciary. Moreover, PiS might exercise veto power to thwart any attempts at restoring the rule of law. Consequently, it may be impossible to reverse many of the reforms introduced by PiS without a parliamentary majority of two-thirds.

Finally, the President has appointed scores of new judges from among candidates approved by The National Council of The Judiciary, whose legal standing is questioned by the Court of Justice of European Union (2019). Equally important, European Court of Human Rights claimed that the Polish Constitutional Tribunal is not a 'tribunal established by law' because it contains a judge appointed with the violation of proper legal procedures (2021). As things stand, it is difficult to imagine how the legacy of the 'good change' can be rescinded without creating further legal problems.

## Conclusion

The American playwright Arthur Miller once remarked that 'an era can be said to end when its basic illusions are exhausted' (Miller, 1974/1975, p. 30). The Polish experiment with a market economy and liberal democracy after 1989 was founded on the illusion that relatively unfettered markets are compatible with political liberties. The victory of PiS in the 2015 elections and the party's subsequent rule has tarnished that illusion. We concur with David Ost, who argues that 'too much economic liberalism threatens political liberalism' (2016). Thus, as this paper shows, the social discontent bred by economic liberalism has created a countermovement that questions the virtues of liberalism itself. PiS rule is an example of the instrumental use of social discontent. Promises to counter the growing commodification of labor and firmly re-embed markets in society, announced during electoral campaigns, were successfully reformulated into disputes over culture and identity after the party gained power. Meanwhile, many serious maladies—such as growing inequality, labor market insecurity, and inefficient public services—have not been addressed by the government. Thus, popular discontent has been only temporarily silenced by redistributive measures. We would thus argue that after 2015 the Polish political scene underwent significant change, which is already producing 'distinct legacies' in terms of remolded discourse, the dismantling of liberal constitutionalism, and the creation of new power elites. The determination and uncompromising attitude displayed by PiS has created new opportunities for political actors who are no longer constrained by legal considerations. Moreover, a strongly anti-European language and the incitement of hatred towards minorities has ceased to be taboo in Polish political discourse. The dismantling of the rule

of law cannot be easily undone. The seizure of power has allowed PiS to create its own elite in the media and culture, as well as among those who work in the third sector, public services, and legal professions. Many such nominees are protected by fixed terms of office or majority requirements in the case of parliamentary voting. Moreover, the social legislation introduced by PiS is highly popular, and seems unlikely to be challenged by a potential opposition government. Given the party's successful electoral campaigns, the rhetoric of social promises is likely to be taken up by political rivals, making a full-scale return to neoliberal discourse improbable. Consequently, we can conclude that the potential for systemic change unlocked by the party's rise to power in 2015 has indeed produced lasting results.

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## The human embryo: Mapping patients' ethical decisions in Hungary

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### Abstract

When in vitro fertilization (IVF) treatments first appeared in Hungarian legislation, the related experiences and the moral dilemmas of couples who go through these procedures were unknown. Couples have to make a great variety of decisions during the IVF process. In our study, we focus on the journey of the human embryo in IVF treatment through the ethical lenses of women. In order to explore the differences between established ethical and legal frameworks and the perspectives of women who have participated in an IVF procedure in Hungary, we conducted semi-structured interviews. In contrast to the static view of embryos typical to a part of the ethics literature, which also characterizes most established legal frameworks, patients' view of embryos of interviewees was dynamic: they interpreted embryos in a malleable and constantly changing way. Embryos were perceived differently depending on time, place, and biological characteristics, and primarily in relation to how they could contribute to achieving the goals of treatment. In this article, we also demonstrate that the main ethical framework that the participants in our research evoked in relation to the IVF process was related to the ethics of medical treatment. At the end of the paper we also make an attempt to draw some conclusions that may help ameliorate problems with the current normative ethical and legal framework by incorporating the experiences of women who participate in IVF procedures.

**Keywords:** bioethics, embryo, qualitative study, assisted reproduction

## 1 Introduction

Since the first baby was born in 1978 with the assistance of in vitro fertilization (IVF), millions of children have come into the world via artificial reproductive technologies. Looking closer at the practice of this reproductive technology, it is easy to see that the technopolitical culture of different countries varies greatly in relation to this procedure (Felt et al., 2010). The culture of assisted reproduction in a country can be characterized

by the way embryos are viewed and treated, and the way ethical considerations guide technopolitical decisions concerning embryos. Earlier research on the conceptualization and definition of embryos and the decision-making process based on these focused mainly on those countries in which there was strong emphasis on open, public debate about the moral status of the embryo. Our current research explores the ways embryos are viewed in Hungary, where until the beginning of this research no public debate about these issues had taken place. This study examines patients' ethical decisions at the intersection of sociology, bioethics, law, and science and technology studies (STS). It maps out the ethical frameworks applied in the accounts of IVF customers when they discuss decisions they made involving the moral status of the embryo. Within the framework of this research, we conducted 20 semi-structured interviews with women.

There are countries where four to five percent of all babies are born as a result of in vitro fertilization (IVF) procedures. The scope of application of IVF has also become increasingly wide in Hungary, where, according to estimations by the authorities, 1.5 to 2 per cent of all babies are born with the help of in vitro techniques (Szülészeti és Nőgyógyászati Szakmai Kollégium, 2010), and it is expected that this figure will increase due to a variety of social and biological developments (Anderson, 2005; Boivin et al., 2007).

The spread of assisted reproductive technologies<sup>1</sup> is transforming earlier views about how to define such notions as the body and the family, nature, and life (Perrotta, 2013). Using reproductive and other biomedical technologies raises numerous ethical, moral, and social questions (Sándor, 2009); while some authors compare the significance of the former to that of the emergence of nuclear technologies in the middle of the twentieth century (Thompson, 2005).

In this article, we analyze perspectives and ethical frameworks related to the embryo in the IVF process.

Many authors use the terms 'embryo' and 'fetus' in different ways, and there are different conceptions of them in different legal frameworks as well. An important biological definition of the human embryo considers it to be a discrete entity that has arisen either due to fertilization of a human egg by a human sperm, or by other processes such as cloning, whereby a biological entity with a human nuclear genome is created. It is an important distinction that 'embryo' is the term for this biological entity for the first eight weeks of development only, while after that it is referred to as a 'fetus' in the biological literature (Findlay et al., 2007).

The IVF procedure is a type of artificial reproductive technology in which the fertilization of eggs takes place outside the uterus (in vitro, i.e. outside the body). During the IVF process patients have to make a number of difficult decisions about the fate of embryos. During the procedure, as a result of hormonal stimulation, many eggs are typically available, and thus more embryos are created than are transferred into the womb. This raises the issue of what to do with surplus embryos—embryos which are left over after the procedure. These embryos can, for example, be frozen and stored for later use. However, it may happen that after successful pregnancy/pregnancies, some stored embryos remain unused. In some countries it is possible to donate embryos for research—for example, stem

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<sup>1</sup> In this paper, assisted reproductive technologies are understood as various forms of treatment and procedures designed to achieve pregnancy involving the treatment of eggs, sperm, and embryos in the laboratory. One of these procedures is in vitro fertilization (Zegers-Hochschild et al., 2009, p. 1521).

cell research. There is also often the possibility to donate them to other couples. These are just examples of some of the difficult choices that need to be made.

The aim of the current article is to investigate the morality of patients. Several sociologists (Bauman & May, 2001; Sayer, 2004) argue that within sociology too little attention has been paid to the moral aspects of social life. Sayer (2004) argues that in people's lives it is often normative issues that are the most important ones. This does not mean that individuals always consciously or directly think about moral issues many times a day: some of our moral thinking has resulted in habitual action, meaning that people do not always engage with the moral component actively. Under the term 'lay morality,' in this article we understand the morality of non-experts that deals with 'questions of what concrete behaviors or practices are good or bad, how we or others should behave and what we or others should do' (Sayer, 2004, p. 3). Following Sayer's approach, we connect morality to emotions and well-being, regarding the moral aspect as relating to things that people care about and positing that it affects people's well-being. From this perspective, emotions are regarded to have a cognitive character and are not necessarily seen to be opposed to reason and rationality.

During the analysis we seek to answer the following research questions:

- (1) What kind of ethical frameworks do Hungarian women who participate in IVF procedures use in their decisions related to the fate of embryos?
- (2) How do they view embryos within these ethical frameworks?

Our aim is to compare the views of women who undergo procedures with those embedded in bioethical and legal frameworks.

While in many countries in the world serious public debate has taken place about the moral status of the embryo (Gaskell et al., 2006; Gottweis, 2002; Kirejczyk, 2008; Reis, 2008), this discussion was neglected in Hungarian society until the summer of 2017 when Bishop András Veres put ethical dilemmas related to the embryo and the surrounding artificial reproductive technologies somewhat into the limelight. However, we conducted our research and collected empirical data before this date, so his raising the topic did not influence the content of the interviews.

In certain countries (e.g. Italy), the debate has focused on the procedure and the methods applied during artificial fertilization itself. The dilemma concerns whether it is ethically acceptable to allow methods to be used that produce surplus embryos, or whether many embryos may be produced that can be transferred into the body of the woman. In the latter case, the success rate is significantly lower, and the expense of the procedure is also greater (Perrotta, 2013). In other countries, the utilization of surplus embryos for research purposes has been contested: embryonic stem cell research is viewed as the most controversial of potential research applications. The source of controversy is that the related embryos are side products of artificial fertilization procedures, and only two extreme positions have emerged in debate: full commitment to embryonic stem cell research, and complete rejection of it (Kitzinger, 2007).

In Hungary, the law permits the use of in vitro fertilization and the freezing of surplus embryos. As donation for research is not typically an option in Hungary, couples face the decision to either freeze and store surplus embryos, or to permit their destruction. The third option of donating to other couples is extremely rarely available.

The current conservative government, which was already in power in 2013, enshrined the protection of embryos into the Hungarian Fundamental law (constitution), where, according to certain interpretations, this limits options for artificial reproduction. Nevertheless, these theoretical limitations have not seemed to affect the practice of *in vitro* fertilization, and infertile couples are even being encouraged to take advantage of artificial reproduction in government rhetoric.

According to representative surveys in Hungary, the population has a generally positive view of artificial insemination (Szalma, 2014; Szalma, 2016; Zavec Research, 2017). In relation to this, other empirical research has also confirmed that Hungarian society values children highly, and respondents emphasize the importance of having their own children (Miettinen-Szalma, 2014; Szalma, 2014). Encouraging couples to have children is also a priority in the political sphere; many new measures have been introduced recently to facilitate childbirth. Similarly to individuals of other countries, Hungarians also prefer a blood relationship between parent and child. As a result, the intention to have a child is evaluated more positively when it involves a genetic relationship between parent and child than when it takes the form of adoption (Neményi & Takács, 2015). In addition, official policy is prenatal in nature.

What makes this research particularly relevant is that we do not yet have information about how Hungarian women who take part in *in vitro* fertilization programs view embryos in general, and what kind of ethical considerations frame their decisions about the fate of embryos.

The paper proceeds as follows. First, we briefly discuss bioethical, sociological, and STS literature which deals with the embryo and with lay morality related to decisions about embryos in IVF. Next, legal frameworks related to the embryo are described. Then the current research project is presented. In the conclusions segment, results are connected to the previous parts of the article. The relationship between the frameworks used in ethics and law is compared with the perspectives of interviewees and found to be different in many respects. The conclusion reflects on the relevance of the results for experts as well as policymakers. The arguments put forward in this article can benefit sense-making concerning the embryo and ethical frameworks, and may prove useful in policy development. It is argued that the perspectives of women who engage in artificial reproduction should be considered when protocols and legislation are designed.

## 2 Ethical frameworks and the moral status of the embryo

The moral status of the embryo has been debated in ethical literature for a long time. In Warren's definition (1997, p. 3), for a [biological] entity to have moral status, it 'is to be morally considerable,' and 'it is to be an entity towards which moral agents have, or can have, moral obligations.' There are different types of moral statuses, and bioethicists have not reached agreement on which kind of moral status the embryo has. Some authors assign a moral status to embryos that relates them to things (Warren, 1997) but not human beings, while others—from the point of view of Catholic theology, for example—would assign almost the same moral status to them as to adults (Shannon & Wolter, 1990). Some view them as mere aggregations of human cells, while others as human beings (Warnock, 1985). What is common to such a wide range of (sometimes diametrically opposing) views is that

they often discuss the moral status of ‘the’ embryo – as if embryos are to be considered only one type of entity. This static view of the embryo is dominant and well established in the bioethics literature, although some authors distinguish between, for example, the age, or the location of the embryo. Still, the latter do not typically involve nuanced classification systems but rather only differ in terms of the criteria employed to determine if the embryo has moral status: thus, the embryo is regarded either as having moral status, or not. Some authors, for example, are of the position that the embryo can be considered the start of a human life at the age of 14 days (Nakano-Okuno, 2006), while others assign it moral status only when it has a functional relationship with the mother’s womb (Agar, 2007).

The literature in sociology and science and technology studies (STS) emphasizes that embryos are not only material but also socio-cultural entities, so social and cultural factors influence how we think about them (Franklin, 2013). The embryo often does not appear as a kind of entity in these studies, but the latter take into account that, in reality, embryos occur in different specific situations. These differences can affect how social actors perceive them and what moral, ontological, and social status they attribute to them (Franklin, 2013; Perrotta, 2013).

The meanings assigned to embryos are the products of the ‘technopolitical culture’ of IVF (Felt et al., 2010). In line with this, Latour (1991) and Akrich (1992) emphasize the interrelated development of political and technological configurations and point out that various societies might show cultural differences in how this development occurs. Analyzing various views (judgments) of biomedical technologies, they reach the conclusion that in spite of global (technocultural) trends and the European harmonization of legal norms, there can be great differences in the technopolitical culture of individual societies, the configurations of how these technologies are present in these societies, and the ways in which members of society view these technologies. In their research, Haimes et al. (2008) also emphasize that, depending on the social context, there can be great differences between views about embryos.

Empirical research in the twenty-first century has mainly focused on single decisions regarding the embryo out of the many decisions that patients have to make during IVF—for example, whether to donate to research, etc. (De Lacey, 2007; Frith et al., 2011; Jin et al., 2013.; Roberts, 2007; Waldby, 2014). Most of these research projects were conducted in countries where there has been intensive public debate about the moral status of the embryo and a focus on one decision within the whole process. As opposed to this, the current research explores a wider spectrum of decision-making processes. A further novelty of our research is that it was conducted in Hungary, a country in which the social context of decision-making is different in many regards to in the countries discussed in previous research. Also, according to our knowledge, no other sociological research has examined the lay ethical frameworks related to making decisions about the future of embryos in IVF procedures in Hungary.

Roberts (2007) analyzed decisions about whether to freeze viable surplus embryos after the successful transfer of embryos to the womb. In fieldwork conducted in Ecuador, the author found that IVF clinic personnel and patients employed a variety of ethical interpretations. Some thought according to a life ethical framework, while others within a kinship ethical frame (Roberts calls a ‘kinship ethical framework’ when embryos are considered

a part of kinship relations) (Roberts, 2007). People who applied this frame expressed fear that their frozen embryos may leave the web of kinship relations and somehow come to be used by strangers without their consent. As opposed to this, according to the more abstract 'life ethical framework,' the embryo is not considered important because it is potentially part of the family, but rather because of an abstract principle it is considered universally valid. This perspective involves treating every single embryo as valuable as it is connected to life, regardless of whether it is connected to a family. Those who thought in terms of the life ethical frame had favorable opinions about freezing embryos, while those who were influenced by the norms of kinship ethics had negative views—and as a result, certain clinics froze significantly fewer embryos than others.

A research team led by Jin (2013) focused on a group of Chinese patients who had completed in vitro fertilization treatment, already had a genetically related child, and had had their frozen embryos stored. They found that the moral status of the embryo was a significant factor for those who decided to continue freezing them, while the high cost of storage was cited among those who decided to stop the freezing process. (It should be noted here that the specificities of Chinese culture and the one-child policy make the Chinese sample unique.)

Even though ethical views about embryos have been analyzed according to different, specialized sub-populations of IVF patients in earlier research projects (for example, those who gave birth using donated eggs, or those who were asked to donate embryos for research purposes after IVF was successful), some shared conclusions can be drawn from these different research efforts.

International research has shown that the embryo may be viewed differently depending on whether it is placed in the womb, or whether it is frozen outside it (Provoost et al., 2011), and individuals who take part in IVF procedures in different countries also show diversity in how they think about and treat embryos (Haines et al., 2008).

When research on assisted reproductive technologies focused on the health personnel of IVF clinics, ethical issues were mostly connected to one aspect of the decision, similarly to in other earlier research on patients. In the case of personnel, for example, many articles deal with ethical questions related to preimplantation genetic diagnosis (PGD) or the ethical interpretation of donating embryos for research purposes (Baruch, 2008; Ehrich et al., 2010; Ehrich et al., 2011; Kalfoglou et al., 2005; Meister et al., 2005; Wennberg et al., 2016).

In their research about how clinical personnel and researchers viewed and used surplus IVF embryos for stem cell research purposes in Denmark, Svendsen and Koch (2008) found that embryos were considered within a medical-treatment-centered ethical framework. Not being the main focus of their research, the authors do not elaborate on the specificities of this ethical framework; they simply note that this type of ethical thinking is characterized by putting patients' interests above those of the embryo. Svendsen and Koch also found that 'spare' embryos were not in fact simply biological 'facts': complex organizational and moral processes led to the decision whether to select surplus embryos for utilization at a neighboring research clinic.

### 3 The legal notion of the human embryo

In this section, we examine how jurisprudence regards the status of the embryo and the fetus. For a long time, law was comfortable with the *static* notion of the fetus. The only demarcation line involved (live) birth, the point at which a human being gained legal status. Until the moment of birth, only conditional legal status was granted to the fetus (Yan, 2007). Its different stages of development became relevant first in the context of abortion, and later in the case of IVF, in relation to which an embryo outside of the human body is regarded differently than a fetus in the womb. In Roman law, the *nasciturus*—the fetus in the womb—was recognized in the law of inheritance. This Roman principle of law can be translated as ‘[t]he unborn is deemed to have been born to the extent that his own benefits are concerned’ and influenced European legal thinking about the human fetus for centuries. In the context of abortion, right-to-life, right-to-dignity, and the right-to-privacy have been interpreted. Since the landmark American case *Roe v. Wade* (*Roe v. Wade* 410 U.S. 113 1973), the trimester framework has been employed to infer a gradual increase in the rights of the fetus. The turning point is viability.

Although debates about abortion still arise in many parts of the world, dilemmas concerning embryos are much more complex than in the case of the fetus. The complexity stems from the many different technologies which deal with the *in vitro* (outside of the living organism) and *in vivo* (within the living organism—in the uterus) embryo.

Today, scientists distinguish many different kinds of embryos according to by which procedure the embryo was created, and what stage of development the embryo is at. Another categorization may be based on the embryo’s role in reproduction. There are embryos for implantation, discarded embryos, embryos to be stored or frozen, embryos for research purposes, embryos for stem cell research, etc. While these technologies raise many different legal concerns, the redefinition of the human embryo in law nonetheless rarely happens. From this static position, many controversial conclusions can be drawn, such as that cloned embryos would not be considered embryos if the law defined embryos only as ‘fertilized eggs,’ for example.

Since the options created by IVF and the various uses of embryos in different reproductive procedures and in stem cell research have increased, it has become more and more complicated to define the human embryo and what the status and the distinction between various kinds of human embryos may be.

It seems obvious that the status of the *in vitro* and *in vivo* embryo is different. An *in vivo* embryo has a ‘bond’ with the pregnant woman, while an *in vitro* embryo has an uncertain future that includes either a successful implantation and development, or becoming a ‘surplus’ or ‘left over’ embryo. Birth still remains the major legal watershed, although when the European Court of Justice faced the issue of the patentability of human embryonic stem cells, it came out with another definition that is applicable in the field of intellectual property law. In *Oliver Brüstle vs. Greenpeace eV*, the main question was whether stem cells obtained from 5–6 day old human embryos can be regarded as embryos. Unlike the previously static notion of the human embryo, here the Court provided a different definition of the human embryo, but one limited to the domain of biotechnological invention. The aim was clearly to prevent the commercial use of embryos with the purpose of creating embryonic stem cells for patent-related purposes. From this perspective—in accordance with the meaning of Article 6(2)(c) of the Directive 98/44/EC on the legal protection of

biotechnological inventions—, any human ovum after fertilization, and any non-fertilized human ovum into which the cell nucleus from a mature human cell has been transplanted, and any non-fertilized human ovum whose division and further development have been stimulated by parthenogenesis, constitutes a ‘human embryo.’ Later on, the Court gave a slightly different interpretation in the case of the parthenogenetic activation of an unfertilized ovum (Bovenberg et al. 2016). In this judgement, made in 2014, the European Court of Justice reversed its 2011 ruling, stating that an unfertilized human ovum stimulated by parthenogenesis ‘does not constitute a human embryo, if it does not in itself have the inherent capacity of developing into a human being.’

Ascertaining the moral status of the human embryo has many important legal consequences. One is who decides about the destiny of an (*in vitro*) embryo. If embryos are regarded as a kind of shared genetic material, then the mutual consent of the egg and sperm donor or by the prospective parents is necessary. This dilemma was made clear in numerous legal cases, such as in *Evans v. the United Kingdom* (application no. 6339/05) at the European Court of Human Rights (2007). If the law considers embryos as a 50–50 per cent combination of genetic material, then joint consent is necessary for making decisions about the implantation, storage, and destruction of the human embryo. If the law recognizes the *in vitro* human embryo as a form of production that involves hormonal treatment and invasive medical intervention for women, then the weight of decision-making about the *in vitro* human embryo may not be symmetrical: women may have priority or more voice about what may or should be done with them (as in Hungarian law, for example).

Looking specifically at Hungarian law, within the Hungarian Health Care Act of 1997 (Chapter IX) a specific chapter deals with assisted reproductive procedures. The chapter starts with some definitions. Embryos are defined as all live human embryos after fertilization until the twelfth week of pregnancy. This definition runs somewhat counter to the content of Parliamentary Act No LXXIX of 1992 on the protection of fetal life. According to this Act, life deserves respect and protection from the point of conception. The 1992 Act nevertheless allows the termination of pregnancy until the twelfth week. While the 1992 Act focusses on the fetus, in Chapter IX the 1997 Act focusses on the human embryo. When this specific chapter on assisted reproduction was designed, the primary focus was to permit a broad scope of various reproductive procedures that mimic natural reproduction.

In Hungarian law, research on embryos is allowed until the fourteenth day following fertilization (Section 181 (1) of the Hungarian Health Care Act). Embryos cannot be created for research purposes. From this it follows that only *surplus* embryos can be used for research based on the consent of patients, and only after the Human Reproduction Commission has approved the related research protocol. Despite the burgeoning IVF sector and the legal possibility of the latter in Hungary, there has basically been no research on the human embryo. Although research on human embryos is allowed in Hungary, there is an aura of secrecy around this practice. This can be explained by various factors: while research on human embryos requires good research facilities, it contradicts the current political-ideological stance of the government. In addition, research on iPS (induced pluripotent stem cells) is within the portfolio of many international research consortia in which Hungarian scientists participate. Moreover, many clinics interpret the laws in the way that surplus embryos cannot be used for stem cell research. Obviously, this goes beyond the

focus on IVF treatment, but some people may wish that their sacrifice has not been meaningless, even if treatment was not successful. A similar approach can be observed in a case at the European Court of Human Rights, *Parrillo v. Italy* (Application no. 46470/11, 2015), in which the applicant complained that her unused embryos could not be donated for research purposes because of legal changes in Italy.

As we have seen, because of serious legal consequences the law creates a strict demarcation line between the person and the human fetus yet to be born. One of the basic conditions of the rule of law is that legal regulations are predictable. As a consequence, whenever it is possible, precise and clear legal categories are constructed. Coherent and strict definitions have to be formulated regarding exactly what research is, about what constitutes a human embryo or a surplus embryo, and when is it possible to make an embryo selection or to implant an embryo. Nevertheless, new reproductive technologies constantly challenge this static vision and – in relation to judicial decisions made on a case by case basis that involve the right to decide about in vitro embryos, and when commercial and research interests jeopardize the adequate protection of embryos – one can see a more nuanced, more dynamic vision of the human embryo. However, overall, the main parts of established legal frameworks remain static in this regard in many countries, including in Hungary.

#### 4 Data and methodology

During the exploratory phase of our research we conducted semi-structured interviews with 20 women who had participated in an in vitro fertilization procedure. We filtered out those women for whom an embryo had not been implanted yet, or who had their last IVF cycle more than three years ago. Two of the interviews took place in Budapest, and the rest in other cities in Hungary. The youngest of the interviewees was 30 years old, the oldest 43. With some exceptions, the majority of them had already had more than one embryo transfer. Twelve interviewees had no children at the time of the interview, but two of them were at a late phase of pregnancy. Thirteen respondents declared themselves religious, and some of them expressly stated that they were Catholic. Half of the interviewees said that they had experience only with Budapest clinics, while the rest had attended IVF clinics in the countryside or both in Budapest and in a smaller city in the countryside. Respondents were recruited in two ways: some of them responded to our call on thematic internet discussion groups and forums, while others were selected through snowball sampling.

The length of the interviews was typically between one and two hours. Because we were examining a sensitive topic with a vulnerable population, we took special care during the interviews to become emotionally attuned to the interviewees. We found that even though difficult emotional situations were often reported, many seemed to find opportunity to be able to speak freely to an understanding audience about their experiences and emotions to be a good experience.

Interviews took place mainly between April 2015 and November 2015.

When evaluating the results, selection effect should also be taken into account, as it is expected that those who are prepared to give such interviews may differ from those who are not. Presumably, those who did not have a bad conscience about the IVF procedure (for example, due to their religious beliefs) were more likely to participate in the research.

During the research we kept in mind the need for anonymity: data have been modified in the analysis so that interviewees cannot be identified (the study uses pseudonyms). All interviewees signed informed consent forms, in which they were informed about the research.

Prior to the period of data collection, ethics approval for the project was obtained from the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Social Sciences at Corvinus University of Budapest in March 2014.

The results were analyzed using qualitative thematic analysis following the recommendations of Braun and Clark (2006). Interview transcripts as well as our field research notes and electronically accessible content (e.g. websites) were coded using NVivo software. We examined what repetitive thematic patterns could be observed in the corpus. The categories of analysis were formed partly on the basis of theory and previous research, and partly in an inductive way: on the basis of studying the texts. The coding took place in several rounds: after initial coding, we merged some categories, looked at the relationships between the categories and grouped them (these became main categories and subcategories), then we created new categories in which the interpretation was more pronounced. Taking into account the suggestions of Braun and Clark (2006), we took special care that the coding should be thorough and comprehensive, and that the analysis should not only consist of summarizing and characterizing the interview texts, but also interpreting the texts and embedding them in an interpretive framework.

## 5 Results

In the following, we discuss the main themes that we established from the interview data. An important theme was the prevalence in the narratives of a hierarchy of embryos, with more worth awarded to certain embryos. Another relevant characteristic of the answers was the concentration of those who viewed IVF from a medical treatment ethics perspective, and what happened was interpreted in this frame. Regarding IVF as a necessity, and as a normal – and in many cases the only – way to deal with infertility was also a recurrent theme. Then, we go on to show how the importance of the goal – having a baby – was characteristic of most patients' interpretations. Finally, we discuss how in the cases of those interviewees who had already had a child through IVF treatment and who had chosen to have surplus embryos stored, additional ethical frames emerged when discussing the dilemmas they faced.

### 5.1 *A hierarchy of embryos*

We found that most of the interviewees looked at embryos differently to the static view in some of the ethics literature and the main parts of established legal frameworks. Unconsciously, they had developed a hierarchy of worth of human embryos, with some being deemed more valuable than others. While, for example, life ethics attaches equal value to all embryos and links them to human existence without exception (Roberts, 2007), the dynamic vision that emerged in the case of respondents was characterized by a kind of embryo hierarchy. In this approach, embryos that would bring them closer to achieving their goals were considered more important and valuable—the embryos at the center of attention were more strongly connected to the goal of having a baby. For the most part,

embryos are not regarded as an abstract embodiment of life, but are connected to respondents' own concrete goals of creating a family (in this, the position is similar to kinship ethics). Therefore, embryos do not have an inherent value in themselves, but the latter is related to how they can contribute to a couple's goal of having a viable pregnancy. At given points in time, embryos that fitted this description were always awarded more prominence. Other embryos that were not selected (whether for biological or other reasons) were out of the scope of focus. A given embryo could be brought back from the periphery of attention and activity if its role in achieving the goal of treatment (the birth of a baby) was reassessed—e.g., an embryo that was first frozen and later thawed for implantation. When frozen embryos were required to be used, they again became important as potential sources of a future child. One can say that the value of life was attached to potentiality, not just to the entity of the embryo.

At the time the embryo was transferred to the womb, our interviewees concentrated on the selected embryos. When they saw them on a computer screen they started to hope for a positive outcome, and after the procedure they focused only on the embryos in the womb, hoping that they would successfully develop. Embryos that were not transferred remained outside the focus of attention:

This is not important in that environment, and in that situation—what is important... is to succeed... then you do not concern yourself with what will happen with the rest.  
(Sarah)

Before the embryo transfers women spoke about the embryos in terms of numbers and used metaphorical expressions such as bubble or flower, as this is how they saw them on the monitor. This shows the relevance of the factor of place—when the embryos were in the womb, women started to refer to them differently. For some women this was the demarcation point after which they regarded themselves as expectant mothers. Others used the term mother or mum with other women who were in a similar situation, although, as the excerpt shows, the latter terms were still used somewhat ambivalently—partly as a joke, partly seriously:

We also called each other moms jokingly, you know, the girls there. Well, yes, after all, I think it was the case for us after so much time... and we didn't achieve this in a natural way, yet it's a great experience to have an embryo in their womb, so yes.  
(Angie)

Also characteristic of the thinking of many respondents about embryos that were transferred to the womb was that this process did not necessarily mean that a baby would be born. This was especially noticeable with those who had already gone through several unsuccessful IVF cycles. Therefore, even after embryo transfer, they saw their potential—they did not yet see them as their children, but they already meant more to them than a mere set of cells:

Well, for me, it's mixed, okay, I know it's an initial state of a living being, but I still don't feel it's mine. (Kate)

Another important demarcation line for many respondents was the time of attachment of the human embryo to the wall of the uterus. From that moment on they started to personify the embryo more, and to use expressions such as 'little newcomer.'

It seemed that the more time the embryo spent in the womb, the more important it became for the mother—there was increasing emotional involvement and use of the expression ‘my baby’ and ‘my child.’ Thus, the view changed from regarding embryos in the beginning as a set of cells to the respondents’ own children.

### 5.2 IVF as ‘infertility treatment’

When IVF is considered as a form of infertility treatment, then the status of human embryos is awarded much less importance. For various reasons, clinics suggested this option to clients. Partially, this was important for receiving state funding for treatment, but it also served as a convenient way to avoid complex moral issues. Since the aim of the procedure was to ‘cure infertility,’ the medical context often ignored the complex emotional and psychological elements of childlessness. Couples and single women sometimes preferred to have a child or start a family via IVF treatment, and it often seemed to have been easier to accept the medical model than to look at the various reasons for childlessness. In any case, the medical vision does not distinguish between infertility and childlessness. Having a spouse without a child is simply regarded as a case of infertility, which may be treated at a clinic.

Based on the study of interviewees’ accounts, it seems that in most decision-making situations related to embryos the dominant feature was what respondents’ own interest was in terms of the success of their treatment, and that the treatment should minimize any difficulty. To characterize this ethical framework, we adopt the terminology of the ethics of medical treatment, which is somewhat similar to the treatment ethics used by Svendsen and Koch (2008) to describe professional ethics. It may be said that it is only natural that women undergoing IVF would use such a framework for decision-making—a framework which constructs them as patients, and where the emphasis is on their treatment interest and minimizing financial, workplace, relationship, and health difficulties. However, as we have shown in reference to Roberts’ (2007) research, this is by no means necessary. It is conceivable that a woman undergoing IVF may be guided by different considerations in some of her decisions.

Within the ethical framework of medical treatment, even if a decision affected the embryo the justification of the choice did not include considerations related to the embryo, but rather the success of the patient’s treatment and the minimization of material and other costs. Moral issues and dilemmas related to the status of the embryo remained in the background, and respondents often did not seem to have really thought about these aspects in depth during their treatment process. Rational considerations came to the fore in their thinking.

This ethical framework was typically present when we asked the latter about what had caused emotional difficulty or created a dilemma in relation to choosing a procedure or during a procedure, or when respondents thought about going for another IVF cycle. Hormonal stimulation and its side effects were considered a big challenge for patients, who often complained of having insufficient information. Decisions about continuing treatment were partially based on the side-effects of previous treatment, the cost of such treatment, and any stress and failure they had suffered during treatment. Life ethics considerations concerning the embryo did not appear in these accounts about such decisions.

There were only a few cases when our interviewees approached the situation from a

life ethics perspective during their assisted reproductive procedure, even before they had any success with it. These women, while applying an abstract view of embryos as forms of life, also viewed the latter in a personal way, as their children. But whilst a life ethics approach was identifiable for a few women, for an overwhelming majority the medical treatment ethical framework dominated.

There was only one woman who, because of life ethics concerns, asked for a procedure that was different from the usual protocol. She requested to have a small dose of hormones so that she would not have too many surplus embryos, because she wanted all of them transferred. She considered embryos to be human beings right from the beginning of the procedure.

Decisions about freezing embryos during an IVF cycle were also motivated by the practical use of this technology via a medical treatment ethical frame, and not by the abstract moral status of the human embryo. The main reasons behind the choice for freezing were the physical and psychological burdens of hormone treatment. Our respondents often considered the use of frozen embryos for the next IVF cycle to be less stressful:

The frozen one is better, I think, ... because it is implanted within a natural cycle, this frozen embryo, so the body can have a little rest, so it is not like when you get a full hormone treatment. (Sophie)

### *5.3 Normalization of IVF and a stress on the goal*

Interviewees accepted IVF treatment as a necessity, and considered it a normal way to deal with infertility. IVF was often perceived as the only choice.

You can decide on a date... you have practically no other decision, because this is the only way if you want a child. (Tilda)

Respondents had all wanted to try all the possible IVF options before considering any other avenues, such as adoption—as having a child using their own gametes was preferred. They did not think about the fate of the surplus embryos that are the side products of medically assisted procreation, and therefore did not contemplate any alternative artificial reproduction process that could have avoided the problem of unused embryos. They did not ponder solutions that would have resulted in the production of fewer surplus embryos out of ethical considerations—such as having their zygotes frozen or vitrified, or avoiding hormonal stimulation so that less embryos would be produced in the first place, or asking for all embryos to be implanted in the procedure—as all these options would have reduced the chance of success considerably. As our respondents felt that they had only one way to reach the goal that was most important for them, dilemmas concerning surplus embryos were relegated to the background.

According to the accounts of the respondents, the clinics had strongly focused on the success of the transfers. In many clinics, pictures of babies are used as illustrations on the walls. Thus, couples waiting for their treatment are faced with images of others' happiness, maintaining the former's focus on the ultimate goal rather than developing their own views and assessment of such procedures.

Our interviewees revealed that during the procedures they always focused on the goal they wanted to attain. This kind of medical treatment ethics was therefore characterized by strong stress on the end result. We have previously identified the fact that having your

own child is especially highly valued in Hungary (Miettinen & Szalma, 2014; Szalma, 2014). The situation was no different with our interviewees, who felt that they were willing to make even a huge sacrifice to be able to have their own baby:

It did not count then, that this may or may not cost our health—we just wanted to have a baby, at any cost. (Sage) We did not really think this over, because we did not even know what a test tube was, so we did not dwell on it beforehand. We just had one goal: to have a baby, whatever the consequences, so we just jumped in. (Hannah)

#### 5.4 *Decisions about surplus embryos in relation to the longer term*

Although most decisions were based on the medical model and motivated by the success of IVF treatment, in some cases alternative ethical considerations also arose. Especially characteristic of those who had already had a child as a result of the IVF treatment, but had surplus embryos stored, was the fact that they were concerned about the destiny of their frozen embryos. Many patients were not sure about their reproductive plan (whether they would like to have another child), but they felt that the destruction of their embryos was a choice they could not easily make. Since during each phase of IVF treatment they were concentrating on the next step, they often said that they did not foresee encountering this dilemma at the end of the procedure.

In the accounts, after already having children, one of the most important aspects in decision making about the use of frozen embryos was whether having a sibling would be good for the family (which can be seen as a kind of kinship ethics framework, albeit different from that described in Roberts' 2007 study). In addition, it appeared to be a serious dilemma for respondents whether to expose their bodies and souls to the difficulties of the IVF procedure again (medical treatment framework). Some interviewees explained that, precisely because of the latter, they would be happier to get pregnant spontaneously than go through another IVF cycle with earlier frozen embryos. Postponing difficult decision making by using stored embryos also emerged as a kind of coping strategy.

It was hard again, right in the summer, when I couldn't decide whether to freeze any further, and my indecision wasn't because of the amount of money, but because I didn't know if I wanted another baby at all; and if I did, then when. Now I lean towards wanting to try again. But it was in my thoughts that they were frozen there, and I didn't want it [the freezing process] to stop suddenly. I think it already involves a small beginning life. It's not that if I don't pay, then I am killing them, it's not that drastic. However, I have their fate in my hands, even though I wouldn't necessarily call them people, but somehow the thought that you still have to decide about future people... I had to think a lot about it. That's why—and because I didn't know when I wanted to continue—I took time for myself to make a decision as well. [...] I couldn't decide what to do with the embryos, I can't say I don't need them, but I can't say I need them now. (Sarah)

Some of the interviewees thus expressed views which are more similar to those of life ethics when faced with the situation whether to terminate storage—even if for other decisions during IVF they had used a medical treatment ethics frame. In relation to this choice, they were of the view that the destruction of embryos should possibly be avoided. However, their perspective differed from life ethics in the sense that frozen embryos were not given completely the same moral status as human beings. Two interviewees who we

have earlier discussed used a life ethics perspective throughout their IVF procedure, but also awarded the moral status of a human being to any kind of embryo, frozen or not.

Before starting the procedure and during the first phases of the procedure many of the interviewees had little information about what to expect, and what decisions they would have to make. Not being fully informed, and always focusing on the actual procedures could have meant that patients lost sight of the consequences. They never really thought of other future consequences besides having a successful pregnancy—such as having potentially viable surplus embryos. For many women who have not yet succeeded with the assisted reproductive procedure, having viable embryos at the end of the process that they would not make use of was only a distant possibility. The destruction of these viable embryos then could be postponed for many years if they decided to continue with storage.

Many interviewees thought that donating surplus embryos for research could create meaning from their sacrifice. For some of the interviewees, the development of science was a value in itself. For others, it was a more important point that any solutions developed through this process would be specifically aimed at improving existing in vitro fertilization techniques. In this ethical framework, therefore, the embryo is seen as increasing the chance of helping future patients to succeed with their own IVF treatments.

I supported the idea because this way I can help them make freezing and research more professional. That is all. Nothing more really... (Alexandra)

Research which used embryos as material for non-reproduction-oriented research was less likely to be preferred. This has important ramifications for legal policy as well.

A few respondents felt that they would not be able to donate their surplus embryos to scientific research, exactly because they attributed human life to them. Sandra, for example, spoke of embryos as ‘human beings’ and therefore rejected the idea of using embryos in scientific research. It should be noted here that she did not have surplus embryos and she first heard of this possibility only during the interview, so she had not been faced with this dilemma caused by the related (emotional) difficulties. It is also interesting that she interpreted embryos abstractly as ‘life,’ and personally as her own babies:

I would not offer them... they should not play around with our little babies... they are beings, human beings, and really, there is an adult here... kin... [I do not think] anyone would be happy that they are used in research. (Mary)

All of the interviewees rejected the idea that their surplus embryos should be donated to other couples. Different reasons were used to support this conclusion, but most of the latter used the frameworks of ownership ethics and kinship ethics in their arguments.

## 6 Conclusions

The accounts of interviewees reveal that most of the decisions about embryos were predominantly motivated by interviewees’ own interest in the success of treatment, or the desire that the treatment would occur with the least possible difficulty—especially during the IVF procedure itself, before successfully having a child. In order to characterize this type of ethical perspective, we rely on the notion of the ‘ethical framework of medical treatment.’ One could argue that it is only natural that a woman would be first and foremost interested in her own health and well-being and the success of the fertility treatment

she undergoes, but, as we have argued based on research by Roberts (2007), this should not be taken for granted. In the latter's research other sources of motivation also informed IVF clients' decisions.

We found that interviewees typically viewed embryos differently within the ethical framework of medical treatment than they are viewed from a life ethics approach. While the latter values all embryos highly, and connects every one of them to life (Roberts, 2007), the ethical framework of medical treatment applied by the respondents created some kind of an embryo hierarchy. From this perspective, those embryos that assist women to achieve their goals are considered more valuable and more important.

Therefore, we were able to observe that the interviewees interpreted embryos not in a static and stable way, but constructed them in a malleable and constantly changing way. They spoke of the embryo in different ways, depending on factors such as time (the age of the embryo), space (inside or outside the womb), biological characteristics (is it viable, is it developing), or the perceived role it can play in helping them to reach their goals (birth of a healthy baby). The more time the embryos spent in the womb, the greater the attachment of the women to them.

The interviewees' dynamic view of the embryo sharply contrasted with the core of established legal discourse, which is more static in its construction of the embryo and does not have such a wide variety of changing understandings.

In addition to the dominant ethical framework of medical treatment ethics, several other ethical frameworks emerged in our interviews, primarily related to embryos that remained after a successful pregnancy. One of the by-products of IVF processes is the large mass of residual frozen embryos, some of which are not ever expected to be used. Based on the interviews, it appears that many patients are unaware of this when deciding on the procedure. During the treatments, the patients focus primarily on the given stage of the procedure or on the desired pregnancy goal, and do not think about what will happen after their goal is fulfilled.

When interpreting the results it should be taken into account that they cannot be generalized – not least because of the small sample size and potential selection effect, as those who gave the interviews may differ from those who did not. Another limitation of the research is that we only interviewed women, and we asked them to recall their IVF experiences retrospectively.

As for the policy implications of our research, we believe that the perspectives of those undergoing IVF should be taken into account when protocols on informed consent are designed and when laws are made regarding in vitro treatment. Based on our study it seems that there is a personal moral space which represents women's dynamic vision of their embryos at different stages of the treatment. This dynamic ethical vision could be taken into account to shape a more individualized version of the informed consent procedure (informed consent is the process of giving information to patients about their treatment, which, among other elements, includes an assessment of potential risks, benefits, and consequences, based on which permission is asked for the treatment, and the former are asked certain decisions in relation to this). In the case of IVF, such decisions can include what happens to embryos. As patients concentrate on the treatment phase they are currently at, and do not look further ahead, it may be a good idea, for example, to ask for informed consent at each different phase so couples can take their experiences into account. Clarifi-

cation is needed for clinics, researchers, and in the wording of the law in a way that makes it obvious that research on embryos is allowed in Hungary. If research on embryos were more common in Hungary this could help, as our research showed that for some women who engage in IVF being able to donate their surplus embryos to research would help them feel that their suffering was not meaningless.

When the first laws on IVF were adopted, they were not preceded by consultation with consumers of medical services or patients as, understandably, the latter could not yet formulate an opinion about this novel treatment. Therefore, the approach was inevitably technocentric, and based on cutting-edge technologies. Decades after the adoption of the first IVF laws, however, the situation is completely different: it is possible to fine-tune the rules, to take into consideration good ethical practices, and to reflect on the experiences of those who participate in such treatment. This can be regarded as narrative justification for good bioethical practices (Arras, 2017), such as asking for patients' concerns and using non-technical language in informed consent forms. Whenever it is necessary, individual consultations can increase understanding of patients' fears and concerns about their surplus, implanted, or frozen embryos.

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