

ASYLUM SEEKERS AND THE STATE. WHOSE THREAT? WHOSE SECURITY?

by

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## **Abstract**

This dissertation examines the disparity between how states define asylum seekers and who identifies him or herself to be an asylum seeker. Using interpretive methodologies I examine how states construct asylum seekers in security discourses, and the role of international geopolitics in solidifying state-based identities in state discourses. Narrative interviews with asylum seekers offer insight into how state security discourses act upon asylum seekers as individuals. I juxtapose narratives addressing the experience of being an asylum seeker with the state based analysis. I use the theory of ontological security as an analytical tool capable of furthering a comprehension of the contention between state-based security discourses and decentered security that reveals the power of state-based identities and how the dominance of state-based identities in the international system actively detracts from other identities. The theory of ontological security can offer an explanation as to how and why state discourse positions asylum seekers as a threat. The biographical identity narrative within the state and the way the state acts amongst its international peers offers insight into the ways migrants contest state identity and state security. By intersecting the security literature that assumes the state and the migration literature that problematizes the state I make an intervention. This intervention is situated within the human security paradigm, in which I offer a decentered human security that incorporates the logic of ontological security without the state, whereby human security does not have to rely on state based identities.

## Acknowledgements

This dissertation has been a work in progress for a long time - probably since I was in high school and I was asked to mentor a new student who was seeking asylum with her mother from Afghanistan. I have a multicultural family and migration has always been something that is a fact of life rather than a problem but then I have had few constraints on the moves I've made over the years. Exposure to constraints on migration led me to want to understand where they come from and why. I am first to admit that I still do not fully understand the "why" part of that question.

My research for this project began in Kansas and took me to Athens, Greece where I interviewed a number of people seeking asylum. This was thanks to the willingness of the participants and the assistance of Caritas Hellas, Doctors of the World, Praxis, and the Greek Refugee Council. All of these organizations do incredible work despite being badly in need of resources. The following year I continued the research in my hometown of Newcastle-upon-Tyne in the UK. Again, I met a number of people who were kind enough to share their experiences with me. Thanks to the West End Refugee Service and everyone at Walking With - as you know, this project would not exist without all of you!

Thanks along with enormous respect are due my committee, in particular my mentor, adviser and chair Brent. I have such great admiration for your work and I hope I can do justice to your mentorship. Thanks for having faith in my ability to pull this off! And thanks to former grad student colleagues Baris and Cristian who have answered numerous questions, given me advice, and soothed my anxieties.

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# Asylum Seekers and the State. Whose Threat? Whose Security?

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## **Introduction**

Looking around Viktoria Square in the centre of Athens one can clearly see the realities of international migration, to be specific, irregular and forced migration happening outside of visa and immigration programmes. Viktoria square is in North Central Athens, a space of about 250 square feet, with a kiosk selling newspapers, a metro station, a few benches dotted around, and the surrounding streets lined with cafes and bars. The apartment and office buildings that rise around Viktoria Square are tall with flat roofs, with white peeling paint and large verandahs. Graffiti and the remains of posters adorn walls and lampposts. Viktoria Square has become known as the centre of immigrant-Athens. Looking around, there are people sleeping on benches, men from Africa and Asia with goods for sale spread on large blankets, clusters of people sitting, chatting, standing, waiting. The people are not going anywhere because they do not have anywhere to go. They are not at home because presently they do not have homes to go to. Athens is one of the first ports of call for migrants seeking to enter Europe. While the migrants often consider themselves to be asylum seekers, state and European Union laws seldom agree with them. National discourses posit them as economic migrants, or more frequently “bogus asylum seekers,” “welfare tourists,” and “illegal immigrants.” In this study I investigate the disparity between the self-conceptions of asylum seekers and national discourses constructing perceptions of asylum seekers.

Millions of displaced persons seek to migrate because they cannot afford to live in their home country. This has led to a growing underground economy in human trafficking, with vulnerable persons incorporated into slavery and sex work, in addition to disenfranchised female workers in an “offshore proletariat” (Sassen 1999). Despite their vulnerability, international law

and domestic immigration law of liberal democracies continue to separate economic migrants from forced migrants. While those economic migrants who move through the visa programmes are certainly separate from subjects of forced migration, the current distinction leaves one of the biggest motivations for migration, which is poverty, absent in the global community. Due to the absence of forced *economic* migration in legislation pertaining to forced migration, and due to the difference between asylum seekers self-identification and state identifications of asylum seekers, it is necessary to problematize the category of asylum seeker that is used by states at state borders, which implements the very specific criteria of the refugee definition.

Asylum seekers acquire the title when seeking admission to a state, either at the border or once inside. By this nature, they are often travelling without documents and tend to come in trickles, such as small family groups or as individuals. In immigration policy “genuine” asylum seekers are distinguished from categories such as “economic migrants”, “bogus” asylum seekers and “illegal immigrants.” The asylum seekers considered to be genuine meet the individualistic criteria of the Refugee Protocol.<sup>1</sup> The Protocol definition was written in the context of the aftermath of WWII and reflects Eurocentric concerns of the Cold War political environment (Hathaway 1991, Frelick 1992). The “non-genuine” categories are those people who do not fall within the bounds of this definition, and serve as the basis for the construction of asylum seekers as a threat. Throughout this study I use the term asylum seeker to cover more broadly those persons who seek protection, including protection from poverty. I maintain the position that reasons to migrate are a result of complex circumstances that cannot be narrowed down to a

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<sup>1</sup> The Refugee Protocol definition of a refugee is as follows: As a result of events occurring before 1 January 1951 and owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.



single cause. I challenge the economic emphasis in state discourse constructing those they consider “bogus,” while I am mindful of the subjective complexity in individual migrant issues. My broad use of asylum seeker is founded in studies by Anastassia Tsoukala, among others, who points to “the weakening of any distinction between migrants and asylum seekers granted a refugee status ... the authorities considering in general that most asylum seekers are ‘false’ ones” (Tsoukala 2005:13-14, citing Butterwegge 1996 and den Boer 1998). I define asylum seekers as all those who enter an advanced industrialized state seeking protection, prior to it being established that they meet the relevant criteria. Many of those seeking asylum are unaware of the official definition and can be considered genuine *seekers* of asylum despite official ineligibility. All those who enter a state to seek protection, whether under the Refugee Convention Definition, with an established nexus reason or without, are included in my definition of asylum seeker. Thus, I include those seeking to escape poverty, civil war, or natural disaster. None of these categories is covered by the current official definition.

This work is situated in the broad field of international relations (IR). IR scholarship has been dominated by a narrative generated by the North West, specifically the U.S. but also North Western Europe (Nayak and Selbin 2010, Agathangelou and Ling 2004). IR as a field has conventionally focused on the study of conflict. The “debates” that characterize the historiography of the field reiterate the importance of Realism and Liberalism and their subsequent “neos.” These dominant paradigms concern themselves with the behaviour of states (Wilson 1998; Schmidt 2002). The security literature in particular has been dominated by realism and state security concerns (Agathangelou and Ling 2004, Fierke 2007). The principle assumptions that have reinforced the paradigms of realism and liberalism are that of states as unitary, rational actors within an anarchic international environment. This largely disregards the

actions of people, other than in the context of decision-making elites (Allison 1969; Hagan 2001). Particularly over the last two decades, schools of critical security have offered challenges and a rethinking of security studies (Waever 2004; Booth 2005). I draw on these critical schools of thought, challenging the state dominated paradigm. I engage a thick understanding of the state, incorporating societal security in the vein of the Copenhagen school (Buzan 1991; Waever 1993) as this allows for analysis of threat construction and perception at the elite level and at the social and cultural levels.

The human rights literature similarly has been dominated by state-focused concerns. Human rights is often associated with Enlightenment liberalism and natural rights found in Locke and Rousseau (Schmitz and Sikkink 2001), declaring the idea that states should respect the rights of citizens. Natural rights see all humans as having rights but this interacts with governance in order for those rights to be realized. Schmitz and Sikkink document the shift in human rights literature from the study of domestic politics to include foreign policy concerns in the 1970s; and the incorporation of human rights in IR fully in the 1990s, with human rights atrocities in the Balkans and Rwanda bringing to the forefront studies regarding international intervention. However, human rights still rested on the assumptions of states as the primary actors in IR and inherently advanced the values of Enlightenment liberalism privileging the concept of human as citizen. Nayak and Selbin recognize this as inherent to the constructed discourses of “evil perpetrator, innocent victim” (Nayak and Selbin 2010) that serve to justify international interventions reproducing the hierarchy of Western ideas. Human rights *within* Western liberal democracies tend not to be considered, furthering the idea that Western liberal democracy represents the “good.” There are some exceptions to this; for example, with regard to the Bush administration and torture (Nayak and Selbin 2010; Forsythe 2006; Neal 2006). Here,

“human rights can be used to challenge whether racially unequal liberal democracies are ‘civilized,’ thus disrupting assumptions about what kinds of processes lead to human rights” (Nayak and Selbin 2010:64). My focus is not on race, but on citizenship and immigration status. I complicate the human rights scholarship though examining what is missing in terms of access to human rights within the geographic boundaries of Western democracies.

Reconceptualizing how we understand borders can function as a tool to decenter IR away from the emphasis on the state as primary privileged actor (Nayak and Selbin 2010). The shift to focus on the experiences and perceptions of the migrants themselves aims to do this by looking at the experience of borders in circumstances where they function as a blockage to realizing social and political participation. Additionally, drawing on scholarship that points to the neglected consideration of the body in IR, individual migrants can be understood as a physical manifestation of the border itself (Doty 2004, Doty 2007, Biswas and Nair 2009). For example, there is no territorial border visible in Athens proper. However, people must confront the reality of the border every day as it is made visible by the bodies in Viktoria Square, in Omonia Square, sleeping in the National Gardens, and protesting outside the internationally renowned museum of archeology.

## **Research Questions**

In this study I look at the collision between subjects of forced migration and the dominance of state interests in global politics in general and in the field of IR. I examine the resulting irony that the threatened come to be perceived as a threat. In doing this I develop a notion of ontological security that reflects an individual’s normative judgments about the aspects of his or her life that contribute to a sense of individual or personal insecurity. I develop my use of

ontological security from Anthony Giddens' structuration theory, which is based upon "human wants (that) are hierarchically ordered, involving a core 'basic security system' largely inaccessible to the consciousness of the actor" (Giddens 1993:124). Ontological security is determined by security in the individual's daily life and societal participation. The acquisition of ontological security is characterized by identification of the needs most immediate to the particular individual. I use this framework to offer insight into self-conceived understandings of security and human rights, shifting the focus to the aspect of security an individual is most immediately lacking. My core research questions address the emphasis currently placed on the state even in areas such as human rights that pertain to the individual, and subsequently investigate how this can be shifted to the individual outside of the state, and what this offers to human rights. Specifically, my core research questions are as follows:

1. What are the mechanisms in place in international and domestic politics that lead asylum seekers to be constructed as a threat?
2. What are the characteristics of international human rights that lead migrants to be excluded?
3. In what ways does the individual rights-seeker perceive his or her ontological security?
4. How can human rights be reconceived in order to empower the individual rights-seeker?

### **Interpretivism, reflexivity and theory as a verb**

The subject matter of my study focuses on individuals who remain marginal in international relations and critically exposes the unequal power dynamics between these individuals and the discourses constructing them in Western perspectives. Positivism has long been held in IR as "the implicit 'gold standard' against which all approaches are evaluated"

(Smith, 1996:13). I adopt interpretive methods that diverge from the assumptions of objectivism and empiricism at the core of positivist methodologies in preference of an hermeneutic approach “whereby we can only understand the world by our being caught up in a web of significance” (Smith 1996: 26), considering the linguistic historical tradition to inform our understanding and appropriation of the world (Gadamer 1989, Gibbons 2006). My interpretive and constructivist approach examines discourse as the primary mechanism of the constitution of social phenomena, assuming language as constitutive of the world, rather than reflective of the world (Kratochwil 2001). My epistemological preferences are reflected in the nature of the questions I ask, which are generated by a pragmatist ontology that rejects the possibility for a standard of static objective truth that can be empirically observed. Rather, I seek to understand how the categories of legitimacy and illegitimacy are constructed for asylum seekers and to understand the disparity between the state’s experience of asylum seekers and the individual migrant’s experiences of *being* an asylum seeker.

Recent debates in IR have seen a movement of the field towards post positivist approaches, which reject the objectivist empiricism of positivism (Smith et al 1996, Schmidt 2002, Wight 2002, Gibbons 2006). The causal explanations based on objective observation that are the aim of positivist approaches in IR are not appropriate to the interpretive analytic, which rejects the notion of objective truth and is aligned with a pragmatist ontology. Thus, the move towards post positivism has had a fundamental effect on the types of questions being asked and the types of information being sought (Fearon and Wendt 2002). The purpose of theory for the interpretivist is not to predict in the context of causal claims but is to develop contextual understanding and practical knowledge (Krause and Williams 1996). My research questions call

for interpretive methods, are generated by interpretive scholarship in IR, and contribute to that body of scholarship.

With regard to the state's experience of asylum seekers I examine the dialectic constitution of categories of "genuine" and "bogus" asylum seekers. I understand these as performative concepts that are produced by state narratives, which normatively reinforce state identity and legitimacy. I adopt subjective hermeneutics, which Adler terms "radical constructivist" in the vein of James Der Derian, Roxanne Doty, and Stephen Gill among others (Adler 2002), allowing me then to shift the emphasis to self-definitions of asylum seekers rather than the definitions advanced and reproduced in state discourses. This reinforces my expanded definition of asylum seeker to those who self-identify as asylum seekers and exposes the disconnect between state conceptions of asylum seekers and self conceptions of asylum seekers.

The approach I use to answer these questions is founded in a critical "decentering" of international relations that attempts to make space within the narratives of international relations scholarship for, not just the voices of a group of people without access to rights, but the incorporation of these voices in the conceptualization of human rights. I engage the "radical constructivist" approaches that look to expose and understand power dynamics and allow for dissident understandings of power relations (Der Derian 2009, Campbell 2007, Adler 2002). However, there are two additional motivations that inform the questions I ask and consequently my epistemology and methodology. The first refers back to the description of interpretivism that Krause and Williams provide (1996), that interpretivism aims to gain contextual understanding and *practical* knowledge. Observing the preference for practical knowledge I take influence from theorists such as Marysia Zalewski (1996) and Cynthia Enloe (2004) that connect theory with the everyday, and with practice. Zalewski (1996) critiques post positivist approaches as

competing for a moral highground, and advocates thinking of theory as a verb: we theorize IR in our daily practice. I emphasize the notion of the everyday encounters that form the stuff of IR for most people, and I account for the political in the everyday. The particular encounters I engage are everyday experiences that construct the idea of migrants in society incorporating analyses of popular culture as well as political narratives. I juxtapose this with the everyday experiences of migrants themselves in order to understand their self-perception and varying positions of insecurity.

Further to Zalewski's point is my second concern: that of reflexivity in IR. Adopting an understanding of the hermeneutic reproduction of social meanings, I take a position of reflexivity which rather than claiming objectivity is careful to acknowledge my presence in my research. Further to this, I take an ethical stance with regard to the supposition that the scholarship of IR contributes to the hermeneutic reproduction of the world (Smith 1996, Campbell 1998). IR scholarship is not a separate world but is implicit in international politics (even if distantly) thus it is an ethical obligation for IR theory to be reflexively self-aware in its own production of international political phenomena. Linking this to Zalewski's "theory as practice" and my hermeneutic epistemology I understand that the questions I ask in this dissertation are a product of my wider experience and my involvement in migrant advocacy organizations.

I understand individual migrants as manifest representations of the borders of Europe in everyday life. Shifting to a self-defined understanding of human rights and security in order for forced migrants to determine the needs most immediate to them then attempts to actively break down the borders that determine citizenship. My focus is on the people who fall outside of the established boundaries of citizenship and who do not have access to what is considered a legitimate immigration status. I characterize these people as forced economic migrants, although

in many cases economic reasons only comprise a small part of the overall decision to migrate. Collectively, any person who is forced to migrate but cannot access a “legal” route can be included. Forced economic migrants in liberal democracies are physical manifestations of the border between deserving and undeserving. The border is not the territorial border but that of political belonging. Here I juxtapose the migrant’s self-conception of rights with the state efforts to “protect” this visible border through constructing the individuals as a threat to the national wellbeing. The boundaries of legitimacy are constructed and reproduced by these state narratives and I posit that the space within the borders has contracted as a result of discourses that continuously construct the identity of “bogus asylum seeker,” “illegal immigrant,” and “welfare tourist.” The reproduction of these categories within daily life constantly delimits and contracts the space within the boundary of legitimacy in popular perceptions of those on the “inside”, making it more difficult for an individual migrant to access that space, or for forced economic migrants as a collective category to access a legitimate space.

In terms of defining and delimiting the boundaries that inform this study I look to the migrants for an understanding of what is security and insecurity. This shift is informed by critical studies that point to the dominance of Western given definitions in IR scholarship (Nayak and Selbin 2010, Barkawi and Laffey 2006, Agathangelou and Ling 2004). In shifting the emphasis to migrant self-identifications as seekers of rights I examine where boundaries to subjectivity in terms of defining rights ought to lie. In doing so I challenge the underlying assumption in given understandings of human rights that there is a teleological framework of rights that is completed at a given point, manifested in what are considered basic needs. To limit human rights as basic needs represents an exogenously determined limitation on what can be considered a right. For example, subsistence rights provide access to shelter and food. Civil and



political rights provide access to social and political participation. Social and economic rights in Europe for European citizens protect things like the limited hours permitted in the working week, the right to a certain number of breaks in a working day, the right to a minimum of 28 days annual leave (Directive 2003/88/EC of the European Parliament). Thus, the suggestion that the individuals seeking rights at the borders of Europe do not have the right to request the above advantages establishes the hierarchy that is already implicit in the fact that there exist declarations of citizens' rights, or European Human Rights, in addition to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Guild 2005). The suggested problem with subjective determinations of rights that is adopted by the thesis recognizing limited basic needs is that rights become things like a foreign holiday every year and an amount of flexible disposable income to guarantee access to desirable consumer goods. My intention is not to defend the elaborate system of rights that citizens of Europe claim as the ultimate goal: this is inherently problematic not least due to scarce resources (Myers 1989, Young 2001, Laferriere and Stoett 2006). Instead, I posit that decentralizing the question of insecurity and human rights to focus on the self-defined rights of forced economic migrants who represent the borders of Europe means that the limitations on subjective determinations of rights must themselves be subjectively determined. The purpose of this is not to define what rights ought to be, but rather to interrogate the reality of inequality within the Western-generated accepted understanding of human rights. For example, if an individual migrant requests a foreign holiday and disposable income as his right, the framework that has generated that request is one where these things are established for a privileged group of people. Reflexive conceptions of equality, dignity or humaneness on the part of the individual rights-seeker can feasibly reside in having equal access to the things that people in the West perceive as their rights, because this is symbolic of equality. Shifting the conceptualization of

rights to one self-defined by the migrant is not opening up human rights to be exploited by greed in the place of dignity, but it is aimed at exposing and challenging the greed already inherent in the restrictive policies that determine deserving and undeserving people. Therefore, as a theoretical starting point, the boundaries on what can be considered rights must be subjectively determined by the rights-seeker, as to otherwise set these limitations would be to acknowledge and reinforce a hierarchy of rights.

## **Methodology**

This study is divided into two separate and complementary parts: the state level constructions that function to limit legitimacy to a particular group of people, and the shifted and decentered level that looks at the part of the rights seeker. I use interpretive methods that are best suited to answering the questions I ask. At the state level I look at the hermeneutic reproduction of meaning through discourse. Theories of critical discourse analysis understand discourse to be language and practice that produces meaning in life (Laclau and Mouffe 1990 [1987], Fairclough 1992, Locke 2004). I examine the meanings produced around the presence of asylum seekers via policy, practice, and public rhetoric to understand how the assumptions that position asylum seekers as a threat and recreate the norms of state sovereignty operate in this context. In the decentered study I look to the narratives of people who understand themselves to be asylum seekers. I treat the narratives as events from which I can gain an interpretivist understanding of asylum seeker identities and an understanding of the production and maintenance of ontological (in)security.

The fabric of my analysis will focus on the experiences of rights-seekers in Greece and Britain juxtaposed with the perceived view of these individuals in society-at-large in these two

states. These two states taken together represent different extremes regarding immigration towards Europe. Thus my analysis provides an understanding that both rests on specificities to the individual states yet can be considered emblematic of issues that appear across the EU and other liberal democracies that implement immigration restrictions.

- Case selection

Britain has been established as a country of immigration for several decades. In some regards Britain can be considered exceptional in Europe; for example, Britain is not a Schengen state and still requires all international arrivals pass through passport control. However, in terms of asylum policy the measures in Britain reflect those imposed in the rest of Europe with Britain and Germany having pioneered harsher controls, higher standards of proof, and expedited appeal and deportation procedures (Schuster 2003, Hayter 2004, Stevens 1998, Stevens 2001). My concern is more pervasive than an analysis of policy and legal documents: I intend to look at the production and reproduction of undocumented migrants across the social fabric of Britain.

Britain can be understood as an example of a state where moderate parties have adopted the ideologies of the far right in terms of immigration (Geddes 2003). This has limited the capacity for success of the British National Party, yet an accepted view emerges that sees immigration, particularly undocumented or forced economic migrants, as negative and even dangerous to Britain. Thus I intend to look at how this discourse is produced nationally though looking at the political positions of the three major parties, in addition to the popular voices apparent in the tabloid media and in popular culture.

In the past Greece was conventionally characterized as a country of emigration as a result of low levels of economic development, with the shift to a country of immigration pinpointed around the mid to late 1990s. However, Greece also experienced large numbers of ethnic Greeks

immigrating with particular influxes in the 1920s following the Greco-Turkish War (also known as the Asia Minor Disaster), and the 1960s following the Istanbul Pogroms. While Greece does not have a notable far right, nationalism has been a part of the reflexive Greek identity since the Greek War of Independence and so political slogans such as «Ελλάδα για τους έλληνους» (Greece for the Greeks) are an accepted part of national rhetoric (Hainsworth 1992, Dimitras 1992). The assertion of Greek identity and the reflexive conception of Greeks as an oppressed nation over millennia has been reproduced in the concern with the connection of a Greek historical narrative uniting Modern Greece with the Byzantine Empire and more notably with Classical and Ancient Greece (Clogg 2002, Beaton 1999). This historical narrative posits that Greeks were enslaved and oppressed by the Ottoman Empire for 400 years. However, the role of Greeks as the oppressed leaves little space for a reflexive understanding of Greeks as oppressors, or withholders of rights. Greece represents a useful case study to provide insight into the challenges presented by the role of E.U. immigration policy conflicting with assertion of national identity. The Dublin II Regulation enforces the “safe third country” rule, meaning that migrants have to claim asylum in the state that they first enter. For the majority of migrants entering the E.U. this is Greece. Greece does not have the financial resources to enforce deportation and does not have the administrative capacity to process all the claims (Sitaropoulos 2000). The result is a huge backlog that leaves thousands of migrants unable to claim assistance and unable to leave. The border then is visible in everyday life. Thus my analysis is aimed at looking at the nascent discourse in Greece, via media and popular culture, which grapples with social identity in order to confront the borders embodied in disenfranchised migrants.

The country studies are juxtaposed with the narratives of forced economic migrants within those states in order to understand the collision between the discourse constructing

undocumented migrants at the state level and the self-perceptions in terms of security and insecurity. This provides an understanding of how human rights can be reconceived in order to address issues of ontological insecurity. The narrative interviews with individuals in a situation of ontological insecurity provide insight into what elements the rights-seekers themselves identify as most immediate needs that can provide ontological security. Both the discourses at the state and society level and the narratives and experiences of rights seekers are necessary to understand the collision and to understand the production and reproduction of bodies as borders and boundaries preventing access to rights.

- Critical discourse analysis

Using the tools of critical discourse analysis (CDA) I gather and analyze data relating to the construction of asylum seekers as a threat and pertaining to the state level of analysis. Critical discourse analysis critically examines language understood as discursive events that become meaning-terms that exist within a given genre and reproduce a collective meaning that is implicated within a given power dynamic (Locke 2004). For Fairclough, a discourse is “a practice not just of representing the world but of signifying the world, constituting and constructing the world in meaning” (Fairclough 1992:64). The receiver of the meaning is implicated in the constitution of meaning: discourse constitutes meaning through collective understandings and the acceptance or rejection of a particular construction of meaning (Locke 2004, Fairclough 1992). Fairclough defines discourse as practice, in that meaning is constructed in communication, or “verbal and non-verbal signifying systems,” it also is implicated in human activities, and in collective memberships (Fairclough 1992 , Gee 1996 , Locke 2004). Thus,

“discourses are ... ‘ways of being in the world’; they are ‘forms of life.’ They are, thus, always and everywhere social and products of social histories” (Gee 1996, cited in Locke 2004 ).

In order to go about interpretation of a given discourse, one must recognize the genre, or form of construction; the context; the social complicity between the maker and the receiver; the expectation of the participants; and the rules in which the discourse is constructed (Locke 2004). In the project I conduct a cross-genre CDA to gather a comprehensive picture of the production and reproduction of the notion that asylum seekers threaten advanced industrialized states. This way I attempt to encompass different contexts, audiences, and dynamics of communication in order to understand the construction of forced economic migrants across society. My discourse analysis focuses on the notion that undocumented migrants and “bogus” asylum seekers are discredited in European immigration discourse. I follow the method of Van Dijk (1993) pertaining to the organization and institutionalization of the power and dominance of an “in group” and its elite representatives, over an “out group.” Van Dijk examines how discourse reproduces systems of social inequality via a theory of ideology that is based on the shared mental representations of social groups. The social group represents the limitation that “makes explicit which groups, group members, or institutions are actually involved in the formation, confirmation, reproduction, or change of such ideologies” (Van Dijk 2000:93). I look at the mechanisms in Britain and Greece that construct a particular understanding of asylum seeker in the national discourse, examining national politics and the popular media.

My selection of the genres for the study of Britain is informed by Didier Bigo’s (2002) three levels of threat construction. I examine the contextual background with a genealogical history of British policy towards asylum seekers. Situated within this context, I analyse political speeches and parliamentary discourse to represent the elites or those engaged in threat

construction, taken from the years 2008 to the present, covering the 2010 election campaigns. Documents published by the UK Border Authority and the UK Serious Organized Crime Association represent the “managers of unease” and offer insight into the threat construction at the level of security professional. Finally, an analysis of the tabloid media represents the “fear mongers” that produce and reproduce the popular perception of asylum seekers as a threat. These are limited to the bounds set by the threat construction analysis and will examine the years from 2008 until the present. Popular culture represents an important but often overlooked element of IR. It represents the everyday encounters that people have with IR, the “living” of IR as opposed to the theorizing of IR (Krishna 1993, Krishna 1999, Nayak and Selbin 2010). The tabloid media crosses the boundary between popular culture and news media, as the content is known to be sensationalistic, dramatic and a source of entertainment (Conboy 2006). The tabloid media also represents five of the six most-read newspapers in Britain.

Greece differs from Britain in regard to discourses constructing asylum seekers and economic migrants. The case study of Greece is informed by existing work of writer Gazmend Kapllani, which looks at the portrayal of migrants in Greece as being “without subjectivity.” Kapllani, who is originally from Albania and migrated to Greece in the 1990s, has written at length on his experience of migration (see Kapllani 2009). He suggests that migrants are removed from a surrounding context or story and are given the decontextualized role of migrant, thus their identity is denied and migrants are perceived and understood only in terms of what they mean to Greece. The construction of migrants as without identity contrasts the continued reassertion of Greek persecuted identity. I examine the clash between Greek reflexive identity and the experience of migration in Greece in a single genre media analysis. The media demonstrates the presence of migrants in Greece without subjectivity, but instead portrayed with

only the identity of migrant. Asylum seekers in Greece are a relatively recent phenomenon. The media represents popular access to the political and social discourses constructing migrants and asylum seekers, thus the critical analysis will offer insight into places where subjective identity is absent from social perceptions.

- Narrative interviews

The purpose of the narrative interviews is to gain insight into the self-defined rights that migrants in Europe are seeking. I gather personal narratives to provide me with an understanding of the participant's life experiences that might lead to his or her formulation of the concept of security in order to identify the needs most immediate to the participant. Narrative interviews aim to gather stories and anecdotes that can offer interpretive insight into a person's life through the plots and structures of the narratives (Kvale 2007). This differs from psychoanalysis as one is not attempting to understand the individual psychologically. The narrative exists as an event contingent on time, place, and circumstance. Thus, analysis of the narrative is not analysis of the inner workings of the individual. To add broader context, the narrative interview will be combined with ethnographic participant observation, identifying "the need to posit research subjects whose inner worlds cannot be understood without knowledge of their experiences in the world, and whose experiences of the world cannot be understood without knowledge of the way in which their inner worlds allow them to experience the outer world" (Holloway and Jefferson 2000:4).

I intend to explore security and insecurity in order to understand how the participant would self-define ontological security with the theoretical implication that this should be understood as underlying human rights. I assume that meanings are generated by context and interactions, thus I want to access a participant-generated meaning frame through which I can



share migrants' own perceptions of security, insecurity, and human rights. In narrative interviews my responsibility as a researcher is to listen while the participant is in the role of "story-teller" (Holloway and Jefferson 2004). My questions reflect this, asking things such as "tell me the story of how you came to be here," or "do you have any anecdotes about problems you have faced here?" In doing this I shift the framing of meanings and content to the participant.

The participants fit the demographic of individuals who aim to seek asylum in Europe or who are in the process of appealing a failed asylum claim. These individuals are situated in Greece and in the U.K. to mirror the geographic locales of the state level constructions. In particular, I am concerned with people whose views conflict with that established in international relations and in state policy, thus people who have been unable to lodge a valid claim or who are appealing a failed claim are most likely to fit this criterion. I aim to circumvent the state-constructed notions of rights and security because the perspectives I explore are those of individuals who are prohibited from participation in the state generated notions of rights and security. Furthermore, these individuals reside in a position of ontological *insecurity*, post rupture to their familiar existences. This suggests that the "unconscious body of knowledge" which maintains ontological security for Giddens will be accessible to the individual as highlighting what is provoking their insecurity as well as the elements that they need to realize a sense of security (Giddens 1984, 1991). This allows me to encapsulate some of these elements in an understanding of human rights.

### **Chapter outlines:**

The first chapter comprises a theoretical investigation of the dialectic construction of asylum seeker. Legitimate asylum seekers are considered those whose experiences comply with the Eurocentric refugee definition. I look at state discourses that performatively construct “genuine” asylum seekers and “bogus” asylum seekers. This leads into a second chapter that exposes the security discourses that construct “bogus” asylum seekers as a homogenous group that represents a threat to the state. The security discourse simultaneously denies both social and political subjectivity for asylum seekers. The critical discourse analysis of Britain offers insight into these discursive mechanisms in chapter three. The fourth chapter turns to the Greek experience and illustrates the constitution of the homogenous category of “bogus” asylum seeker against state identity. I elaborate on the denial of subjectivity to the category of “bogus” asylum seeker, or forced economic migrant, which resists empathetic understandings of asylum seeker experiences and allows the Greek identity to remain unchallenged by the physical appearance of denial of rights to “outsiders.”

The fifth chapter illustrates extant challenges to the state discourses constructing asylum seekers. Chapter five explores the paradigm of human security, deconstructing the roots of human security in human development and human rights, both in policy and in IR theory. I offer the framework of ontological security as a means of decentering the theoretical paradigm of human security to foreground human experience rather than state interests. Chapter six then analyses the self-definitions of those asylum seekers who do not meet the state definition: those who have made a claim that has failed, or who have not claimed on arrival because they fear deportation. The conceptualization of human security engaged here questions established political citizenship boundaries. This chapter provides the critical insight generated by narrative interviews with those individuals seeking access to human rights in Europe, contextualized by

ethnographic participant observation. I look at these narratives to understand the self-identity of asylum seekers that can allow for a shift in the conceptualization of rights pertaining to the needs that asylum seekers in a state of ontological *insecurity* identify as most immediate.

My conclusion draws together the utility of moving away from state-centric discursive constructions of those seeking rights, with the shifted conceptualization of rights offered by those who fall outside the boundaries of legitimacy offered by the Eurocentric state-based definition. I return to pinpoint answers to the research questions outlined in this introduction and point to potential avenues for future research.

## **Refugees in a World of States versus States in a World of Asylum Seekers.**

The “refugee problem” has been widely studied from a variety of perspectives. This chapter will illustrate the processes surrounding the refugee definition and the application of that definition to asylum seekers. I note the Eurocentric bias and the temporal influences in the drafting of the definition and consider the implications of this bias in contemporary asylum seeker identifications. I identify a dialectic process whereby asylum seekers become thought of as “bogus” or illegitimate by the states where they claim entry. This labelling of asylum seekers then reinforces the justifications for the current restrictive definition and its need in the contemporary international environment. Bogus asylum seekers exist in and are reproduced by state discourses. They are, according to this dialectic, “illegal immigrants” who deliberately travel to Europe only to exploit the system of benefits and advantages that these states provide for their deserving citizens, while simultaneously undermining the ability of the benevolent Western states to provide asylum to those genuine asylum seekers who flee persecution to embrace the values of liberal democracy. The production of the “undeserving” category underlies the disparity between self-definitions and state-definitions of asylum seekers. I investigate the disparity between self-definitions and state-definitions of asylum seekers, with a view to highlight the need to incorporate asylum seeker “self” definitions in global understandings of seeking asylum and gaining access to rights. Unlike the refugee definition, the category of asylum seeker is not applied by a global, international or national institution or agency, but is a label used to talk about a group of people that have not yet acquired an internationally recognized immigration status.

The first part of this chapter outlines the development of the refugee definition according to conventional understandings. I then examine in more detail the asylum “category,” demonstrating that it is not a category at all but a label applied to a group of people essentially without a recognized immigration status. I look at the construction of “bogus” asylum seekers and illegal immigrants, categories states apply to those who have not been determined “genuine.” Bogus asylum seekers and illegal immigrants are those individuals that the state deems as undeserving of the rights and privileges the state applies to its citizens. I problematize the constructed category of bogus asylum seeker in light of the restrictive nature of the refugee definition, and the lack of an independent asylum seeker definition. I suggest that because “genuine” asylum seekers instrumentally become refugees when recognized those who are asylum *seekers* carry the label of “bogus” or “illegal.” I then turn to the assertion that asylum seekers must self-define and examine how this interacts with the international state system.

### **Refugees in a World of States**

- **The development of the refugee definition:**

The principal documents in international law that codify the characteristics that define a refugee are the 1951 United Nations Convention Relating to the status of Refugees, and the subsequent Refugee Protocol that was published in 1967, which removed the temporal and geographic constraints of the original definition. This definition is as follows:

A person who owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence

as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it (UNHCR 1967).

The definition was founded in Article 14 of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This article states “(1) Everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution. (2) This right may not be invoked in the case of prosecutions genuinely arising from non-political crimes or from acts contrary to the purposes and principles of the United Nations.” The Refugee Convention definition of a refugee then delimits this right to a specific group of people who are victims of individually targeted persecution motivated by one of the five nexus reasons.

It is important to note that the Convention definition of a refugee did not appear in a vacuum and was certainly not the original refugee legislation. However, there was little concern regarding refugees prior to the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. While in political philosophy there has certainly been a history of a duty to offer refuge, and a concept of responsibility towards the stranger (see Arnaout 1987 for early Arab-Islamic concepts, and Bau 1985 for concepts in the Judeo-Christian tradition), there was no real consideration of a standardized refugee policy or codification regarding the people to whom such a policy would apply before the United Nations promulgated the Refugee Convention. The former lack of consideration is generally thought to be the result of two points: the first is that immigration was favourable in industrializing countries, bringing in manpower to sustain economic growth; the second is that there was not a case of mass movement of a population or a group of people across established state boundaries that was pronounced enough to provoke consideration of legislation to codify state reaction to such a movement (Marrus 1985, Hathaway 1991). The explanation that relies on the idea that there was not previously a mass movement of people is of course dependent on one’s perspective regarding

who constitutes a refugee and how we define movement: for example the forced migration of Native Americans known as the Trail of Tears can certainly be considered a mass displacement of peoples, persecution and even ethnic cleansing; however, the situation reinforced rather than undermined the primacy of Western “civilization” and the sovereign state borders established by the United States. Consideration of this mass displacement of people does not factor in the refugee literature. The situations that are considered relevant to the development of the refugee definition are those in which mass movement undermined established sovereign state boundaries, or was considered economically or politically threatening to sovereign government or society. Thus, sovereign boundaries are essential to the existence of refugees. Hannah Arendt explores this connection in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. Arendt posits that the growth of nationalism in Europe created stateless minorities. The rights of citizenship were predicated on belonging to a state, and nationalism caused the state to be conceived as ethnically homogenous. The very fact that stateless people “without nationality, without money, and without passports” were crossing frontiers seeking protection in large numbers hardened the borders of states and undermined the notion of universal human rights (Arendt 1972). Arendt establishes that the question raised in negotiations for international refugee legislation focused firmly on repatriation and problems arose from the new understanding of stateless people: “Every attempt by international conferences to establish some legal status for stateless people failed because no agreement could possibly replace the territory to which an alien, within the framework of existing law, must be deportable” (Arendt 1972:284). It was inconceivable to think that there could be mass movement of people who were without territory. To address the political concerns would violate the sovereignty of the refugee sending-state. To compel a state to bestow citizenship would violate the receiving state sovereignty. The way the refugee has been defined

in international law responds to the movement of several million people in Europe during World War II, movement preceding that compelled by national and ethnic conflicts. Furthermore, states that formulated the refugee definition did so in a political environment that posited the interests of liberal democracy and Enlightenment individualism against Soviet communism (Geddes 2003). The criteria of the refugee definition then, responded to particular events that occurred at a particular time in Europe, was formulated around European understandings of sovereignty, and responded to the political questions that European states were facing at the time. For these reasons the definition can be considered inherently Eurocentric.

James C. Hathaway provides an account of the negotiations preceding the development of the contemporary refugee definition, identifying three distinct periods: the juridical, the social, and the individualist period (Hathaway 1991). According to Hathaway, states began to implement instrumental refugee policies to serve their needs early in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. The mass movement of Russians between 1917 and 1922 followed by the Armenian exodus from Turkey in 1922 inspired the first international accords regarding refugees. Hathaway terms this period of law the juridical approach and it covers the effects in the international sphere caused by a state failing to offer de jure protection, through refusing to recognize or take responsibility for a group of people (Hathaway 1991). This period lasted from 1920-1935, when focus shifted to the social approach. The social approach lasted until roughly 1939, and was needs-based, recognizing anyone who needed help or protection due to circumstances causing them to lose de facto state protection. This in particular applied to people fleeing the Nazi party in Germany (Hathaway 1991, Haddad 2008). The third period then goes from 1939-1950 and represents the individualist approach. Hathaway describes this approach as revolutionary as it rejected group determinations and focused on individuals. This understanding of refugee protection was criticized by the



Soviet bloc, who made the argument that political dissidents should seek protection in states sympathetic with their views but should not fall into a category that is deserving of international protection given that the political views in question might not reflect an international consensus. Nonetheless, the 1951 Convention definition of a refugee maintained the individual aspect and endorsed pro-Western political values, while rejecting the social need-based or the juridical group-based conceptualizations.

The protection offered in the 1951 convention definition of a refugee is based on civic and political values. The drafting of the definition was strategic: the definition consciously offers protection to the opponents of communism and so prioritizes pro-Western political values that are embedded in Enlightenment liberalism and modernity. Thus, in the polarized political environment of the Cold War, the refugee convention operated as a political tool (Hathaway 1991). As Hathaway points out, “the strategic dimension of the definition comes from the successful efforts of Western states to give priority in protection matters to persons whose flight was motivated by pro-Western political values” (Hathaway 1991: 35). It is conspicuous that the definition includes no capacity to protect “persons denied even such basic rights as food, healthcare, or education” (Hathaway 1991: 35). The main shifts then have been the move away from group based protection and social protection based on need. Instead the refugee definition came to be based on very particular attributes. However, the group based and social based protections that were not included in the 1951 definition ceased to be a concern of the international community at the moment of drafting, but did not cease to be an issue for individuals. These individuals still migrate for various reasons and these de facto refugees claiming refuge at the borders of a state still exist, in the form of asylum seekers. As Haddad asserts, there is no such thing as an illegal refugee; this is a misnomer. A refugee is a person

who has *already met* the refugee criteria (Haddad 2008). An asylum seeker is a person who is outside of the law, outside of his or her legal or habitual country of residence but *not yet recognized* by states or the international community as having acquired a new status that guarantees certain rights, such as those of citizenship. Asylum seekers are both *de jure* and *de facto* people without citizenship or immigration status and consequently without rights.

In the 1960s there were attempts among UN member states to draft an international convention on territorial asylum (Musalo et al 2007). The convention definition of a refugee requires *non-refoulement* but not admittance. That is, a state cannot forcibly return an individual to a place where he or she will face persecution but the state still holds the sovereign power to determine who may or may not be admitted to the territory. States are not required under international law to admit asylum seekers, they are simply required not to return them if there is a credible chance of persecution on return. The conference that aimed to draft a convention on territorial asylum and so reach a solution on this distinction did not achieve its goal. It did expand some aspects of the refugee definition, giving states license to interpret certain elements as they saw fit. Thus, asylum seekers are individuals who exist in an international realm but who are unaccounted for in international law. Some of them are recognized by states as meeting the refugee criteria, some are not. Asylum seekers represent *de facto* migrants who are outside of state protections and outside of international protection. Refugees are within international protection, but refugees become refugees only once they are recognized. Asylum seekers remain *seekers* of recognition until they are admitted by a state.

- **The asylum category**

The refugee definition determines who is a refugee as an international status. Asylum seekers are without international status: they have not been recognized by an international

authority and they claim asylum at the borders. Thus, state sovereignty is protected in that states decide who they admit. Presently all states considered “Western” are party to the Refugee Protocol and adopted refugee definitions that are based on this protocol. Britain signed the protocol in 1968; the United States in 1968; Germany, Greece, and Canada in 1969; France in 1971; Italy 1972; and Spain in 1978 (UNHCR, 2008). However, despite being signatories many of these states did not adopt the definition into domestic law until later. In Europe the adoption of the definition into domestic law tended to coincide with the demographic of asylum seekers changing after the end of the Cold War: rather than being a tool to offer refuge to individuals fleeing communism in Eastern Europe, the refugee definition became a mechanism to protect states from influxes of people fleeing a variety of situations in the global South.<sup>2</sup>

In Europe the codification of asylum policy into law generally occurred in the early 1990s. For example, in Britain prior to the 1990s asylum policy was governed by the 1971 Immigration Act. The 1971 Act did not include any specific procedure or policy to deal with refugees or asylum seekers and Britain was reluctant to incorporate the convention definition into domestic law (Stevens 1998). During the late 1980s Britain implemented some visa restrictions against arrivals from certain areas, and the 1987 Carrier’s Liability Act implemented fines for people who transported undocumented arrivals and implemented detention of undocumented arrivals (Stevens 1998). The first comprehensive legislation aimed at asylum seekers in Britain was implemented in 1993, and this focused on two main goals: expediting appeals to reduce the backlog of applications, and deterring “bogus” asylum seekers. Greece did not implement immigration legislation until 1991, but the legislation that was passed in 1991 incorporated asylum seekers. For example, Law 1975 of 1991 “Entry, exit, sojourn,

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<sup>2</sup> I follow literature on neoliberalism and access to human rights in use the term global south, for want of a better description (Bakker 2007). It refers to the part of the world that has experienced lesser degrees of economic development along with social, political and economic upheavals that are often a result of processes of globalization.

employment, removal of aliens, procedure for the recognition of refugees and other measures” focused on curbing migration and facilitating removal. This law was not particularly effective and in 1997 a programme was created geared at legislating terms for migrant workers, then in 2001 a subsequent programme offered steps towards residency for undocumented migrants. Other European states followed similar time frames, with Southern European legislation occurring slightly later than that of Northern and Western Europe given that many of these states had previously been considered migrant sending states rather than migrant receiving states, with emigration vastly outnumbering immigration. However, the temporal distinction between signing the refugee convention and protocol, and implementing asylum policy demonstrates that the asylum seeker category was legislated as something analytically separate from refugees: the refugee definition is adopted by states to determine which asylum seekers are legitimate. The restrictive nature of the refugee definition means that many people who arrive at the borders of the liberal democracies that participated in the creation of refugee legislation are denied entry. On arrival many people looking for human rights are denied access: they remain neither citizens nor legally-determined refugees. Migrants are considered to be under the state-based categorical definition of “asylum seeker” while their case is being processed. In the limited understanding, people only become asylum seekers once having made an application for asylum to the state. They only are considered asylum seekers whilst that application is being processed. During transit and prior to filing an application they are simply without status. If a case is denied they are considered failed asylum seekers and, if they do not accept voluntary repatriation they again revert to being without status.

According to the UNHCR repatriation is considered the principal and preferred “solution” to the refugee “problem” (UNHCR 1993). The Dublin Regulation in Europe

implemented a layered form of repatriation: those seeking asylum are not returned to their country of origin or former habitual residence, but are first returned to their first safe third country state. The safe third country is the first state that is considered safe that an asylum seeker passed through on the way to the country in which he or she makes a claim. This type of repatriation is justified by the rights of states to protect their sovereignty and to protect their borders against influxes of needy people, not by the rights of individuals. The convention definition was written with the individual at the core, to protect individual rights. However, when individual rights clash with sovereignty, the states revert to state interests over individual interests. Psychiatrists tend to agree that policies of detention and forced repatriation often aggravate post traumatic stress disorder and mental health problems in asylum seekers. The uncertainty and insecurity of repatriation policies have a negative effect on the mental wellbeing of the asylum seeker (Silove et al 1997, Sinnerbrink et al 1997, Silove et al 2000). Thus, the safe third country ruling essentially prioritizes the rights of states over the human rights and physical wellbeing of asylum seekers. Furthermore, deportation in safe third country cases occurs prior to determinations of “legitimacy” and “illegitimacy.” The right of the state in question is the right to protect sovereign borders and the right to reserve social services for citizens and so is embedded in sovereignty and citizenship. Referring back to Arendt’s observation that mass displacement of people problematized the state-citizen-territory triangle (Arendt 1972), asylum seekers, as people who fall outside of the triangle expose the continued prevalence of the relationship between the state, citizenry and territory and this is exemplified in the “safe third country” ruling. States reinforce sovereignty over the territory and reserve rights for citizens while asylum seekers who are stateless cannot access rights and are constructed as bogus due to their presence within territorial borders.

The safe third country ruling is posited as burden sharing between EU member states. Logically, it is assumed that asylum seekers want to reach the wealthier European states to make their claims and so the safe third country ruling forces asylum seekers to claim in the Southern European states that form the European frontier with Africa and the Middle East. Burden sharing efforts are aimed at guaranteeing that any one state is not overwhelmed with a mass influx of asylum seekers. Thielemann (2009) demonstrates that EU member states have converged their asylum policies with regard to the specific issue of border security. The converging of asylum policy is seen as a necessary security measure to protect EU border. However, the focus on security reinforces the idea of illegitimacy, or more specifically, the need to protect the state from bogus asylum seekers. The security efforts are underlined by burden sharing: the aim being that no one state must bear the burden of an influx of asylum seekers and can transfer applications to other member states with both the consent of the state parties involved and of the individual asylum seeker. However, the emphasis on burden sharing has two effects. First of all, it reinforces the emphasis on the economic burden, increasing the suspicion towards those migrating for economic reasons. Second of all, it relies on a de facto categorization of asylum seeker prior to the application being processed. Burden sharing relies on one state experiencing an influx of asylum seekers. However, as discussed, asylum seeker is not a legally determined category. According to states, asylum seekers only become so after having filed a legal claim for asylum. Any legal status determination is reliant on state recognition. Therefore, before agreeing to burden sharing the member states will want to determine that they are not in fact accepting potential “bogus” asylum seekers or “economic” migrants only to bear the cost of transfer and deportation. This is demonstrated in the 2004 *Qualification Directive*, which establishes common criteria for the recognition of asylum seekers

in the EU. The objectives of this directive include standardized criteria for the identification of *genuine* refugees. Asylum seekers in Europe become refugees once it has been established that they are within the bounds of the law. The law determines that genuine asylum seekers are those people whose claim meets the convention definition of a refugee. Thus “asylum seeker” is the individual making an application prior to legal recognition. However, within the category of asylum seeker we see the further distinction between genuine and bogus asylum seeker. Bogus asylum seeker is a rhetorical category that is not established in international frameworks and yet is referred to in state discourse and in policy documents.<sup>3</sup> “Bogus” asylum seekers are in fact asylum seekers. To be understood as “genuine” an asylum seeker must be recognized by the state in which he or she seeks admission. To gain recognition, he or she must meet the refugee criteria and therefore on recognition he or she becomes a refugee. Consequently, every asylum seeker is a bogus asylum seeker; the only legitimate asylum seeker is actually a legally recognized refugee. The discourse that constructs and reproduces the distinction between legitimate and illegitimate asylum seekers in fact only creates an idea of illegitimate, fraudulent, or bogus asylum seekers.

### **States in a World of Asylum Seekers**

States create refugees: the displacement from territory would not occur without established delimited territories. Thinking of the world in terms of states and the relationship between state, territory, and citizenship is problematic regarding the grounds on which citizenship is determined: both *jus solis* and *jus sanguinis* leave space for individuals to be outside of these categories, particularly given the fact that each sovereign state determines its

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<sup>3</sup> For example, British Home Office White Paper on immigration “Secure Borders Safe Haven” refers repeatedly to “asylum shopping,” the “international free for all” of the asylum system, and the need to restore integrity to the system in order to protect against fraudulent asylum claims.

own criteria for citizenship. Individuals remain on one territory or another within the continuity of their own lives, however disrupted or unknown that continuity becomes. Asylum seekers are subject to recognition by states yet in practice, asylum seekers must self-define before making an application. There is no legal criterion to *seek* asylum, only to be provided it, and that criterion is the refugee definition. However, to become what is thought of as a “genuine” asylum seeker under the current system one must file an application for asylum with a state and be recognized as an asylum seeker by a state. Haddad proposed that refugee identities are essentially different from citizen identities because they are not composed of attachment to a nation state, but instead are dependent on a home state, a displaced person, and a host state. The identity of the refugee is constituted by the interaction of those elements (Haddad 2008). However, this is problematic as it encourages conceptualization of an “essential” refugee identity, which allows such an essential identity to be reproduced and reapplied and thus discounts alternative identities. Furthermore, the refugee identity as Haddad defines it is complicated by longevity. Refugees who are born in refugee camps do not have the interactive identity between the home state and the host state, but instead have a host state prior to resettlement. In the temporary home state migrants are often housed in camps and do not have comparable social and political rights to those of citizens. They then might move to a second host state for resettlement; however, identity may also be dependent on ethnicity, religion, nature of persecution or any number of individual experiences.

The distinction between refugees and asylum seekers allows asylum seekers to be treated as an analytically separate category from refugees, despite the same recognition criteria. The experiences of an asylum seeker are likely to differ from those of a refugee, although the extent to which they will differ is subject to individual experience. Asylum seekers and refugees are certainly perceived differently by states: refugees are accepted as genuine while asylum seekers



are interrogated. Haddad points to the blurring of the category between asylum seeker and migrant, suggesting that refugees were somewhat “rebranded” as asylum seekers. The subsequent growth of economic migration and the interrelated causes of migration that include civil unrest, poverty, and natural disasters, all of which are not covered by the refugee definition, create mixed movements (Haddad 2008). Reasons for the blurring of the category are traced to the initial creation of a distinction between refugees according to the 1951 definition and other migrants (Karatani 2005) and post Cold War changes in state needs and asylum seeker demographics (Hathaway 1997, Huysmans 2000, Lavenex 2001). The role of state needs and the nature of the influxes speak to the more stringent restrictions governing asylum seeker recognition. The inefficacy of the fixed convention definition that was drafted in response to temporal needs and circumstantial events is certainly a compelling explanation for the inability of that definition to account for all forced migrants in need of humanitarian protection.

Refugees have conventionally been differentiated from migrants based on the idea that a migrant makes a choice to migrate while a refugee is forced to migrate (Haddad 2008). Haddad catalogues some of the distinctions: for example, migrants want to build a better life, while refugees simply want to rebuild what they have lost; migrants consider both push and pull factors, while refugees are simply subject to push factors. However, this is of course an oversimplification of the nature of experiences and the decision to migrate. Such an oversimplification, to the extent that it is adopted by states and interacts with the “legitimate/illegitimate” distinction, has a resultant effect on the treatment of asylum seekers on arrival. Because asylum seekers must meet the refugee criteria, then asylum seekers must prove that they did not *decide* to migrate but were forced to migrate by individually targeted persecution that gave them no other option. This means that broader structural causes for

migration that compel migration are not acknowledged. Asylum seekers do not have a legal status but have to prove that they are not migrants, they did not choose to migrate. If they did choose, then the implication is that they are actively attempting to defraud the asylum system. The distinction between migrants and refugees assumes that because a migrant makes a choice to migrate then the experiences in the process and on arrival are parts of that decision. The migrant is constructed as a rational individual who has made a cost benefit analysis prior to leaving his or her home state. The refugee made no such analysis and is seen as a victim and so deserving of protection.

Carens (2006) addresses the ethical onus on a state with regard to asylum seeker admissions. He posits a distinction between refugees and asylum seekers in that refugees have been recognized by the UNHCR. Thus, states can ethically ignore refugees who are already in a safe haven even if that safe haven is a refugee camp. However, if a state returns an asylum seeker to face persecution then the state is implicated in what becomes of the asylum seeker, because the asylum seeker applies to the state for protection. Carens posits that while states have moral obligations there are some exclusion criteria that states apply to asylum seekers that can be considered morally permissible, one of which is state security (Carens 2006). However, Carens also acknowledges that the people asking for asylum can form a continuum from those facing persecution and danger of death at home, and those simply claiming to be refugees but facing no real danger. The state holds the power to determine who is who. Carens recognizes that the refugee definition is open to subjective interpretation giving states the sovereign right to decide asylum policy (Carens 2006). The state security rhetoric surrounding asylum provides an ethical justification for the state to deny entry to certain people. Here, I build on scholarship that

suggests the security rhetoric surrounding migration blocks certain individuals from realizing their security and human rights needs.

Bigo observes the experiences of migrants within a state as created by a dialectic of the state's desire to expel the individual and the state's desire to prevent the individual attempting re-entry. He clarifies that the treatment of migrants by states should not be understood as an attempt to discipline behaviour, but simply to prevent re-entry (Bigo 2001). However, in preventing re-entry the state is labelling the individual as an incompetent member of the neoliberal system, subject to incarceration to protect the public (of the host state) and to discourage future deviant behaviour (crossing sovereign borders). In that guise then the treatment of asylum seekers who have not received a positive determination of refugee status can be understood as disciplining behaviour. Incarceration, maltreatment, and deportation will prevent the individual repeating the decision to migrate. The individual migrant who is not a refugee is understood as rational and calculating and thus negative experiences and maltreatment will act as deterrent factors. This can be seen in the language of illegal immigrant, fraudulent claims, and bogus asylum seekers used by states as justification for harsh security measures at the border. The word bogus suggests that the migrant is fully aware of the criteria of the refugee definition and actively attempting to undermine state law and security. The consequences of these rationalist assumptions regarding migrants and including asylum seekers prior to positive status determinations means that the asylum seeker gets caught between "push factors" in the home state and deterrent factors in the receiving state. The resultant experiences of asylum seekers do not comply with standards of human rights and human dignity that the liberal democracies that are denying asylum claims purport to uphold.

Deterrent behaviour on the part of states compels a vision of asylum seeker behaviour that is dependent on rationalist assumptions regarding asylum seeker motivations. This can be seen as an overflow of Western neoliberal governance across state borders to manage the behaviour of the migrant. Literature in international relations that explores the “governance of the self,” which understands global politics with recourse to Foucault’s notion of “governmentality,” can offer insight here into the operation of that governance on the asylum seeker. Governmentality is a mode of governance that focuses on the management of populations through decentralized bodies such as agencies, corporations, and decentralized bureaucracy. Within the state system, international institutions, states, and state agents adopt the view that poverty is not a compelling reason to migrate. If an individual attempts to migrate without going through the proper visa channels and it is for a reason outside of the limitations of the refugee convention definition then that person is tagged at the very least as a deviant manipulating the system, more likely as a criminal, and in some circumstances as a terrorist (Kanstroom 2005, Miller 2005). The security framework challenges the freedom of movement that is part of conventional liberal values (Mau 2010). Additionally, the freedom to move is equally “managed” by neoliberal forms of governance. For example, those individuals who are profitable and economically solvent need to be distinguished from those who are not. The solvent profitable bodies are imported to the receiving state through visa programmes. However, at the global level determinations of who is profitable cannot be made on an individual basis. Thus, just as in domestic scenarios where those who are from low income, inner city, and particular ethnic backgrounds are considered more likely to be criminals (Pratt 1999, Stenson 1999), those from what may be termed the global South (for want of a better description), or from the global proletariat, are considered more likely to be deviant or criminals who are

scheming to “steal” something “they do not deserve” from those good self-governing folks in wealthy liberal democracies (Smith 2004-05). In this vein, states adopt the discourse of bogus asylum seekers, illegal immigrants, and welfare state tourists, which discredits the individuals who are thought of as undesirable and a potential burden to the state.

### **Asylum seekers as a challenge to the state**

To then shift the emphasis to the asylum seeker, one must move from the concerns of states that are evident through the global climate via legal instruments (the refugee convention and protocol definitions) and through the normative structural assumptions and observations, to consider instead the encounters an asylum seeker might have with states as he or she migrates. As outlined above, the asylum seeker must self-define as an asylum seeker until he or she is officially recognized and accepted by a state. After being formally recognized the asylum *seeker* shifts to asylum “sought and found,” acquiring instrumental refugee status, that is, the legal rights and the perceived identity of a refugee. To obtain these rights the asylum seeker must first self-define and then travel to the location where he or she intends to seek protection. On doing this, while in transit, the asylum seeker enters an international zone where he or she does not have access to legal status and must remain without status, regardless of the physical environment, until the claim is processed and a positive result is obtained.

Giorgio Agamben’s understanding of bare life has been usefully and variously applied to understanding the lack of access to human rights for refugees. Bare life is the situation of a person that has been banished from society and placed outside of the law, societal participation and juridical subjectivity being the two apparatus that constitute a being as human (Agamben 1999). For Agamben, the existence of spaces of bare life demonstrate a failing of the system of

human rights and more tellingly as a failure of the state-citizen-territory connection as the refugee him or herself is constructed as nothing other than a human rights category (Agamben 1999). The location in which bare life is exposed for Agamben is the camp. Agamben equates different forms of camps (including concentration camps and refugee camps) in locations where sovereignty operates on the body as a form of biopolitics. The human who is not a citizen is reduced to bare life; he or she is not permitted to participate in society and is not within the bounds of the law, so cannot claim rights that are guaranteed by the law. Refugee camps are a location in which humans are reduced to bare life (Agamben 2000). The framework in which human rights become obsolete is one in which the citizen can access rights but the human cannot. Agamben in that vein distinguishes between active and passive rights: Passive rights are those human rights that society was formed to protect; active rights are the legal rights through which society was formed (Agamben 1999). Thus within a society there are people who are not active voting citizens that possess passive rights; for example, children, women in some societies, the infirm, the mentally ill, and criminals. They are within the bounds of the law and offered passive protection from it, although they do not have the active right to change or use the law. However, the act of forming a society for the agreed protection of rights thereby constitutes an inside and an outside; the creation of citizens also creates non-citizens who therefore lack both active and passive rights. However, in Agamben's discussion territory is held constant. Citizens and passive rights-holders are within the territory, those who are outside of the territory do not have access to rights. Refugees expose this problematic: they are "nothing less than a limit concept that radically calls into question the fundamental categories of the nation state" (Agamben 1998: 78). However, when considered via the context in which the refugee definition was drafted, refugees are not produced as a limiting concept, but as a reaffirming concept. The

category of “refugee” reinforces the values of liberalism and the benevolent nature of liberal states. It was drafted by states in the environment of the Cold War to protect those individuals who objected to and fled from communism. In this way, it reaffirmed the values of benevolent liberal democracies and the freedoms within them. The category of refugee as it is legally determined is in itself a category of the nation state and a category of liberal governance. It is in fact the inefficacy of this categorization to account for migration and to delimit and control migration that actually calls into question the categories of the nation state. Asylum seekers expose the inefficacy of the refugee definition, in particular those asylum seekers deemed illegitimate who seek human rights within liberal democracies but are prevented from accessing the rights and freedoms that liberalism promises. This then offers insight into why nation states discredit asylum seekers.

Furthermore, the space in which Agamben observes the lack of rights is in camps as stated above. However, asylum seekers further problematize this assumption because they must self-define and request a legal status at the border or once inside the territory of a state. While many are detained and the detention of asylum seekers has become more prevalent, there are many asylum seekers and irregular or undocumented migrants who do not have access to rights but are within the privileged territory. This in particular applies to economic migrants who work without employment rights, are unable or afraid to seek access to healthcare and other social provisions, and often work long hours in dangerous locations without the ability to contest their situation. They represent an “illiberal” space within liberal democracies; they are within the territory rather than detained outside of it but are not provided access to basic civic, political, or social human rights.

Sonja Buckel and Jens Wissel (2010) point to the role of borders in producing areas where rights are contested in a way that permits investigation into the lack of rights available to some peoples within liberal democracies. The authors suggest that there is no physical place on earth that is not covered by human rights (a broad claim that is open to debate) , but there are *people* who are not, creating a paradox as the rights are human rather than territorial. However, as a human if you are not in your proper place then you cannot access the legal framework of rights reserved for citizens. While for Buckel and Wissel there is a potential difference between the basic rights that are universally human and the legal rights one can access as a citizen, I posit that this is not a useful distinction. The concept of universal human rights is distinct from actual and *accessible* universal human rights and given the continued privileging of sovereign state rights, accessible rights remain a reality only for citizens, even within states that are said to be committed to the advancement of universal human rights.

Marie Woodling points to the binary distinction between citizen and undocumented in which treatment towards one population would be considered unthinkable were it directed towards another, to some degree reiterating Agamben's distinction between the citizen and "bare life" (Woodling 2010). Asylum seekers might not exist in delimited areas but when collectives of asylum seekers form they directly challenge the structure in a way that refugees do not. For example, "in the simple act of calling for rights, the Undocumented break the identity between human and citizen and thus threaten to bring state power itself into crisis" (Woodling 2010: 151). The act of asking for rights in some ways reinforces the state power dynamic, in that collectives must ask for recognition before different societal actors or institutions (Rajaram and Grundy-Warr 2007). However, when movements erupt and demand rights this counteracts state power, particularly at times when rights are demanded by people to whom states or institutions are



reluctant to award rights. A pertinent recent example includes asylum seekers aboard a ship that was not permitted to dock in Australia. Here the asylum seekers on board petitioned Australia for access and in doing so constructed a narrative that conflicted with state discourse and eventually compelled the state to recognize them as political subjects (Budz 2009). A second example is that of Sudanese refugees in Africa petitioning the UNHCR for rights, and rejecting the state-constructed narrative of legitimate and illegitimate concerning who was “deserving” of rights and protection (Moulin and Nyers 2007). In both these cases a collective of asylum seekers created an unexpected counter to the state narratives that construct who has access to rights. In doing this the asylum seekers demonstrated an active political voice that gained recognition on the national and international levels respectively.

While asylum seekers can be seen as “hidden” rights-less subjects because they are not always within a delimited space, asylum seekers are inevitably political subjects given that in making the journey they must self-define as fleeing persecution. Rather than remain passive, asylum seekers claim a political position and take action. That is not to say that every person who self-defines as an asylum seeker is automatically fleeing political persecution, or even fleeing a form of persecution that both complies with the state’s definition of persecution and is provoked by a protocol nexus reason. However, it is not unreasonable to suggest that the majority of people within advanced industrialized states *probably* do not know the criteria of the refugee definition. Individuals who self-define as asylum seekers probably do not know these criteria until they are told their claim is not legitimate. However, when states construct “bogus” asylum seekers as sneaky, devious, or intentional criminals, the states hold the asylum seekers to an improbably high standard of knowledge, which in part depends on the assumption that asylum seekers have made a rational cost-benefit analysis prior to migration. Therefore the paradox is

evident. Asylum seekers must self-define as such before making the journey to seek asylum. However, the self-definition frequently does not match with the state definition of an asylum seeker.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter aimed to demonstrate two separate but connected understandings of asylum seeker. The first section demonstrated the construction of asylum seekers via the conventional narratives produced by states both on an international level via the UNHCR, and on a national level, via state policy and concerns. The second section shifted the emphasis to examine how this understanding constructs bogus or illegitimate asylum seekers as the only asylum *seeker* category given that if asylum seekers meet the burden of proof required by states they are instrumentally subsumed into the refugee category. This section also aimed to demonstrate the significant contemporary failings of the refugee and asylum seeker definitions based on the fact that they were constructed as a result of circumstances that were spatially, temporally, and ideologically specific. Finally, in accepting that asylum seekers must self-define in order to seek asylum, this chapter called into question the paradox whereby self-definitions differ from state-definitions and create a permanent category of being in which an individual cannot seek rights regardless of the liberal democratic body he or she is seeking them from. However, the political nature of self-defining as an asylum seeker in order to seek rights is conducive to political agency which at times can expose the extant state-power dynamic.

## **Security and the construction of asylum seekers**

This chapter addresses the irony of immigration discourse in advanced industrialized states: that the insecure of the world are constructed as a threat. I present a theoretical understanding of the security discourses that construct immigrants and asylum seekers into a homogenous unit that is seen as threatening a sovereign state. In these discourses, concern for state security takes precedence over individualistic concern for human rights. Both frontiers and societal identity in the state under threat are protected by the construction of a perceivable “out” group or threatening “other” that legitimizes restrictive policy while reinforcing identity. The security- migration nexus provides a particularly compelling understanding of the experiences of asylum seekers, demonstrating the construction of asylum seekers at the state level in security dialogues while simultaneously raising the question of security to characterize the objective of an asylum seeker.

The first section of this chapter examines theoretically the interplay between critical concepts of security and the development of asylum and refugee law and processes at the state level. I then turn the focus to decentralized and post-colonial readings of security and migration that highlight the utility of shifting the focus from the realities that state discourses produce for states to the realities that state discourses produce for those people who do not have a state-based identity such as citizenship. I begin with a traditional understanding of state security and demonstrate how the processes dealing with asylum seekers have been manipulated to position them as a threat to this conventional conceptualization of security. The production of asylum seekers as a threat is realized through the creation of a fictional collective of asylum seekers with shared negative characteristics, making the threat appear more salient in light of the traditional

notion that states threaten states as unitary actors. I take into account economic security and the implicit contradictions in practice involving economic security: subsistence level security is not a significant part of traditional security studies, yet the economic threat to the EU member states represented by asylum seekers is emphasized. Representation of asylum seekers as an economic threat relies on conceptualization of citizen entitlements and societal security. I apply these understandings of security to the critical concept of societal security, looking at the role of identity in the construction of asylum seekers as a threat, and simultaneously the effect this construction has on perceived asylum seeker identities. The notion of asylum seekers as a collective is particularly significant because characterizing asylum seekers as a homogenous collective makes salient the idea that this collective will ultimately undermine the national identity of European states. Furthermore, such a proposition concurrently constitutes and reinforces the authority of state-based identities,

While critical security literature deconstructs state discourses that constitute asylum seekers as a threat for a more comprehensive understanding of threat production, post colonial perspectives can add additional insight into the underlying dialogues of sovereignty and the fortification of state borders that legitimize state based identities. Much of the post colonial literature situates the contention with state based identities in contested border zones where groups and collectives become “imperceptible,” written out of the post colonial globe due to power relations produced by the colonial organization of the globe and post colonial border lines. Borrowing from the post colonial literature, I shift analysis to asylum seekers within the borders of the European Union. While the asylum seekers do not necessarily occupy a delimited space, they are prevented access to political agency and social participation in Europe. The post colonial literature can offer insight into how individuals become “imperceptible” within

European borders and additionally allows the potential to reconceptualize political agency around non-state-based identities. I offer a review of the insights that critical and postcolonial literatures provide regarding the construction of asylum seekers as a threat. I then move to ontological security theory to demonstrate how this provides an analytical tool capable of furthering a comprehension of the contention between state-based security discourses and a decentered understanding of security, offering insight into the power of state based identities.

The paradox that is evident is, drawing from the previous chapter, asylum seekers are forced by law to seek asylum as individuals. They must self-define as asylum seekers, distancing themselves from a collective and taking on an asylum-seeker identity. The individualistic nature of seeking asylum in common practice prevents group based political agency at the global level. However, states receiving asylum seekers construct asylum seekers into a threatening homogenous unit. Asylum seekers as individuals without political agency cannot enter into a political dialogue with states to fracture this construction.

### **Asylum seekers: collectively a threat?**

Security studies, particularly in US scholarship, have conventionally been state centric, engaging realist assumptions of states operating as unitary actors in an anarchical international system (McSweeney 1999, Smith 2004, Morgenthau 1978, Fearon 1995, Lake and Powell 1999). Security typically refers to a state attempting to assure the continuity of its existence, via a negative conception of security, understood as an “absence of threat” (McSweeney 1999:14). This negative understanding of security underlines the security dilemma in international relations, whereby a state attempts to escalate its security in order to reduce threat, yet in doing so simultaneously becomes understood as a threat by other states. These other states, as rational

actors in pursuit of negative security, escalate their own security measures and the result is an antagonistic, tough realist world (McSweeney 1999, Herz 1950, Jervis 1978).

The conventional security studies approaches emphasize security as “freedom from threat”, a negative conceptualization of security (Fierke 2007, McSweeney 1999, Roe 2010). The state functions as the referent object of security, based on the deduction that a secure state makes a secure population. At the first level this assumes that the state protects the *physical* security of the population inside it, with physical security being necessarily more important than any other form of security (McSweeney 1999). At the second level, state security represents freedom from threats against the existence of the state itself. In this context geopolitics, realpolitik and conflict studies reify the state, which is treated as a unitary actor. This negative conceptualization of security theorizes asylum seekers in the context of the potential threat they apply to the state. The category of asylum seeker is considered an objective status. Because the onus for recognition is on the state rather than the asylum seeker, the recognition of asylum seekers by states is then seen as a political action that could then have geopolitical implications. For example, if the US recognizes asylum seekers from Iran, then the US is making a political statement about the complicity of the Iranian government in persecution of its population. In this context the recognition is a political statement, a use of soft power that could have security implications (Price 2006).

Asylum seekers might also be represented as a security threat, whether to the borders of the state or to the population from within the state. In the latter case asylum seekers might be constructed as a threat to social cohesion or a threat to economic wellbeing among other things. These portrayals of asylum seekers are frequently seen at the state level (Milner 2000, Stedman and Tanner 2003, Lischer 2008, Betts 2009). The relationship between theory and practice

suggests a hermeneutic understanding of asylum seekers in which negative security is theorized by scholars and by political actors. Consequently protecting the population from the threat asylum seekers place on their wellbeing becomes a policy priority. In the former case, in which asylum seekers are represented as a security threat to state borders, the asylum system might be seen as a route into the receiving state that can be exploited by extremists and terrorists (Kanstroom 2004, Miller 2005, Coleman 2007). Thus, the borders are reinforced with policing mechanisms and at times the military; for example, the European FRONTEX force is a European military unit that patrols the border between Greece and Turkey. To summarize, when questions regarding asylum seekers are asked in the context of conventional security frameworks, these questions tend to focus on the implications of asylum policy choices for international interactions, geopolitics, and diplomatic relations at the state level.

Constructivist scholarship in IR shifts the understanding of security and insecurity from an objective observation and a necessary outcome of an anarchical system, to a condition constituted through social relations. That is, “anarchy is what states make of it” (Wendt 1992), and relationships conducive to security *or* insecurity can be developed in the international system. However, critical security scholars have addressed a variety of means of shifting the conception of security, engaging such things as positive security (Huysmans 1998, McSweeney 1999, Roe 2008), human security (Ramcharan 2002, Thomas 2004, Nuruzzaman 2006), security as emancipation (Booth 1999, 2005), and ontological security (Huysmans 1998, McSweeney 1999, Steele 2005, Steele 2008, Mitzen 2006, Roe 2008, Zarakol 2010). Karin Fierke (2007) identifies security as an “essentially contested concept” (ECC). The key to a concept becoming an ECC is the attachment of a moral or ideological element, meaning that the concept resists precise accepted definition. The conventional realist understanding of security can be seen as

ethnocentric as it emerges from Western-centric concerns with state security during the Cold War (Fierke 2007). The ideological element in this conceptualization of security can be understood as preserving (or securing) liberal democracy, capitalism, and the global polity organized around the nation state. For critical constructivists it then follows insecurity as generated by the security dilemma also must be understood as a result of the nation state-based global polity (Campbell 1998, Huysmans 1995, Watson 2011). Identity is established through the nation state system, and the constructed social environment lauds liberal democracy and capitalism. Thus, insecurity is understood as any threat to these elements that are constitutive of identity, rather than a threat to the person. The state and military focus of security scholarship and of security relations in practice serves to constitute the mutual understanding of insecurity and perpetuates the security dilemma not as objective fact but as a relational construct. Reconfiguring security as an ECC allows for attachments to other moral or ideological assumptions; for example, human security attempts to shift the referent object from the state to the individual and includes subsistence security. Thus, it carries an ideological element that challenges current global wealth distribution.

Critical and constructivist conceptions of security can offer insight into the irony that subjects of forced migration are constructed as a threat. As discussed in detail in the previous chapter, asylum seekers must self-define as such, acquiring the title when seeking admission to a state, given that there is no category to establish asylum seekers in motion. In immigration policy “genuine” asylum seekers are distinguished from categories such as “economic migrants,” “bogus” asylum seekers and “illegal immigrants,” all labels that serve to characterize people seeking asylum as illegitimate and undeserving. Here I will first look at how these categories serve as the basis for the construction of asylum seekers as a threat, then I move to understand



how this threat-production obstructs asylum seekers from political and social participation. In this chapter I continue to use the term asylum seeker to cover more broadly those persons who understand themselves to be asylum seekers and are attempting to find protection in Europe, including protection from poverty.

In the traditional understanding of security, particularly in US international relations scholarship, military conflict between states is the primary concern. Rather than thinking in terms of collectives composed of individuals, states are thought to threaten states as unitary actors.<sup>4</sup> The construction of asylum seekers into a threatening homogenous collective allows the threat to be engaged within security discourses. Yet the collective construction of asylum seekers contradicts the liberal individualistic tradition of refugee law that I outline in the previous chapter. It would be difficult to justify restrictive policy based on the characterization of a single asylum seeker as a threat. The fact that asylum seekers are portrayed as a homogenous group creates the illusion of a unitary actor that is compatible with traditional understandings of security. International refugee law was written with individual security and individual rights - particularly of the persecuted person - in mind. The Refugee Protocol definition established five criteria for seeking asylum that discount poverty or natural phenomena. An individualistic interpretation of this definition was adopted into state practice and remains today, primarily as a means of protecting the state from the problem of potential mass influx. No exception to the law of *non-refoulement* was allowed to account for cases of mass influx (Hathaway 2005:358). The conclusion was “states are allowed to deny entry to refugees only in truly exceptional circumstances, and only to the extent truly necessary to protect their most critical national

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<sup>4</sup>While in International Relations scholarship more generally varied approaches that take into account the individual level of analysis have become widely accepted, it is fair to say that Security Studies in US Realism continues to dominate and that paradigm emphasizes the military aspects of security as they pertain to the nation state. McSweeney gives a concise overview of the domination of the state centric approach in US Security Studies in *Security, Identity and Interests: A Sociology of International Relations*, (1999) Ch. 1

interests” (Hathaway 2005: 359). Cases of mass influx from the conception of refugee law were dealt with through the commitment to burden sharing.

However, the floodgates issue has been salient throughout the development of state practice. For example, upon claiming asylum, an individual is required to demonstrate a well-founded fear of persecution. This well-founded fear must show that the persecution is aimed specifically at the individual who is claiming asylum. The perpetrators of the persecution must be aware of the individual in question and there must be reasonable evidence that they will directly target the individual if he or she were to return to the state of origin. In other words, a person cannot claim asylum based on the fact that he or she belongs to a particular religious group only because other members of that religion have been persecuted. The individual must show that he or she specifically is under threat. Conversely, if each individual and his or her circumstances were given consideration in terms of how much he or she singularly threatens the state in which she is seeking asylum, it is unlikely a threat would be apparent; nevertheless, asylum seekers when constructed as a collective create a perceivable threat from a homogenous unitary actor. The negative characteristics then attributed to this actor through representations in public narratives and the mass media further consolidate the contrary image of asylum seekers as a homogenous collective that threatens state interests. The individual asylum seeker that is escaping persecution is undermined by association with this ostensibly threatening actor. Hence, the predominant ontology in US IR scholarship that perceives states as the only relevant actors in international politics perceives this constructed actor as a threat not only to a given state, but perhaps, by its very existence, to the integrity of the state system itself.

## **Asylum seekers and critical conceptions of security**

Critical security studies move away from the priority on the state and the security dilemma in international politics in two directions. Firstly, critical conceptualizations of security broaden security to include themes other than military threat such as threat posed by the environment (Myers 1989, Weber 2006, Hoyden 2006), by poverty (Wallerstein 2004, Smith 2004), or by health (Elbe 2005, Youde 2005), amongst other things. Secondly, critical security studies rethinks the referent object of security, moving away from the state in favour of society (Waever 2005, Williams 2003), individuals (Booth 1991, McDonald 2002), or communities (Booth 1999, Linklater 2005). I will concentrate on three approaches within critical security studies before moving to post-colonial voices in security studies for additional insight into constructions of asylum seekers in Europe. Finally, I will turn to the theory of ontological security to demonstrate the potential for a decentered understanding of security that can take into account non-state-based identities.

The 'Copenhagen school' is one of the main homes of security studies in Europe and focuses on securitization. Scholars affiliated with this school of thought look at security discourses as a means of depoliticizing issues. According to Barry Buzan et al "security is a quality actors inject into issues by securitizing them, which means to stage them on the political arena ... and then to have them accepted by a sufficient audience to sanction extraordinary defensive moves" (Aradau 2004, Buzan et al 1998). The scholars associated with the Copenhagen school look at the political dynamics of threat construction and the use of speech acts to legitimize apolitical decision making. The referent object of security becomes society, rather than state territory

The Aberystwyth school of critical security studies, in the tradition of critical theory, aims to problematize the assumptions seen as self-evident in conventional security. This school posits that security can be understood as a form of emancipation, defined as “the freeing of people (as individuals and groups) from those physical and human constraints which stop them carrying out what they would freely choose to do” (Booth1991:319). While conventional security studies assert that the state provides security for the populations within it, Booth suggests that the state should be treated as “means, not ends” (Booth 1991:319), shifting the referent object of security to the individual or collective victim of “human wrongs” and security is conceptualized as emancipation.

Additionally, the Bordieu and Foucault-inspired approach of Didier Bigo (the ‘Paris school’) looks at power relations and the production of threat through post-structural scholarship and power dynamics (Waever 2004). Here, security discourses are deconstructed in a way that exposes threat production and the corresponding constitution of the protected “inside” of states. The Paris school provides insight into threat creation and the post structural analytical tools supply an understanding of security as a form of disciplinary power that disseminates through the population. Situating security as a form of disciplinary power uncovers the mechanisms of threat production as a cycle of power relations that reproduces itself. In this context, the state can be seen as implicated in the mechanisms of threat creation.

These Europe-based approaches lend themselves to the concern of this chapter that looks at the construction of asylum seekers as a threat. I maintain that a key element of threat-construction is the notion of a unitary actor threatening the state and society within it, in this case a threatening group of “illegal immigrants.” The legal / illegal distinction can be understood through critical works regarding the identity-difference nexus constituting “insides” and

“outsides” of states, which is dealt with in more detail below (Fierke 2007: 37). Additionally, the human rights and emancipation focus offers insight into the nexus between human rights and security that underlies the core questions of this research. The notion of a unitary actor is also compatible to some extent with US security scholarship, which looks at physical threat to a state from a unitary actor, although in this case the threat is not military.

In order to outline this security-migration relationship I begin with the concept of societal security engaged by the Copenhagen school. Buzan emphasizes the need for security discourse to refer to a collective rather than an individual, because “most threats to individuals arise from the fact that people find themselves embedded in a human environment” (Buzan 1991:37). The primary human environment in which individuals exist is the local society, which is in turn part of a larger society, such as a national or religious group. Societal security in Ole Waever’s framework refers to national society in its function as a partial composition of the state (Waever 1993:23). In understandings of societal security, identity as a member of a collective is particularly important because of its constitutive role for society. Buzan describes societal security as concerning “the sustainability, within acceptable conditions for evolution, of traditional patterns of language, culture, and religious and national identity and custom” (Buzan 1991:19). Waever defines societal security as “the ability of a society to exist in its essential character under changing conditions and possible or actual threats” (Waever 1993:23). Thus, identity is fundamentally part of national security if one conceives of society at the national level. The securitization scholarship highlights critical constructivist contentions with the reproduction of the state based power structure. Securitization of issues outside the conventional ambit of security studies further solidifies state power and the perceived legitimacy of the nation state. For example, Watson points to the securitization of health in the movement of people in

and out of Canada, which presents the state as the provider of security against health risks. In this way, incorporating health as a security issue makes space for the state to construct itself as the provider of security against the threat of ill health (Watson 2011). The Copenhagen school offers insight into the securitization of migration and the movement of peoples as a discourse constructing the state as the body that provides security against this threat to identity (Wæver 1993, Huysmans 1998, Williams 1998). The discursive construction of state identity depends on demarcating an inside and an outside with citizens on the inside, and outsiders representing the threat.

An understanding of the identity/security nexus that is relevant to this project is that of the importance of the existence of a perceivable “other” for the constitution of identity; that is, societies are constituted by the fact that they are recognizable from the outside. Part of this is recognizing what they are not. Identity is often constituted through difference (Fierke 2007:77). David Campbell asserts that “difference is a requisite of identity (and) danger is inherent to that relationship” (Campbell 1998:81). Jef Huysmans develops the role of the “other” in the context of security and migration, asserting that “securitizing migration and asylum constructs political trust, loyalty and identity through the distribution of fear and an intensification of alienation” (Huysmans 2006:47). In other words, alienating an “out-group,” especially if that out-group is within the state territory, solidifies the identity of the “in-group.” This phenomenon is apparent in the securitization of migration within the European Union. Furthermore, difference is traditionally hierarchical; for instance, in the example of European discourse, “difference was equated with inferiority and similarity with equality” (Fierke 2007:77). State interests and identity are mutually constituted and “both may be transformed through interaction” (Fierke 2007: 80, McSweeney 1999).

Huysmans argues that the securitization of migration policy in the EU, in particular during the 1990s when debates towards a common immigration policy took place, incorporated the theme that migration was a danger to domestic society (Huysmans 2000, see also Bigo 1994, Den Boer 1994, 1995). The idea of migration as danger or as threat feeds into the understanding of migration as something that states needed to securitize against. Huysmans asserts that security policy is “a way of mediating belonging” and because migration is identified as weakening national tradition and social homogeneity “it is reified as an internal and external danger for the survival of the national community or Western civilization (Huysmans 2000). In other words, migration threatens the very survival of the nation state in terms of its societal identity. Huysmans offers valuable insight into the mechanisms in Europe that have led to immigration policy being made in the security realm. While the state and society internal to the state are understood to be constituted by discursive constructions, Huysmans leaves room for consideration of the effect of these discursive constructions on the subaltern populations that constitute the threat. In other words, Huysmans’s work highlights the construction of immigrants and asylum seekers as a homogenous force that threatens Europe. While Huysmans offers insight into the processes of securitization he creates space to analyze what the effect of this understanding of a homogenous threat is on the disparate individuals that constitute the threat.

If the referent object of security is shifted to individuals within the state or to society, the identity of that society must be securitized against the internal other who is not part of that “in-group”. This securitization is reinforced because the “out-group” is within the physical boundaries of the state. Since the traditional image of securing borders to secure the state is out of the question, the most feasible way to protect societal identity, and so the survival of society

itself, is to maintain a distinction between the “in-group” and the “out-group” within the state. Elspeth Guild discusses the differentiation between citizens and non-citizens in terms of rights, which plays into the concept of “the other.” She asks “why would we need a Declaration of rights both for men and for citizens if there was not an inherent difference between the two” (Guild 2005:107). Her study indicates that non-citizens have fewer rights when it comes to questions of national security because they are seen as untrustworthy. Hence, the non-citizens are conceived as being fundamentally different from citizens, contributing to the construction of the “other.” This understands the in-group and out-group dynamics more generally: rather than the in-group being internal to Europe as in Huysmans’ study, the in-group incorporates all people who possess membership of a state. The out-group then is composed of stateless peoples, asylum seekers, and anyone whose identity is not based on state membership.

If societal security is perceived as dependent on an identity that is sustainable although subject to natural organic evolution, mutually understandable, and objectively verifiable, then the notion of it changing is particularly problematic, especially in light of the conception of security that is focused on continuity and familiarity (McSweeney 1999). The denial of participation in society is represented in asylum law through economic measures and restrictions on personal liberties, as Guild demonstrates. For example, in the UK the freedom to appeal a judicial decision in court is certainly extended to members of society, but denied in immigration decisions (Stevens 2001). This law precludes immigrants from fully entering society, creating a stigmatized “other”. The discussion of identity is strongly related to Foucault’s idea that discourse generates modes of power and exclusion (Fierke 2007). This exclusion is further related to the construction of the other, as “the social space of inside / outside is made possible and helps constitute a moral space of superior / inferior” (Campbell 1998:73). Here I borrow



from the Paris school and Didier Bigo's understanding of the construction of immigrants as a threat. For example, in a 2002 paper, Bigo posits the flow of the security discourse of migration through three levels of diffusion (Bigo 2002). The diffusion begins with the supposition that security problems benefit politicians as the politician can be seen to manage the problem hence strengthening his or her authority. Migration is particularly susceptible to this according to Bigo, because it lends itself to the image of something foreign invading the body. The second level is comprised of people who buy into the problem and reinforce the image such as security professionals, the military, and the police. Bigo asserts that for "the intelligence service and the military, migrants are not a political dilemma but a national-security problem." The image that was a political problem is then a national security problem and like many national security issues, it is adopted by the media, particularly the tabloid media, and fear is disseminated through the population (Bigo 2002). While politicians provide the starting point for Bigo, unalloyed agency should not necessarily be attributed to politicians. They are affected by the views of the populous but are also members of the said populous and so are invested in the particular "fear" that is disseminated. Politicians act on at least two levels: at the desire to be re-elected and at the level of personal concern. As Foucault would have it, they cannot step outside of this normative structure that constructs and maintains power relations (Foucault 1982).

The concept of emancipation provides the principal analytical tool of the Aberystwyth school of critical security studies. Emancipation shifts the referent object of security outside of the state or the society, instead focusing on "ethical communities" (Booth 1999). Rather than thinking in terms of cultural relativism based on the state system, the ethical communities are defined as those who have been subjected to human wrongs. The universal recognition of human wrongs provides us with a tandem universalistic understanding of human rights (Booth 1999:62-

63). However, the definition of Emancipation holds inherent to it an Enlightenment understanding of individualistic liberties. We understand humans as oppressed based on Western liberal conceptions of what oppression looks like and the form of emancipation follows that model. Emancipation offers “a theory of progress for politics, it provides a politics of hope and it gives guidance to a politics of resistance ... Emancipation is the only permanent hope of becoming” (Smith 2005: 42). The analytical tool of emancipation serves to combine human rights and security studies, shifting the focus to individuals or groups who can be considered victims of “human wrongs” and defining security as potential. However, it remains attached to a static conception of threat as composed of human wrongs, which can be identified through appealing to Western liberal human rights. The Aberystwyth school shifts analytical attention from state security to human rights, and allows for relational understandings of security. However, security in this case can be seen to some extent as hierarchical rather than horizontal, given that the agents of emancipation are either Western or bearers of Western ideas (Fierke 2007). This does not mean that the concept of emancipation is inherently oppressive or problematic, but simply that care needs to be taken because the concept itself is a product of unequal relations. Further, adopting the state as the means of acquiring security reproduces the status quo in which individuals or collectives without state-based identities have no means of security.

With regard to the phenomenon of asylum seekers we see the bearers of Western ideas unwilling to recognize asylum seekers who self-define and do not correspond with the refugee definition, which has liberal individualism embedded within it. Thus the unequal power relations reproduce state-based categories of “need” and “human wrongs” provoking the danger that states turning away individuals who self-define as asylum seekers will not be recognized as,

or recognize themselves to be, committers of human wrongs. The category of asylum seeker understood by the Convention definition is limited and the discourses constructing “bogus” asylum seekers remain largely unchallenged. While the actions of states towards undocumented migrants are open to criticism via understanding of human dignity, “bogus asylum seekers” are not understood as composing an ethical community because they already carry the connotation of *unethical* behaviour, that is disrespect for the rule of law that establishes sovereign boundaries and due to the individualistic nature of claiming asylum, they are removed from a community.

The nexus between asylum seekers and state security is that the outside, represented by the “other”, moves to be physically inside the state, which means the values, culture, and identity of society must be reinforced within this context. Conceptualizations of security that take a rights-based approach such as the Aberystwyth school and the human security literature are generally situated in non-Western locations. When the threat is seen as within the Western state, military action would be impossible and ineffective, and sealing the borders militarily would equally be ineffective as the threat has already penetrated the borders. Concurrently, security is focused on securing the state in the context of physical threat, economic threat, and identity threat to the state or the members that compose it. The inverse of that, security for asylum seekers is not considered. The tools of the Aberystwyth school prove inadequate because the act of seeking asylum represents the opportunity of *becoming*. That is, the asylum seekers are “emancipated” and the obstructions to rights in Europe form a separate analytical question that the theory of emancipation does not ask.

In European immigration narratives, the identity of the group that is excluded is responsive to change in the international and domestic environment; the identity of the “other” changes over time in accordance with respective national interests and identity. For example, I

take three categories of threat: physical security, economic provision, and identity. These categories represent different national narratives that gain attention within EU states. The first category of physical security is conventionally part of domestic narratives, and the relationship with immigration has been related to social unrest, particularly in EU states that have seen ethnic and racial violence such as France and Italy (Seljuk 2007, Kennedy 2009, Donadio 2010). Additionally, there has been a resurgence of the relationship between physical security and immigration following a growing focus on terrorism after terrorist attacks in Spain in 2004, and the UK in 2005 (Guild, 2006). Military troops have been deployed at European land borders, for example between Greece and Turkey (Traynor 2010). Following recent migration from North Africa there have been calls to close internal Schengen borders so states can protect their national boundaries.

The second category of security and threat production, economic and subsistence security, features in European security discourses with regard to immigration in the context of the potential strain immigrants might place on the economy. Here the rhetoric of “welfare tourism” is important, and asylum seekers are paired with the notion that they come to take “handouts” from the European states, which ought to protect social welfare and subsistence security for their citizens. The framing of asylum seekers as an economic threat is dominant in the UK and has been present particularly in the tabloid media since the 1990s (for examples see *The Daily Mail*, 8 December 1998, *Daily Record* 16 March 2000, *The Express* 13 December 2002, Innes 2010). The narrative dispersed by the tabloid media suggests asylum seekers are coming to the UK with economic motivations to take something they do not deserve from deserving British citizens.

Finally, identity security is increasingly visible in Europe, particularly with regard to European integration. States prioritize national identity to avoid merging with co-European cultures. In states such as France this has been an important part of national policy for some decades; however, an increased interest in identity is becoming evident across Europe. For example, Britain introduced citizenship classes to the national curriculum in 2002, teaching British students what it means to be British, including civic rights and responsibilities and a unit on British identity (Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency, accessed 2011). With regard to immigration policy more and more states are adding citizenship tests and language requirements to immigration criteria (Lowenheim and Gazit, 2009). The notion is that immigrants who are unwilling to assimilate threaten state identity and therefore are undesirable. Claudia Tazreiter indicates in the words below how the threat presented by asylum seekers is particularly relevant to societal security:

The psychological yearning for a social space defined and able to be controlled within a nation-state *for* members, fosters antagonism toward the stranger who would encroach possibilities for certainty, or the comfort of cultural traditions; a yearning for an idealized past. Those most visible at having encroached valuable social distance are likely to become the target of policy initiatives aimed at national security and ‘sealing’ measures flowing in the opposite direction to economic and political initiatives of co-operation towards transnational, global initiatives. Asylum seekers within the borders of a state, and particularly where they have entered in a clandestine fashion, are a likely target of such measures (Tazreiter 2004:10).

Tazreiter suggests that asylum seekers are particularly problematic because they have encroached upon the ability of a state to confine its resources to citizens. This is relevant to the economic threat and the identity threat represented in public narratives. The presence of the stranger threatens “the comfort of cultural traditions”; the concern is not just for economic factors but for the sense of belonging that should be reserved for members who participate in

cultural traditions and perpetuate them. In this sense, economic security and identity security are interrelated.

### **Post-colonial insights**

The security literature that focuses on a post-colonial decentering steps outside of the dominant security narratives in IR to a greater extent. While the critical security schools attempt to shift the referent object of security or develop analytical tools that reject objectivist state-based understandings of security, the post-colonial literature situates IR security studies into the spatial and temporal narratives that inform a Northern / Western view of the globe and consequently global political narratives. In this sense, a theoretical concern with the territorial aspect of power, and the relationship between sovereignty, territory, and citizenship including how that relationship is performed globally offers additional insight into the security nexus between asylum seekers and the state. Furthermore, post-colonial theory rethinks the conceptualization of security as the absence of threat. Conceptions of the global environment have been constituted through a variety of power relations, in particular those that give precedence to Northern / Western ideas and see these ideas propagated internationally. Understanding security as “absence of threat,” even if the referent object is shifted away from the state, still incorporates a single understanding of existence with an end-goal of removing threat. What composes threat is universalized and suggests a trajectory of action that starts with practice in the least-threatened societies and diffuses outwards. A post-colonial perspective resituates the threat and security nexus to examine the ways in which security for one group of people (for example, citizens of Western states) means insecurity or threat for another group of people (for example, those who do not have a state-based identity). This is a tandem relationship and so suggests interrogating

the conceptualization and practice of security as an extant power relationship privileging one life over another. In the context of this chapter then, constituting state security against a homogenous unitary actor “asylum seekers,” suggests that security for state citizens removes security for the individuals that are disregarded as individuals and seen as a homogenous collective.

David Slater provides a post-colonial critique of postmodernism, suggesting that in postmodernism there is no attempt to anthropologize the west and no need to deconstruct the myths of the west because they are based on rationalism and reason, which are used to justify adopting the economic model of the West for the globe (Slater 2004). Furthermore, for Slater postmodern or critical approaches often fetishize the idea of despair; for example, they carry the implicit suggestion that a “saviour” is needed in the shape of postmodern emancipators who can rebuild and recreate the potential for political power. On the other hand, a post-colonial analysis seeks to recognize the political power that is already there but disguised or oppressed by extant discourses of power and domination in the shape of Western ideas. For instance, Slater tracks the development of discourses of progress, civilization, modernization, development and globalization that both constitute and reproduce the respective roles of the colonizer and the colonized, the centre and the periphery, the globalizers and the globalized (Slater 2004). Through shifting the emphasis with regard to the study of difference, agency, subjectivity, and resistance, the post-colonial project can challenge and destabilize these Western discourses. For Slater, post-colonial analysis adds an ethico-political dimension that is rooted in the critique of colonialism and imperialism, and the revalidation of autonomy and resistance to subordination. The understanding of global politics that divides the globe into territorial nation-states is a manifestation of colonial power that can be destabilized by a post-colonial geopolitical analysis.

One of the principle locales of power that emanates from the West as the colonizer is the geopolitical understanding of the world and spatial identities applied to people. In particular this refers to national identity based on territorial attachment and sovereign government within nation-states. Such a spatial understanding was fixed in Europe as a response to the need to establish a physical sovereignty in addition to the metaphysical sovereignty attributed to the sovereign person and office during the sixteenth century (Hansen and Stepputat 2005). Colonialism then transferred this spatial understanding of sovereign territories elsewhere and established a hierarchy of citizens. Hansen and Stepputat navigate through the role of sovereignty and citizenship and how both relate to formulations of identity. For example, in the modern world the democratic ideal is to vest sovereignty in the people. That way, each citizen personifies national interest which, referring back to the identity – difference nexus, means that the national collective is constituted against what remains outside of it. Thus, citizenship is not simply a legal status, but becomes a larger metaphysical identity represented by the composite of the nation state. Hansen and Stepputat describe the transformation from legal citizenship through the social contract to a collective national identity of “the people” as the crystallization of the state in the people. Following this trajectory, sovereignty is performed through violence, which is exercised against threats. In the colonial world these threats came from abroad, from within, and from those who were not considered ready to be sovereign, that is slaves and colonized people (Hansen and Stepputat, 2005). Thus sovereignty is constituted through sovereign actions oppressing and eliminating freedoms from the bodies that compose threats.

Uncovering the interconnection between territory, sovereignty, and citizenship is central to post colonial analyses. Perera understands space as the “raw material of colonial sovereignty” producing boundaries, hierarchies, zones, enclaves, subversion of existing property



arrangements, categorical classification of people, resource extraction, and manufacturing of cultural imageries. The spatiality that connects people living in “peace” with people living in locations of violent terror is the same spatiality that allows people living in “peace” to remain unaware of the violent or non-peaceful realities within the territorial spaces in which they reside (Perera 2010). Thus, the preservation of security for one group of people simultaneously threatens the security for another group of people. The crystallization of the sovereign state preserves the spatial identities adopted by Europeans in the global North, but non-spatial identities become oppressed as a result of the globalization of Western norms. Non spatial identities fall outside the geographies of reference (Slater, 2004). Asylum seekers in Europe exemplify this issue because they are within the geography of the West, but do not have access to the democratic participation, citizenship, and rights that are emblematic of the West.

Nayak and Selbin underline that conceptualizations of security simultaneously create spaces of insecurity. Creating a positive where security is present also creates a negative where security is absent. When the understanding of security relies on the state then those without state-based identities remain in a zone of insecurity. These zones of insecurity then threaten the secured society: securing the people in zones of insecurity requires developmental action, military action, or migration, all of which are disruptive to established categories of existence that do not comply with the spatial state-based model (Nayak and Selbin 2010). Thus one person’s security becomes another person’s threat. For example, to protect Europe it is necessary to deny the security of all the people who are not permitted entry. To provide for their security would be perceived as a potential threat to the wellbeing of citizens in terms of social cohesion, identity, and access to economic entitlements. Furthermore, to allow open access to

the states of Europe would require reconfiguring the meaning of citizenship in the modern world and would thus threaten the European citizen at the level of existence.

Sovereignty is uniquely threatened by migrants. Nair observes that “state insecurities are constructed in relation to perceived threats to national sovereignty emergent from the unregulated flow of transnational migrants” (Nair 2010:101). This flow cannot be regulated, despite excessive efforts on the part of states. Extensive monitoring efforts are put in place, and the policing of borders is becoming increasingly common using increasingly advanced technology with the aim of making states more secure. Security of states comes at the cost of migrants. For example, low wage migrants are highly vulnerable to actuarial and statistical technologies that establish identities and likely behaviour based on race, class, and gender, which make these characteristics inherent in the reproduction of insecurity. For example, “illegal immigrants” are characterized as a high crime group in the US, based on statistics showing “illegal immigrants” as disproportionately inhabiting prisons. However, for many of these individuals the reason for their incarceration is their status as an “illegal immigrant.” Thus, the identity of “illegal immigrant” as criminal reproduces itself (Miller 2005, Coleman 2007). The same mechanisms apply to reproduce asylum seekers, or given groups of incoming migrants, as undesirable consequently duplicating insecurities or perceived vulnerabilities. Thus, insecurity is a result of the intersection of security and sovereignty, which shapes hegemonic practices around borders and migrant bodies. The experiences of migrants should be understood in a neo-imperial, neoliberal context where border practices reify colonial boundaries and practices of inclusion and exclusion (Nair 2010). These practices then perform the sovereignty that was established around the crystallized European sovereign state.

Much of the post-colonial literature that deals with migration in the realm of security is situated in borderlands, examining the effect of power relations that have constructed the border as such to create insecurity for individuals in specific locations (Perera 2010, Decha 2010, Nah 2007, Toyota 2007, Hortsman 2007, Dean 2007). Drawing in particular on Giorgio Agamben, a second focus looks at how the insides and outsides act upon the person in specific places, particularly within refugee camps (Bigo 2007, Nair 2010, Tagma 2010). In this research I shift the focus to the asylum seeker in Europe. In my analysis I understand space as metaphysical rather than physical. While asylum seekers may be within the territory or physical space of Europe, they are denied political agency and social participation, or access to sociopolitical space. The individual in these circumstances is prevented from accessing social and political participation while having been removed from his or her home community. The role of space with regard to the relationship between borders and sovereignty has been widely studied given that, from the Northern / Western tradition, borders determine spatial conceptions of identity (Biswas and Nair 2010, Ramjaraan and Grundy-Warr 2007, Albert et al 2001). However, the definition of an asylum seeker, as extant in international legal narratives, becomes particularly interesting with regard to spatial identities. First of all the asylum seeker must be physically removed from the locale of his or her spatial identity. While the asylum seeker definition recognizes the five nexus reasons of race, ethnicity, nationality, religion, or membership of a social group the claim itself must be based on individually-directed persecution. Persecution aimed at entire groups is not treated as a valid reason for an asylum claim, based on the concern of creating precedent for an influx, which is detailed above. The asylum seeker must be to some degree excepted from his or her group identity while at the same time the persecution must be based on membership within that identity.

To seek asylum is to deny collective identity and present an individual identity: that of asylum seeker. The process of seeking asylum takes time, varying from a number of months to more than a decade. During this time an asylum seeker is distanced from his or her community identity but not yet permitted to properly enter the social and political space of the state in which he or she is seeking asylum. Moreover, many individuals do not file claims but remain undocumented in order to be safe from expedited deportation. This situates asylum seekers in a social and political “space in between” or situation of “bare life” (Agamben 1999). However, state power constructs collectives of asylum seekers as a threat and refuses to allow participation or entry into the privileged space of the state: not necessarily the physical space, but the social and political space. Therefore, even within European borders and without the firmly delineated lines of the camp, individuals become imperceptible, or considered less than human, based on a social and political condition rather than presence in a physical location. While physically they are within the “West,” my focus is a non-spatial identity that is prohibited access to “the West.” This identity is constructed and maintained as an outsider identity. It can be seen as a product of the Western understanding of sovereignty and citizenship, and imbalanced colonial relations that construct spatial identities. Rather than maintaining individual identities on self-defining as asylum seekers, the individuals seeking asylum are stripped of their identities and take on a new one, simply as an “asylum seeker,” a “bogus asylum seeker”, an “illegal immigrant”, or an “undocumented migrant” with various degrees of negative connotation. However, state based discourses reconstruct this new identity into a homogenous threatening unitary actor that is perceived as harmful to the security of citizens in the receiving state. The nature of seeking asylum simultaneously requires dismissing collective identity. Thus, asylum seekers within the European territory are far from being part of the social and political space of European countries.

Even without the clear limitations provided by analysis within a refugee camp, or on territorial border liners, asylum seekers within Europe are rendered imperceptible and consequently are prevented from accessing the rights they are seeking.

## **Ontological Security**

Ontological security theory can offer unique insight into the processes that construct asylum seekers as a threat via the national narrative. It can also offer insight into the nature of the reproduction of the sovereign state that serves to exclude individuals with non-state-based identities. In this way, ontological security becomes a vehicle through which one can understand the security dynamics that create security for some people while simultaneously creating insecurity for others. Furthermore, the analytical attention ontological security theory gives to the structure-agency relationship can offer particular insight into forced migration. The structure-agency relationship also situates the scholar as an autonomous actor capable of reflexivity (Giddens 1984), meaning that security scholarship contributes to the discourses constructing particular security dynamics. This then demands ethical reflexivity within security studies as a subfield.

Ontological security refers to a core sense of security based in the certainty of the routines and practices of daily life, and a “futural sense” of social life (Giddens 1984:62). Knowledge and autonomy of the self within the routines and practices of daily life is necessary for a sense of ontological security: in this way the theory is established via Giddens’ structuration theory, offering insight into the structure-agency relationship. Rather than portrayed as dichotomous concepts, structure and agency are each affected by, created by, and reproduced by the other. Structure is not a compelling force but is the dynamic in which the

autonomous agent manages his or her actions. Thus, “ordinary day-to-day social life ... involves an ontological security founded on autonomy of bodily control within predictable routines and encounters” (Giddens 1984:64).

McSweeney engages the structure-agency dynamic to investigate the attribution of identity in International Relations. He posits “we can only do security, or do identity, if there is a body of typified actions, mediated by structure, from which to draw in order to make sense” (McSweeney 1999:166). Identities can be configured at many different levels, including states, societies, and other communities, recognizable and produced by social practice. States hold an identity but the impulse of security and the monopoly that states possess over security discourses at the global level means that state-based identities are prioritized. Furthermore, in appropriating security to mean only military security, the state (or the agents within the state that perpetuate such an understanding of security) privileges military security over other forms. . McSweeney argues that if security is our physical survival then security takes a logical priority over other human needs. This is based on the relationship Giddens builds between ontological security and existential anxiety. Ontological security is an internal mechanism of “answering” existential questions, which Giddens divides into four categories, two of which focus on existence and human life and can fall into the realm of physical security. The other two include the experience of others, and the continuity of identity as a biographical narrative (Giddens 1991). Scholars of ontological security have applied these second categories at the state level to offer insight into security relations among states.

Ontological security theory has developed in IR providing insight into state constructions of identity and social relations amongst states (Mitzen 2006, Steele 2005, Steele 2008, Roe 2010) as well as identities within states (Skey 2010, McSweeney 1999), engaging both aspects of the

self, and aspects of social relations. In the international relations literature ontological security is a burgeoning area that has emerged out of political sociology and the constructivist tradition with an emphasis on identity and discourse. Much of the literature in IR has engaged state centric assumptions and taken states as the principal actors. Ontological security can offer insight into state actions through attributing identity characteristics to states, thereby broadening and deepening analyses of security issues. For example, Steele distinguishes between “security as survival” and “security as being” at the state level in which the former relates to physical harm in the face of military threat and the latter relates to a disruption in the identity narrative of the state provoked by behaviour that does not reflect that identity narrative (Steele 2005, also see Roe 2010). Identity characteristics of states might be a product of social relations and constituted through communication between states (Mitzen 2006, Roe 2008), or they might be a product of an identity discourse within a state (Skey 2010, Steele 2008), or of course a combination of the two (Zarakol 2010). While this certainly offers valuable insight into state actions, I look to understand the condition of ontological insecurity of stateless people or stateless communities, which can be considered a consequence of the state understood as the key provider of security.

In the contemporary status quo the state holds agency to make a normative judgment about the security needs of individuals. It follows that individuals without a state based identity are left with little capacity for autonomous agency in questions of security. Rather they must appeal to a state. Roe provides a review of McSweeney’s work, situating his “positive security” as understanding security as a product of social relations grounded in the human individual. While this necessarily excludes natural and environmental threats (McSweeney 1999, Roe 2010) it also challenges the primacy of the state, as the human retains agency to make the normative

judgment regarding his or her security. McSweeney retains the human individual as the referent object of security and asserts:

“To say that security must be grounded in the human individual means that our understanding of the concept must be drawn from a judgment of human needs, not assumed to be so linked and read back into human needs on the basis of state institutional requirements; that our calculation of threats – internal and external – must be referred to the criterion of human needs in the positive, as well as negative dimension” (McSweeney 1999:99).

As discussed above, negative security represents absence of threat, while positive security represents a secure feeling, “the human need for ontological security” (Roe 2010). While Roe suggests that the state should pursue positive security, here I assert that shifting analytical attention to the populations for which the state actively *blocks* positive or ontological security problematizes the role of the state as the security provider. Attention given to the normative ranking of security needs can expose the need for a state based identity to realize security needs. Shifting attention to the persons for whom the state blocks security can then offer a broadened conceptualization of security that retains the human as the referent object and does not rely on the state.

McSweeney deconstructs the relationship between security and identity, demonstrating the potential for ontological security to shift security concerns away from the state in international relations. Furthermore, McSweeney’s work offers a starting point to understand the nexus between citizenship and security at the individual level. When physical security at the state level is prioritized it means the state has made a normative judgment about the hierarchy of human needs (McSweeney 1999:154). In order to maintain a sense of ontological security the autonomy to secure one’s own daily life is necessary (Giddens 1984 63-64). Thus, the individual should retain the autonomy to identify his or her most immediate need when in a



situation of insecurity. If one presumes the security needs of the state are the priority, then one permits the state to make this normative judgment. That may or may not be a huge concern for state members; for example, calls such as “I want my taxes to fund education, not a war” represent a challenge to this hierarchy of needs. However, if non-members of the state are refused entry because of security needs then the state hierarchy acts upon their potential to gain a sense of ontological security. For example, according to current refugee law, states maintain the capacity to make a normative judgment regarding security needs of individuals. The need to be protected from persecution warrants state action in the form of granting refugee status and leave to remain. The need to be protected from poverty does not. Returning to Giddens’ conception of the structure agency dynamic, the distinction is not between forced and voluntary migration because structure constrains the choices of an actor and in both cases the migrant has made a decision to migrate. The distinction is between the circumstances that the individual has fled and in that context the state makes the normative judgment to rank certain human needs below others.

The work on ontological security that engages identity can further inform the understanding of the duality in the role of the state as provider of security and withholder of security. Work on ontological security and shame understands shame as a social phenomenon that can problematize state identities and therefore ontological security (Steele 2005, Steele 2008, Zarakol 2010). Recent work by Zarakol examines identity and ontological security with regard to shame as constituted by intersubjective identities. Zarakol attributes feelings of shame to states because of how they are perceived and constituted from outside. Shame can be generated by reflection within a state on behaviour that does not correspond to the state’s identity narrative (Steele 2005, Steele 2008), and also by how other states and actors characterize a

particular identity (Zarakol 2010). Zarakol refers to early twentieth century Europe in which a shared modern worldview “allowed for those who were labelled as inferior to feel the burn of stigmatization” (Zarakol 2010:11). Zarakol examines how feelings of shame inform state identities by drawing on work in psychology that looks at shame at the level of individual identities. Here, I assert that one can understand the stigmatization that is broadly applied to those who have non-state-based identities and have been rejected by appeals to a state for inclusion and leave to remain in the same way. In other words, an asylum seeker who the state calls “illegal immigrant” may come to reconfigure his or her identity as an “illegal immigrant.” In this context, the theory of ontological security can offer insight into the power of state based narratives of security and identity in maintaining ontological insecurity for those who are outside of the state system. In the following chapters I explore the construction as asylum seekers as a threat in Britain and Greece. The case of Greece is particularly interesting with regard to the national identity narrative. Following that I revisit ontological security at the level of the human individual, offering a reading of human security that disrupts state-based conceptualizations of security.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has examined the literature regarding the intersection of security and migration. Critical security offers insight into security discourses without relying on the state as the referent object of security but incorporating societies and individuals. The formulation of security within this body of literature is not based solely on physical security such as provided by the military, but also looks at economic and subsistence security, and identity security. The post-colonial security literature focuses on colonial power relations that construct and reproduce the

dominant contemporary ideas with regard to territory, sovereignty, and citizenship. The spatial understanding of the world and the nexus between sovereignty and citizenship that is situated within a given spatial territory can be understood as emanating from European history, which colonialism then projected across the globe. The rights-less, less than human individual is constructed as a result of this understanding of citizenship because the citizen is the rights-possessing human individual. A person without citizenship becomes the inverse of the citizen. Colonial identities are hierarchical and rely on a spatial conception whereby identity is configured through territory. Asylum seekers are in a position where they are removed from their community-based spatial identity but denied access to a social and political identity. States then use this lack of identity to reconstruct asylum seekers as a threatening homogenous unitary actor that threatens the interests of the receiving states. The theory of ontological security is a useful analytical tool to understand how the state operates as a producer of insecurity, and how that insecurity is reproduced by the emphasis on the state as the provider of security. In this way the theory of ontological security can bridge the gap between critical security studies and post-colonial scholarship on citizenship and sovereignty with regard to migration.

## The construction of asylum seekers in British discourse

Having considered in chapter two the position of asylum seekers within the configuration of security politics, I move here to examine in detail the case of Britain. In this chapter I look at the discursive constructions that characterize asylum seekers in Britain as a threat, encompassing the idea of a “bogus,” illegitimate, or an illegal presence in Britain that threatens British security interests. Asylum seekers are the insecure of the world and yet in advanced industrialized states they come to be constructed as a threat to national interests. In this chapter, I examine the mechanisms of such a threat construction in Britain.

Didier Bigo theorizes threat construction in society as a set of relations between actors at different levels of the political and security processes (Bigo 2002). Politicians are at the head of this threat construction in which they stand to benefit from being seen to successfully manage a threat. Therefore, to manufacture a threat or to emphasize a particular threat allows them to manage that threat. The second level of threat construction Bigo understands to include security professionals or as Bigo terms them “managers of unease”. This group might also stand to benefit from the particular threat. For example, if migration is posited as a threat then a governmental department might receive funds to deal with this threat, elevating its resources and its importance. Other agencies such as the military or private security companies can also fall into this category. Finally, “fear mongers” are those actors who disseminate the increased fear through the population, such as the tabloid media in Britain (Bigo 2002). Other examples include television media such as news networks, and documentary shows such as *Panorama* in Britain, a well known BBC documentary programme that analyzes important issues of current affairs. The process can be considered cyclical because it is not a neat pyramid of hierarchical relationships. Rather, the agents and managers of fear are embedded within the population

among whom the fear is disseminated. As the fear is disseminated it becomes accepted as self-evident and is further normalized by appearance in popular culture. For example, the television series *24*, which ran from November 2001 until May 2010, represents the appearance of terrorism in popular culture at a time when terrorism was established as an important part of the US national security discourse.<sup>5</sup>

In the study below I demonstrate how the object of fear becomes a self-evident threat that reproduces itself. The object of fear here is asylum seekers, and I maintain the broadened understanding of asylum seeker that I outlined in previous chapters. I incorporate coding for people “seeking to enter Britain illegally” and “failed asylum seekers” who would not be included in the definition of asylum seeker according to the state. I take the view that the creation of these excluded categories plays a part in the construction of asylum seekers as a threat. Of course there are variations and changes over time to the nature of the threat, the actors and agencies involved, and the suggested ways of dealing with the threat. Below, I take the different levels of the cyclical process to carry out a multi-genre critical discourse analysis. I study the production of the discourse at three levels and offer a reading of the construction of threat on the part of actors at each level.

I contextualize the construction of asylum seekers in contemporary discourse within an understanding of the history of immigration policy and the political discourse surrounding asylum seekers, refugees, and migrants in Britain. In the multi genre critical discourse analysis I first consider the political discourse, in the form of speeches of party leaders, and parliamentary

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<sup>5</sup> Brent Steele looks at the appearance of torture in the television show “24” asserting that the dramatization of torture as the only way to guarantee state security then contributes to the reproduction of the acceptability of torture for Americans. The acceptability of torture is manifested in the reality of the use of torture on detained enemy combatants (Steele 2008b). Similarly, in her book *The Dark Side* Jane Mayer suggests that *24* can be understood to have contributed to the construction of the urgency surrounding matters of terrorism (Mayer 2008: 330) and also that the show acted as a source of interrogation techniques for military officials in Guantanamo (Mayer 2008:196).

communications on the topic. The second genre examines the dialogue of security professionals with regard to asylum seekers, looking at reports and documents from the two primary agencies that are responsible for immigration security concerns in Britain, the United Kingdom Border Agency and the Serious Organized Crime Agency. The third category is the media, looking at the most popular newspapers in Britain. The analysis primarily focuses on tabloid press. The tabloid press receives a wide readership in Britain; out of the six most-read newspapers in Britain five of them are tabloids, with the most-read news source being *The Sun*.<sup>6</sup>

### **Contextualizing contemporary discourse**

The experiences of refugees in Britain can be traced back to the Huguenots and other Protestant religious refugees seeking safety from religious persecution in the Sixteenth Century. While the long history of immigration and nationality law affects political interactions with refugees and asylum seekers, here the analysis will begin in the 1930s, as this was the period during which international law conceptualized refugees and states started to meet the needs of refugees as an international obligation.

During the 1930s the UK accepted substantial numbers of Jews fleeing German Nazism, and, following World War II, accepted people either fleeing Eastern European communism or people who were unable to return to their Eastern European homes. As a liberal state, receiving people who were fleeing communism was in the national interest as it reinforced the positive associations of liberal government. However, the colonial history of Britain also affected immigration policy. With decolonization in motion, many citizens of the British Empire migrated to the UK. Nationals of commonwealth countries were not offered asylum but instead

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<sup>6</sup> National Readership Survey 2010-2011, *The Sun* is a tabloid that is generally conservative, although it notably changed its party allegiance prior to the 1997 election. It has an average daily readership of 3million.

“exceptional leave to remain”. Oftentimes, immigrants from former colonies held British passports leaving Britain with a complex system of entitlements to nationality and leave to remain.

During the 1940s to the 1960s the policy of granting leave to remain for citizens of British colonies and former colonies was adapted following discourses of “mass influx” from African, West Indian, and Asian colonial subjects. In the mid 1960s a voucher system was introduced that was aimed at “keep[ing] the rate of coloured immigration within acceptable bounds” (Paul 1997: 171). Theresa Hayter examines motivations for this policy, looking at racism within British society and the consequential effects on racist immigration controls. For example, Hayter cites parliamentary documents in which blacks in Britain are blamed for provoking crimes of racist violence against blacks in Britain. According to Hayter’s analysis, the responsibility for violent crime was attributed to the presence of blacks rather than to the racist perpetrators. The logic cited suggests that if black immigrants were not present in Britain the violence against them would never have taken place, thus black immigrants are the cause of escalating crime. A connection is established between race, immigration and crime, initiating a security discourse that constructs immigrants as a criminal threat to domestic security. The posited solution was to restrict the immigration of blacks into Britain rather than addressing the racism apparent in the white population during the 1960s and 1970s (Hayter, 2004).

In the 1970s and 1980s, further restrictions saw a focus on *who* was eligible to enter Britain, with labour immigration only marginally restricted. However the restriction that was enacted comprised a visa programme that privileged white Europeans over immigrants from former colonies in Africa, Asia, and the West Indies (Geddes 2003). Humanitarian immigration processes fell under the guidelines of the 1971 Immigration Act and there was no distinct asylum

policy until the early 1990s. Asylum categories were then developed during the early 1990s that restricted the liberal policy that had been applied to Eastern Europeans fleeing communism (Geddes 2003). After the collapse of the Soviet Union it was not in the interests of the liberal states to permit entry, as refugees were no longer comprised of political opponents to communism. Furthermore, the identity of liberal democracies that had relied on an opposition to communist authoritarianism was in flux. The interests in advanced industrialized states changed, as did the profile of the refugee. There was no longer anything to be gained politically from a liberal entry policy given that liberalism no longer appeared threatened by communism. The illiberal Soviet Union had collapsed and so the positive characteristics of a liberal identity no longer needed to be emphasized.

Separate asylum and refugee processes were implemented in the early 1990s as a response to growing numbers of arrivals. These policies have since become increasingly restrictive and gradually more securitized in the UK. The 1993 Immigration and Asylum Act in Britain aimed to reduce the growing backlog of asylum applications and to deter so-called “bogus” asylum seekers (UK Parliament 1993). Subsequent acts have repeated and reinforced these aims, emphasizing the goal of deterring “bogus” asylum seekers. The first immigration legislation that New Labour implemented after taking office in 1997 was the 1999 Immigration and Asylum Act. A principal element of this bill that has shaped asylum seeker experiences in Britain is the forced dispersal bill. This bill promulgates that asylum seekers are to be dispersed into assigned housing across the country with the intention that no concentrations of asylum seekers should develop. The Home Office, which is responsible for the dispersal programme does not take the preferences of asylum seekers into account, meaning that if an asylum seeker



would like to remain with family or join a familiar community it is not factored into the government decision making procedures (UK Parliament 1999).

In the late nineties New Labour published a White Paper entitled *Firmer, Faster, Fairer*, which characterized the party's stance on immigration. This White Paper casts suspicion on asylum seekers as being economically motivated and making fraudulent asylum claims with the intention of accessing the British welfare state. Alleged real-life examples are used to demonstrate failed asylum seekers whose story is "a tissue of lies" making repeated appeals in order to stay in the country longer (New Labour 1998: 1.4). Furthermore, the White Paper claims that "illegal" migrants arrive "with no legitimate source of income and resort to crime to survive", casting the migrant as a potential criminal (New Labour 1998: 1.18).

The Home Office published a second white paper in 2002, entitled *Secure Borders, Safe Haven*, and this established a linkage with questions of national security. The 2002 white paper connects the idea that the asylum system is vulnerable to fraud with the need to strengthen the borders and to keep incoming migrants out. Don Flynn points out that, despite the positive rhetoric of the benefits of diversity in the introduction to the White Paper, the White Paper understands "migration as a dire threat to British society, rather than its modernizing salvation" (Flynn 2005:473). The situation portrayed is one of a large pool of criminal migrants who threaten UK interests and provoke the need for restrictive measures. Both the concern that migrants are motivated by the welfare state and the notion of criminal migrants are reflected in subsequent legislation.

The Nationality, Immigration, and Asylum Act of 2002 removed the option of asylum seekers receiving welfare unless they are receiving housing. To receive benefits an asylum seeker must accept government provided accommodation and remain in that accommodation,

accepting the location to which he or she is dispersed. Both Doty (2003) and Stevens (2004) address the dispersal programme, looking at the idea that the government wants to be aware of the whereabouts of asylum seekers at all times. Such a way of policing asylum seekers and managing their whereabouts contributes to the construction of asylum seekers as a suspect population. Additionally, the increased observation differentiates migrants from British society, and the position of asylum seekers on the margins of British social life is perpetuated.

The policing of the immigration system and of asylum applicants in particular is taken further by the 2002 Act, which authorizes government agents to enter and search an asylum seeker's place of residence at any time, further separating the experiences and rights of asylum seekers from the experiences of citizens or even those who immigrate in any other status (Doty 2003). Further to this, the 2002 Act initiated the creation of asylum seeker accommodation centres. These centres provide for the needs of the asylum seekers as determined by the government. Accommodation in these centres lasts from nine months to one year and institutionalizes the immigrant, separating him or her from the rest of society. This essentially puts an asylum seeker through a normalization programme before he or she is allowed access to the rest of British life. The asylum seekers are under more intense surveillance than the population because they are perceived as outsiders. The security element extends to the asylum seekers through a suspicion engendered within society. They are excluded from the normal societal institutions and have their own separate institutions provided, to protect society from being overwhelmed by the perceived influx. Stevens describes the accommodation centres as different from detention centres, or removal centres as they are now known. In asylum seeker accommodation centres the residents are not detained, but do have to meet requirements reporting their whereabouts. The centres provide "full board accommodation, access to health

care, religious facilities, education, interpreters, and legal advice, plus anything else the Secretary of State decides ought to be provided for ‘proper occupation’ or ‘maintaining good order.’” The idea that asylum seekers must be separated from the population in order to maintain order plays into the view that societal security represented by society’s ability to reproduce itself would be fundamentally disrupted by the incomers. Children of asylum seekers are educated within the accommodation centres “to prevent them ‘swamping’ local schools” (Stevens 2004, citing former Home Secretary David Blunkett). Again this demonstrates that asylum seekers are differentiated from the remainder of the population and emphasizes the idea that social stability is disrupted by asylum seekers. A special report by the Institute of Race Relations in 2000 discusses how the framing of the discourse in terms of “swamping” or “flooding” creates a negative perception in the population and incites fear. Rather than framing the dispersal process in positive tones of diversity and multiculturalism, the discourse engenders a culture of fear and suggests that asylum seekers need to be dispersed to avoid overwhelming the local populations. The notion of “swamping” suggests that large numbers of incomers will undermine societal security by disrupting societal reflexivity, that is, the ability of society and social practices to reproduce themselves and be reproduced by the members of society thus establishing a recognizable social and national identity (Waeber 1993). Asylum seekers are a “managed” population that is separate and distinct from the British population. They are in the physical territory of Britain but cannot participate in British daily life.

The question of access to social benefits is raised within the legislation as the idea that asylum seekers are economically motivated arises. In terms of social benefits, the 2002 Act rolled back entitlement and tightened the mechanisms of accessing benefits for asylum seekers. It introduced the stipulation that one would only be able to access benefits if the claim for

asylum was made “as soon as reasonably practical”. While the wording remains subjective, Stevens points out that the wording appears to have been interpreted to mean “immediately on arrival” (Stevens 2004). If an asylum seeker does not make their claim to asylum known immediately upon arrival then they are often considered to have missed the period in which they can access support.

The policing that appeared in the 2002 act was extended in the Asylum and Immigration Act 2004, which further narrowed the potential for appeals and more importantly created criminal sanctions for those who arrive without travel documents. The attachment of criminality to immigration becomes further solidified in subsequent acts, making asylum seekers not just suspect characters, but potentially criminal. The Immigration, Asylum and Nationality Act 2006 made some changes to the appeal process, allowing for two opportunities to appeal an immigration decision, one at the time of decision and a second after the decision to remove the applicant. This act also introduced the right for immigration officers to require examination through biometric methods such as fingerprinting. The UK Borders Act of 2007 increased immigration officers’ powers of detention, search and arrest, replicating the pattern of criminalization in immigration law and the introduction of policing powers at the borders. The Criminal Justice and Immigration Act of 2008 solidified the relationship between crime and immigration in legislation, and the immigration aspects of this act refer particularly to “foreign criminals” and designate special immigration status to those detained or convicted of a crime.

The most recent immigration bill was the Borders, Citizenship, and Immigration Act of 2009, which emphasized selective migration and earning the right to stay. A main function of this Act was to reform the appeals process into a single option of appeal with heavy restrictions. It also implemented the requirement that a foreign national submit to a medical examination on

entry, if requested. Measures such as the medical exam in this act further separate asylum seekers from British society, directing suspicion towards bodily health and creating the idea that people from outside of Britain bring with them the risk of disease. In this context, asylum seekers are understood as outsiders who might threaten the health of society, or who might take advantage of the healthcare institutions consequently threatening the economic and physical welfare of society.

While the policy represents increasing restrictions aimed at preventing asylum seekers from reaching Britain, the question of asylum seekers and “illegal immigrants” has increasingly appeared in popular culture, creating a national awareness that does not just rely on policy documents and the news media. This demonstrates the reproduction of the discourse in everyday life. IR and popular culture is a burgeoning research area (Grayson et al 2009). Existing work has examined the appearance of asylum seekers in contemporary film; for example in Steven Frear’s 2002 film *Dirty Pretty Things* (Gibson 2006). Television programming has been studied less consistently than film; however, a brief look at recent programming shows that migration has appeared in current affairs programmes and also in soaps, which claim to represent British everyday life. For example, BBC current affairs show *Panorama* aired various episodes regarding immigration and asylum over the last decade, including episodes on February 7, 2000 and July 23, 2003, September 10, 2007, and July 14 2008 that focused on asylum seekers; an episode about irregular economic migrants on April 24, 2005; an episode about the customs and excise agency on March 23, 2005; an episode about border security on December 4, 2006; an episode on May 21, 2006 about the deportation of foreign criminals; an episode about immigration to Britain in general on July 23, 2007; an episode looking at fraudulent marriages on March 24, 2011; and an episode on June 16, 2011 that focused on illegal migrants travelling to

Britain.<sup>7</sup> This clearly shows that immigration and asylum concerns appear in the British national discourse that is not limited to political legislation or the news media.

Some of the most-watched television programmes in Britain are nationally broadcast soaps by the BBC and ITV. There has not been a study that looks specifically at asylum seekers and migrants in British soaps, yet the reproduction of social discourses in the television medium has been a central focus of the Cultural Studies discipline (Hall 1981). It is generally accepted that soap audiences prefer content that is culturally proximate and reflects their immediate surroundings (Castelló 2010, see also Straubhaar 1991, Dunleavy 2005, La Pastina and Straubhaar 2005). In recent years, immigration themes have appeared in British soaps; for example, BBC soap *Eastenders* broadcast a storyline about an illegal immigrant from Nigeria in 2010-2011. ITV's *Coronation Street* broadcast an illegal immigration storyline in 2007; and the less-popular soap offered by Channel 4 *Emmerdale* featured an illegal immigration storyline in 2009. These television programmes represent British culture and frequently receive the highest numbers of viewers.<sup>8</sup> The storylines featured can be considered influential and influenced by the national discourse on these different themes. The storylines establish the reality of “illegal” immigration in Britain and reflect the fact that immigration is a topic of national concern.

### **Political discourse**

I analyze the discourse of British policy makers and officials with regard to asylum seekers and migrants coming to Britain to get an idea of the construction of security. I code data from 2008 until the present. I begin with some predetermined codes relating to security because I do not expect to observe the origin of the concept in the limited time frame I analyze, given the

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<sup>7</sup> Source: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/panorama/hi/default.stm>

<sup>8</sup> Figures from the Broadcasters Audience Research Board ([www.barb.co.uk](http://www.barb.co.uk))

history and development of British immigration law over recent decades. The idea of the securitization of immigration does not emerge spontaneously but has been built and reproduced over time, combining discourses of economic threat and criminal threat which is then translated into a discourse of border protection. The predetermined codes I used were “state security,” “terrorism,” “suspicious / bogus,” “illegal / criminal,” and “threat” which I divided into three subcategories: economic, physical (relating to crime), and identity which I also interpret as social and societal cohesion. I also open coded, adding categories “responsibility”, “limiting access” and “separation / difference”. The data I code include the party conference speeches of party leaders for Labour, Liberal Democrats, and Conservatives from the years 2008, 2009, and 2010. These speeches are designed to clarify the party position on the current issues and the party strategy for the upcoming year. I code Standard Notes of the House of Commons over the years 2008-2011 on any aspect relating to asylum seeker policy. These standard notes are designed to communicate the content of legislation and committee debates to the members of parliament “in support of their parliamentary duties.” I understand these to be a means of communication between policy makers and therefore representative of the generalized discourse used on this topic. Many different perspectives are summarized in these documents; they are non-partisan and frequently present the findings of focus groups and research think-tanks. I considered them appropriate because I want to examine the discourse that is generally uncontested and considered “common ground” rather than an ideological position (Van Dijk 2003). Finally, I include parliamentary debate data from the debates regarding the most recent immigration legislation. I include this as a representation of the current discourse in parliament. I studied these documents carefully for wording that communicated characteristics of asylum seekers and policy motivations with regard to asylum seekers.

The most frequently occurring themes at the level of political discourse in Britain were “illegal / criminal”, followed by “bogus / suspicious.” The frequency of the “illegal / criminal” code points to the trend of criminalizing immigration law in Britain. The code “threat” is also prevalent, with more than half of the excerpts coded as “threat” pointing specifically to an economic threat. Economic threat encompassed all excerpts pointing to a strain on social services caused by destitute migrants (see table 3.1 summarizing the data in the Appendix).

Other codes that occurred frequently although not as prevalently as the above-mentioned were “state security”, “limiting access” and interestingly the idea of “responsibility” or earning the right to remain in Britain. The idea of responsibility in immigration legislation is something relatively new in that it does not feature heavily in the existing legislation but is becoming increasingly prevalent in the discourse represented in debates and speeches. It symbolizes a shift from labelling immigrants as “bogus” or as people intending to cheat the system, to a much broader burden of proof for all incoming migrants to actively demonstrate that they are responsible individuals who will not become a burden on the state due to their possession of desirable characteristics, in order to earn the right to remain. This is interesting in the context of existing literature on governmentality, as it demonstrates the emphasis on a shift of responsibility from the state to the individual (see Amoore 2006, Lowenheim and Gazit 2009, Lowenheim 2007, Salter 2008, Stenson 1999). This shift has been observed in other immigration related practices, most notably the incorporation of citizenship tests (Lowenheim and Gazit 2009).

- *Illegal / criminal*

The idea of illegality creates a broader public perception of incoming migrants as criminals. Things such as detention, fingerprinting, photography for facial analysis, extensive requirements for registration, and observation applied to migrants increases the understanding of



the migrant as criminal. There is some distinction between “foreign criminals” and asylum seekers in the political discourse but because of rulings of criminal behaviour and criminal convictions for immigration fraud, the idea of who is considered a foreign criminal is becoming broader. For example, in the parliamentary discourse it is emphasized that it is “a criminal offense to enter the UK in breach of a deportation order.” Thus, a person who might not have engaged in any other criminal act in his or her life can become categorized as a foreign criminal. The rhetoric of criminality and harsher penalties are justified by the following objective: “We want to signal that criminals and cheats are not welcome and highlight the consequences to those who abuse our hospitality” (The draft Immigration Bill and simplification of immigration law, Standard Note, January 4, 2010). There is concern that the public will perceive the act of granting leave to remain to long-term cases as “rewarding criminal behaviour.” This concern is buttressed by the fear that an amnesty for long term cases will create an incentive for more unlawful entries, or “criminal behaviour.” Where the political discourse links the idea of a criminal offense to that of an immigration offense it creates the notion of migrants as criminals. Broadly the political discourse plays into public fears of crime, suggesting that if migrants are willing to commit immigration “crime” then they are likely to participate in other crimes.

- *Bogus / suspicious*

The idea of “bogus” asylum seekers was prevalent in the late nineties and early 2000s. While the term “bogus” does not appear to be used quite so frequently in recent parliamentary documents, the idea of suspicion surrounding those who make asylum claims is still apparent. Thus, in this section I coded statements and policies that suggest the state needs to be vigilant, casting suspicion upon asylum seekers and suggesting they are untrustworthy characters, in addition to the more direct language regarding “bogus” asylum seekers. Within the

parliamentary documents there are reminders that “criminals and cheats are not welcome” and the documents reinforce the desire to exclude people who “abuse the system”. The parliamentary documents outline the extended powers of surveillance attributed immigration officers, which are needed to observe “suspicious” asylum seekers and prevent them from evading their responsibility to report to immigration authorities.

A particular practice that constructs asylum seekers as suspicious is the decision to provide store cards rather than cash benefits. Through the cards the government can control where the asylum seekers shop (the cards are only accepted at certain shops), how much money they can spend each week because the money that is added to the card cannot be carried over week to week, and what products they buy since certain items are restricted. For example, the cards cannot be used to buy alcohol, and cannot be used to buy items that are neither consumable nor toiletries, such as clothes. The use of cards then reflects the idea that asylum seekers within the borders are a suspect or irresponsible population that cannot be trusted with cash. Asylum seekers outside of the borders are constructed as a population that is intent on raising money and will be attracted by the “pull factor” of cash handouts.

- *Threat (economic)*

There is a clear emphasis on the idea of asylum seekers presenting an economic threat to Britain, given the number of references to the strain placed on public services caused by asylum seekers. For example, a recent document (Immigration and asylum policy: the Government’s plans, Standard Note, June 27, 2011) points to pressure on “key public services such as schools, the health service, transport, housing and welfare.” The same document illustrates the need to “protect” public services through capping immigration. There are some references to employment but the most obvious focus is on limiting access to the welfare state. It is

acknowledged in places that the government has created greater pressure on local social services through reducing support and stopping entirely the support of those who are considered “failed” asylum seekers, leaving them entirely dependent on the goodwill of different charitable organizations. It is acknowledged in this document that migration is beneficial for the economy. The idea is to attract the right type of immigrant and to limit access for those who are seen as undesirable. The document emphasizes that public perceptions in general believe migrants as undeserving and the public understands migrants to put unnecessary pressure on services that should be reserved for tax-paying citizens. Politicians appear to follow public opinion and limit access to social welfare for migrants. Current rules do not permit asylum seekers to work while their cases are in progress and consequently they are dependent on social welfare. As a result asylum seekers become a target group to limit. The lack of permission to work and the subsequent scape-goating as a strain on benefits means that asylum seekers come to be seen as the “wrong” type of migrant, possessing undesirable characteristics. Thus, arguments that call for limits on provisions for asylum seekers come to reproduce themselves.

### **Security Professionals**

Security professionals are at the second level of Bigo’s three-level threat construction thesis. Security professionals have the responsibility of analyzing and managing threat. The main professional body that deals with migration in the UK is the UK Border Agency (UKBA). The UKBA was created at the beginning of the 2008 financial year, merging three existing agencies: the Border and Immigration Agency, UK Visa, and part of Her Majesty’s Revenue and Customs. The UKBA states that it “protects the UK borders, and is one of the largest law enforcement agencies in the UK” (UKBA.gov 2011). The agency’s focus on security and law enforcement

means that the question of “illegal immigration” is of course at the forefront of this agency. In this context “illegal immigration” is linked with state security.

The objective of the UKBA is to secure the border and reduce net migration. UKBA puts forward three principal strategic objectives: “1) protect our border and our national interests; 2) tackle border fraud, smuggling, and immigration crime; 3) implement fast and fair decisions. The emphasis on immigration crime is established by UKBA’s partnership with the Serious Organized Crime Agency (SOCA). According to the website, “SOCA tackles serious organised crime that affects the UK and our citizens. This includes Class A drugs, people smuggling and human trafficking, major gun crime, fraud, computer crime and money laundering” (SOCA.gov.uk). The objectives of SOCA implicate immigration interests because serious organized crime includes people smuggling and human trafficking. While there is certainly a connection between the work of SOCA and immigration, it is interesting that SOCA partners UKBA, rather than an organization with a different set of objectives. For example, UKBA could be partnered with an organization that provides welfare and health services, or an organization that focuses on cultural acclimatization. The partnership of SOCA and UKBA underscores threat and security as the core concern of UK immigration.

To analyze the discourse of security professionals I used the annual report of UKBA from the year of its creation (2008-2009) until the most recent report which covered the period April 1, 2010 – March 31, 2011. To represent the voice of SOCA I used two publications that specifically focused on “immigration crime”, rather than any of the other types of crime that SOCA deals with. The first is a guide for lorry drivers regarding securing the vehicles against crime, in particular against clandestine passengers seeking to enter the UK. The second is a section of SOCA’s informational report that deals with “organized immigration crime”.

The code categories I used were the same as those for the political discourse. Here, the most frequently occurring code was “illegal / criminal” followed by “state security”. This is not surprising given that the purpose of these agencies is to provide security against threats. Drawing attention to threat will of course elevate their importance and consequently their funding. The emphasis on threat is therefore in part to secure the continued existence of these agencies. At this level of threat construction security professionals emphasize risk and it is in their interests to do so, as risk ensures the need for security professionals.

The third most frequently occurring code was “limiting access”. Threat was frequently coded although for the most part the focus was on threat as opposed to a specific type of threat. Hence, I coded the base category of threat frequently, but did not specify the particular form as economic, social, or physical. Furthermore, the code “bogus / suspicious” appeared almost as frequently as threat, which suggests that these qualities are considered a point of concern for security agencies (for a full summary see table 3.2 in the Appendix).

- *Illegal / criminal*

The excerpts that I coded as illegal / criminal were not always directly associated with asylum seekers but for the most part related to people attempting to enter the UK without inspection. The security agencies link the act of attempting to enter without inspection to more serious crimes. For example the UKBA establishes its objective as follows: “the agency prevents drugs, weapons, terrorists, criminals, and would-be illegal immigrants reaching the United Kingdom” (UKBA Annual Report and Accounts 2009-2010). Here, “would-be” illegal immigrants are included in the this list of things that generally represent serious crimes. The first annual report of UKBA clarified the main motivation as alleviating the threat presented to Britain by people entering illegally. The agency also establishes its role in reducing organized

crime through preventing people entering the UK illegally. Here immigration crime is attached to other forms of organized crime, with migrants who evade inspection constituting a suspicious population that is associated further with criminality.

SOCA's document defining organized immigration crime incorporates "attempts by illegal migrants to enter the UK using false documents" (SOCA "The United Kingdom Threat Assessment of Organized Crime 2009-10). The suggestion here is that there are pre-existing illegal migrants who are waiting for the chance to enter the UK illegally. A person can only be considered an "illegal immigrant" by law *after* he or she has made an illegal entry. However, SOCA's statement suggests that people are illegal migrants before they have entered Britain. Furthermore this statement suggests that people who are using false documents are automatically illegal migrants. However, a person who intends to make an asylum claim is unlikely to have travel documents given that travel documents are issued by national governments and even according to the conventional limited definition an asylum seeker is fleeing persecution by the government or an agent the government is unwilling or unable to control. In other words, the statement by SOCA assumes a person is an illegal migrant before he or she has attempted to enter the UK. SOCA also published a "lorry crime prevention booklet" that suggests ways to stop criminals gaining access to freight lorries for means of clandestine entry. In this case, the potential migrants are referred to as "criminals" who are waiting to break into vehicles. One can make the case that breaking and entering is a crime; however, this does not account in any way for the circumstances or context that has lead an individual to be desperate enough to enter the UK that he or she is willing to risk his or her life to do so. Rather, any individual attempting to do so is labelled as a criminal who must be prevented access. The idea of people who enter illegally being criminal individuals who engage in further crime once in the UK is put forward

by SOCA; for example, “Organised immigration crime is an enabler of other types of organised crime, providing a ready workforce to work in criminal sectors” (SOCA “The United Kingdom Threat Assessment of Organized Crime 2009-10). While this may be factually or statistically true to an extent, using this argument to prevent entry at the borders implies that a band of criminal migrants is threatening the integrity of Britain. Structural social and economic factors within Britain are ignored. For example, the reduction of access to benefits and the removal of support for “failed” asylum seekers leaves individuals with little choice other than entering the irregular workforce.

- *State security*

State security is a clear emphasis of these agencies, which is unsurprising given that they are security agencies. The first objective of the UKBA is to secure the border and the majority of excerpts in the category of state security regard the protection of the border, protection of the public, and the protection of national interest. I coded excerpts that referred directly to the protection of the borders of the citizenry as state security. In other words, I considered state security any reference to the physical territory of the state or the physical wellbeing of the people considered members of the state, in line with conventional “negative” security (McSweeney 1999, Roe 2010). The UKBA annual report describes the duties of immigration officers. The report uses rhetoric that reflects a tough, realist conceptualization of security; for example, it describes immigration officers as “front line staff”. It also elaborates on powers of surveillance and intelligence-gathering to protect the border, which established the notion of threat associated with the border. Furthermore, the UKBA report frequently groups together the words “terrorism, crime, and illegal immigration” to characterize the threats posed to the UK, establishing the need for border forces to be constantly vigilant. The area that generates the most discussion in these

documents is that of “illegal immigration”, reflected in the frequent appearance of the “illegal / criminal” code. Thus, one might assume on reading the documents of security professionals that “illegal immigration” poses the biggest threat to the UK.

The e-borders initiative is raised frequently in UKBA documents. This initiative requires individuals to register online prior to travel, allowing the UKBA to carry out a number of checks on them. This initiative gives the UKBA surveillance power over people planning to come to the UK. E-borders allows for the agency to check passengers before they begin their journey. To some degree the e-borders programme undermines the asylum system. A person who intends to seek asylum does so at the border or once inside the state. The e-borders programme aims to prevent “undesirable” people, those without permission to enter, to even reach the border. Asylum seekers do not generally go through visa processes, and often travel without documents. Thus, they will be prevented from boarding an aeroplane or a ferry under the e-borders programme.

### **Fear Mongers**

The fear mongers represent the voice that disseminates generalized fear across the population. I consider the British tabloid press to be representative of this voice. Tabloids in Britain are more frequently read than their broadsheet counterparts. I coded the six most-read newspapers in Britain and five of these were tabloids, the sixth (fifth in readership rankings) was conservative-leaning broadsheet, the *Daily Telegraph*. The language of the typical tabloid is simple and straightforward, making tabloids accessible to the majority of people. In fact tabloids were originally intended to be a voice accessible to the working classes (Conboy 2006). The contents are generally known to be sensationalist, focusing on “the bizarre, the lewd, sex,



suppression fees, cheque book journalism, gossip, police news, marriage and divorce, royal news, celebrities, political bias, and any kind of prurience that can be included under the general heading of human interest” (Conboy, 2006:12). Tabloid contents are dramatic, emotive and generally entertaining, which explains why they are so popular, characterized by drama rather than news. The tabloids also function as promoters of national identity. Conboy examines the assertion of national identity in the tabloids through the continued construction of an inside and an outside. He describes this type of othering as endemic to the British tabloids, concluding that the cohesion of the British “insider” group is constructed by the repeated exclusion of a variety of outsiders and “within the general context of the national focus on the tabloids, provides a further core of identification for readers” (Conboy 2006: 121). Tabloids can be seen as a vehicle for the construction of national identity and therefore national security is a common concern to be raised.

I coded articles that incorporated the terms “immigra\*” or “asylum seeker” and “security” for the years 2008 to the present from the six most-read newspapers in Britain, all but one of which are tabloids. According to Bigo’s theorized circle, the role of the tabloids is “fear mongers” and I expected the sentiments of the two previous groups to be replicated. This tended to be accurate, with the most frequently occurring codes being “threat”, predominantly economic; “illegal / criminal”; “bogus / suspicious”; and “state security”. Also of note were the occurrences of “terrorism” and “physical” threat. I also observed a new category, which I added to my existing codes, where asylum seekers were portrayed as typical malcontents who are dissatisfied with the goodwill of Britain (for a full summary see table 3.3 in the Appendix).

- *Threat (economic)*

The economic threat portrayed is generally linked to the welfare state and other social and public services that should be reserved for “deserving” British citizens. This reflects the rhetoric observable in government documents regarding the idea of earning the right to be in Britain. Thus excerpts such as the following portray asylum seekers as a drain on the economic wellbeing of Britain, as well as possessing characteristics of laziness and dishonesty: “Born in Bethlehem, 44-year-old Qatada arrived in Britain in 1993 on a forged United Arab Emirates passport. He claimed asylum and, within a year, was granted refugee status. Weighing 20 stone and claiming incapacity benefit for a bad back, father-of-five Qatada is a drain on the welfare state” (James Slack, *Daily Mail*, April 10, 2008). This quote presents a negative view of an asylum seeker, emphasizing a man who is overweight, has health problems and does not work. The grounds for which he was given refugee status are not cited and the overall effect is that he is characterized as undeserving and a drain on British resources. This is despite the fact that he has been positively recognized as a refugee and has the right to be in Britain. A second example portrays asylum seekers as malcontents who are dissatisfied with the provisions the government have given them (*Daily Mail*, August 19, 2011). This similarly emphasizes the economic burden on British taxpayers. Further to that, the idea is raised that to supply asylum seekers with housing and social benefits *takes away* social benefits from British citizens, solidifying the inside-outside mentality.

The tabloids present the idea of an economic strain on Britain that is caused by asylum seekers and is not limited to the alleged burden put on the welfare state. The tabloids also cite the costs of increasing security at the borders. Asylum seekers are attracted by British benefits and it is suggested that if Britain stops giving benefits to asylum seekers then the extra money to secure the borders will not be needed. Asylum seekers are understood to be economically

motivated. A second economic strain that the tabloid media raises is the cost of judicial review proceedings and the costs of payouts to asylum seekers who have been mistreated. The suggestion appears that the provision of legal aid is being abused by lawyers making claims on behalf of asylum seekers. In these cases the language tends to refer to the costs to British taxpayers.

- *Illegal / criminal*

The tabloids frequently focus on sensational stories related to crime and the criminal behaviour of asylum seekers. While this is not outside the normal coverage of the tabloids, it does create a perception of asylum seekers as criminal which is then reproduced throughout society. For example, there are several mentions of violent crime with intent to harm, such as an asylum seeker throwing a towel rail at the head of an immigration officer and an officer being bitten by an asylum seeker. The article emphasizes the fact that the asylum seeker in question has been diagnosed with AIDS. The risk of AIDS being transmitted via a human bite is incredibly remote, yet the news reports sensationalize the issue as a means of demonstrating an intent of grievous harm on the part of the asylum seeker.

Immigration crimes appear frequently in the tabloid news, with an emphasis on document fraud and working without permission. For example, “the most likely outlets for the stolen passports are asylum seekers and illegal immigrants seeking to establish a ‘legal’ presence in the UK” (Daily Mail, July 30<sup>th</sup> 2008). This reflects the ideas generated and reproduced by the security professionals, in that asylum seekers are seen as perpetrators of immigration crime and therefore of likely perpetrators of broader crime. Tabloids also focus on petty crimes committed by migrants, such as an asylum seeker stealing two MP3 players, or an asylum seeker who has been jailed for theft and petty crimes. Such instances would be unlikely to appear in the national

news were it not for the identity of the perpetrators as asylum seekers. The state of being an asylum seeker is then related to crime and the perception of criminality is transferred to all asylum seekers who are already contending with being seen as undesirable and undeserving of British assistance.

- *Bogus / suspicious*

The suspicious nature of asylum seekers is portrayed through stories regarding unsavory behaviour, or the extended measures of surveillance needed to manage the asylum seeker population. The word “bogus” applied to asylum seeker appears in these articles, although not with overwhelming frequency in recent years. Suspicion was also applied to refugees; for example, it is suggested that DNA technology could be developed to identify “bogus” refugees by identifying the country of origin of a person claiming to be an asylum seeker or refugee (*Daily Mail* September 19, 2009). Given that nationality is not something that can be tracked via DNA this claim by the tabloid media appears outlandish.

Other examples in the tabloid media propagating the notion that asylum seekers are suspicious include that of an Iraqi asylum seeker who is described as having “boasted” about the ease with which he and his family managed to sneak into the UK. The phrase “sneak in” occurs several times, suggesting a negative connotation. An Ethiopian asylum seeker is described as an “ex-druggie convert” by the *Sun* in an article that claims “lying is the default position for Islamists” (*The Sun*, March 19 2009 Trevor Kavanaugh). This is of course a sweeping statement that has no basis in truth and implicates by definition people who support Islam as a governing

system and by association billions of Muslims worldwide. Further to that the article gives criminal characteristics to migrants from this group and directs suspicion to a group much larger than the single asylum seeker described in the article.

A particular focus throughout the tabloid data is given to the irregular camp at Calais which portrays a number of asylum seekers or irregular migrants waiting for an opportunity to cross the border into Britain. The camp itself is frequently associated with crime, suspicion and underhand behaviour. For example, a café owner is described as frequently having “knives pulled on him” by the residents of this camp. A subheading describes the situation in Calais with the words “swarming around a UK-bound truck, illegal immigrants prepare to stow away. Challenge them and they’ll respond with knives and iron bars” (*Daily Mail* May 11 2009). The picture is of a lawless group of criminals doing anything they can to ensure they enter Britain. The migrants at Calais are further described as “intent ... to get to what they see as a land of easy asylum, council housing, and generous benefits” (*Daily Mail* May 11 2009). Rather than being portrayed as people who are potentially fleeing persecution or people who have been forced to leave their homes, these migrants are conceived as a group of economically motivated, violent individuals who are intent on reaching Britain to get access to social welfare. This accuses

migrants in general of possessing negative characteristics such as violence, greed and laziness.

The general suspicion is described by an article in the *Telegraph*<sup>9</sup>, which asserts:

“We must re-establish authority over who comes to this country. Labour's shameful abandonment of border controls has led to tens of thousands of ‘undocumented’ asylum seekers settling in the United Kingdom. Who are these people? How do we know that they wish us no harm? I'm sure that the vast majority are law-abiding, but it takes only one to create mayhem.” October 16 2009, Jeff Randal

This targets all undocumented people as potentially suspicious and suggests that strict control of the border is the only way to limit the threat of harm to the United Kingdom. The headline of this article is “Let’s make Britain safer – pull our troops out of Afghanistan; the real danger lies with our unpoliced borders” (*The Telegraph* October 16, 2009). This headline links the borders to national security and, in the context of the text of the article, suggests that undocumented migrants pose a bigger threat to Britain than military engagement in Afghanistan, the Taliban, and global terrorism. While the threat of the military activity in Afghanistan, the Taliban and global terrorism may be debatable as facts, they are generally accepted to represent threats to British security in the conventional sense of state security. Undocumented migrants here are being compared unfavourably to terrorists and suggested to pose a greater security threat. The threat is then dramatized by the image of hundreds of migrants poised at Calais on the outside of the British border tirelessly searching for a way in.

- *State security*

The theme of state security is raised in the tabloid media and perhaps it is surprising that the code is not more prevalent given the conventional nature of the tabloids to assert the inside –

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<sup>9</sup> The Telegraph is the only non-tabloid newspaper included in the analysis because it is one of the six most-read papers in Britain. It has a readership of approximately 900,000

outside distinction (Conboy 2006). Threats to state security are linked to asylum seekers in terms of the threat of terrorism and fanaticism, and also in terms of social unrest and crime, visible in the co-occurrence of the state security code with “illegal / criminal,” “threat,” and “terrorism”.

The majority of occurrences of state security coded alone relate to political interactions with asylum seekers and migrants. For example, the *Mail on Sunday* describes asylum seekers employed by the Home Office and at the House of Commons as a “security breach” (*Mail on Sunday*, August 22, 2010). The *Sun* also refers to an armoured vehicle that was freighted to London from the continent for Tony Blair. Four asylum seekers were discovered stowed away in the lorry. These examples refer to state security in conjunction with positing the presence of asylum seekers or migrants as a security breach. There are also many explicit links to border security which occur commonly with crime and “illegal immigrants”.

Articles in the tabloid media regarding migration frequently evoke military security in the notion that British troops abroad protect the borders indirectly. For example, an article claims that asylum seeker numbers would “increase significantly” without the presence of British troops abroad. Furthermore articles refer to the national security budget as part of the economic threat that asylum seekers pose to Britain, including the cost of surveillance to ensure that asylum seekers do not threaten national security interests are, and the costs of imprisoning and deporting those who are considered a threat to national security. In this way, the tabloid media constructs

asylum seekers as a collective that is potentially threatening to national security and simultaneously is an economic strain. This reinforces the illiberal arguments that suggest Britain should severely restrict entry, and simultaneously creates a negative perception of asylum seekers more broadly.

## **Discussion**

Asylum seekers are constructed as undesirable in Britain, incorporating national security interests, criminality, and general negative characteristics that arouse suspicion and provoke the need for increased surveillance and observation. The nature of the construction should not be seen as top-down, emanating solely from policy makers who want to secure their interests. Policy makers secure interests though responding to the population and while security rhetoric may be evoked by policy makers to establish the importance of an issue to the public, the public response will also direct the way the topic develops. Across the three genre discourse analysis, the most occurring code is “illegal / criminal” followed by “bogus / suspicious,” “threat” and “state security”. At the different levels “illegal / criminal” was the most occurring code in political discourse and in the discourse of security professionals. It was the second most frequent in the fear-monger category, which has more occurrences of threat. Threat as characterized by the fear-monger category was primarily economic but also included criminal threat and threat to social stability. The appearance of “illegal and criminal” in the discourse reflects the increasing



number of criminal penalties applied to breaches of immigration law. This creates a self-justifying hermeneutic, whereby criminality is legislated because it appears in the discourse and the discourse then refers to the legislation in reference to categories of criminality. The understanding of *illegal* immigrants is the case in point. The rhetoric of illegality is applied to people prior to them committing a crime. The broad group of illegal immigrants is constructed as a collective that threaten British national security and threaten social stability and economic resources. Thus, an individual who enters without documents, which could be for myriad reasons, is understood as “illegal” or criminal. The criminality makes that individual automatically undesirable in Britain based only upon the way in which he or she entered the country.

The rhetoric of “bogus” has been a part of British immigration discourse since the late nineties and suggests that migrants coming into Britain are actively attempting to cheat the system. While the word “bogus” is not found frequently in current political discourse, having been replaced by “failed asylum seekers” it is still apparent in the popular discourse of the tabloid media. Furthermore, the sentiment of suspicion it produces is still present at all levels of the discourse. This suspicion is evident in the extensive surveillance operations applied to asylum seekers to ensure that people who are not considered “genuine” cannot enter or remain in Britain. The suspicion is applied to those thought to be “undeserving” of British social services; however, by generating suspicion of a collective of asylum seekers, the asylum seeker individual

becomes suspicious and held to a higher burden of proof. That higher burden of proof is of course harder to meet and is evident in increasingly restrictive policies.

The threat that asylum seekers provoke is portrayed as predominantly economic at the level of politicians and of the tabloid media. The threat at the level of security professionals is founded upon the perceived criminality of asylum seekers. Both types of threat are bolstered by an inside-outside mentality. The idea of threat becomes pervasive as a generalized menace threatening the economic interests and social cohesion of Britain. Threat appeared most frequently in the tabloid media, comprising 22% of all excerpts from that genre and consequently fulfilling the category of “fear mongers”. The idea of generalized threat plays into suspicion towards asylum seekers and makes popular belief more susceptible to the potential of criminality.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter demonstrates the construction of asylum seekers in British discourse is overwhelmingly negative. The discourse attributes criminal characteristics that threaten Britain in general and pose a threat to national security. The construction of asylum seekers is a collective who in general cannot be trusted; they are to be treated with suspicion and subject to surveillance. The surveillance is presented as necessary to protect British security interests. The effects of the construction of asylum seekers as a threat separate asylum seekers from the social

space of Britain, provoking an aura of negativity attributed to the group as a whole, and thereby removing individual subjectivity. Asylum seekers do not tend to be portrayed as victims of persecution of people in need of help, but instead as a potential unified threat composed of calculating individuals who want to cheat the British system and make money from it. The result is that the system itself becomes more restrictive. Policy makers and security professionals are embroiled in the system and responsible for making and practicing the legislation. Because they are participants in the discourse and subject to the effects of the discourse, the asylum system becomes more restrictive in general, a higher burden of proof is needed for an asylum seeker to establish that he or she is genuine, and more advanced and intrusive methods of surveillance and policing are incorporated, which are justified through references to national security.

## **Greece for the Greeks and Greece for the Immigrants.**

Greece is of extreme importance to the European asylum seeker experience. Greece does not receive the largest number of asylum applications in Europe but it is a very important transit country. In fact, according to a Greek news source 90% of immigration related arrests in the EU during 2010 were made in Greece (Eleutherotypia, October 21, 2010). While this figure may be inflated, many irregular migrants pass through Greece with the intention of seeking asylum or of seeking another form of leave to remain in a different EU member state (Papadopoulou-Kourkoula 2008). I continue to use an expanded understanding of asylum seeker that incorporates asylum seeker self-definitions in this chapter. I include migrants who consider themselves to be in transit and have yet to formally file an asylum claim. This expands the state-defined understanding of an asylum seeker, who is only known as such while the application is in progress. When the application process is complete, under the conventional definition the asylum seeker either becomes a refugee or a variation of “failed asylum seeker” who is to be removed. However, individuals may continue to define themselves as asylum seekers despite a lack of state recognition, thus they are included in the expanded definition I adopt.

Greece is a country that an enormous number of migrants travel through en route to the destination in which they intend to seek asylum and remain. Consequently Greece becomes a point at which the migrant asylum seeker identity is visible, in a place where a large number of individuals understand themselves to be asylum seekers, yet their identity as an asylum seeker has not been recognized by a state. People who understand themselves to be asylum seekers but have not yet made an application for asylum characterize many of the migrants in Greece. It has been estimated that 90% of Europe’s “illegal” migrants enter through Greece (BBC, January 4, 2011), meaning that Greece represents the first point of contact in the EU. However, among the

90% of Europe's "illegal" migrants, there are often people who consider themselves to be asylum seekers seeking leave to remain in Europe for a variety of different reasons.

The number of migrants in Greece presents a challenge to Greek national identity that in some ways is more complex than claims to cultural dilution as one sees in Britain and other "civic" nation states.<sup>10</sup> Greece can be considered an "ethnic" nation state in which the nation emerged from the struggle for territory of the Greek ethnic group (Barrington 1997). Narratives in popular Greek culture from the 1830s onwards frequently position Greeks as a race of historically oppressed peoples (Beaton 1999). The myth of Greek national identity is fundamentally tied to classical civilization with an understood continuity through the Byzantine Empire (Clogg 2002). This tie to the classical civilization further complicates the national identity of Greece and its role in the EU and the "West", given that the civilization of the Greeks forms the foundation stone for the understood Western trajectory of civilization (Koundoura, 2007). Migrants in Greece challenge the national narrative because the presence of migrants in Greece shift the role of Greeks from oppressed peoples to privileged citizens. Further, it is more difficult for a migrant to gain national membership in an "ethnic" nation state like Greece as belonging depends on ethnic identity.

In this chapter I first look at questions of political subjectivity in international relations theory. Work in this area focuses on refugees, asylum seekers and other stateless peoples. Following the review of scholarship I examine Greek national identity, looking at the development and solidification of that identity. I then turn to focus more closely on the position of migrants in Greece and the questions that the presence of migrants raises for national identity. I conclude from my analysis of the Greek experience that migrants are left without subjectivity

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<sup>10</sup> Scholars of nationalism differentiate between "civic" nation states whereby the nation is bound by a common political identity, and "ethnic" nation states, where the nation is bound by common belief in blood ties (Geertz 1994, Smith 2000, Yack 2001, Gellner 2006, Loizoidis 2007).

in Greece, which I demonstrate through a critical discourse analysis of the Greek media between 2008 and the present. Overall, this chapter functions to demonstrate where the state and social discourses in Greece further prohibit the development of migrant subjectivity, solidifying the migrant as less than human and without civilization. The migrant is not considered a subject in popular discourse, and the effect is then to restrict the social and political participation of migrants in Greece.

### **Refugees, asylum seekers, and political subjectivity**

The question of political subjectivity is central to scholarship dealing with refugees and asylum seekers. The idea of the individual as a political subject can be understood as citizenship, given that citizenship provides political, civic, economic and social rights. As discussed in Chapter 1, Hannah Arendt notably posits that citizenship is necessary to access human rights. Human rights are predicated on belonging to a state according to the liberal legalist view (Arendt 1986, Cotter 2005). In this view, Arendt problematizes the notion that universal human rights are extant in liberal states. Rather universal human rights are absent because state membership is required to access rights, so stateless humans are without rights. In *The Right to Have Rights* Arendt conceives of access to human rights as follows: “the right to have rights ... means to live in a framework where one is judged by one’s actions and opinions.” Cotter points out that “A refugee by contrast is judged by his status within the laws of the receiving country – to be an ‘illegal alien,’ an ‘economic migrant,’ a ‘bogus asylum-seeker’ or, if lucky, a ‘genuine’ refugee” (Cotter 2005:109). Thus Arendt’s notion of citizen rights is removed from the liberal legal notion of citizenship rights. Instead, Arendt’s conception of citizenship reflects the idea of membership in a community, participation in that community, and is more comprehensive than a

legal status that is justified by the state system. The state system, which promulgates citizen rights, undermines rights for non-privileged individuals who do not possess legal citizenship. According to Arendt's conception, a lack of citizenship fundamentally undermines human rights in which case exclusive categories of citizenship create people who are excluded from human rights.

Arendt's conception of citizenship and rights has proved useful in studies of refugees and asylum seekers who attempt to gain political subjectivity in the international system. For example, Michel Budz looks to Arendt's view on the centrality of the state in providing citizenship and suggests that refugee camps can be conceived of as "spaces in between" where individuals lacking the bond of citizenship are stuck in transitory spaces (Budz 2009). This argument contrasts somewhat Cotter's reading of Arendt. Budz views Arendt's work as confined within the state system rather than critical of it, while Cotter posits Arendt's view as critical. However, Arendt is valuable in Budz's work in order to understand the limitations posed by the state system with regards to political participation and human rights.

Nevertheless, there is an apparent path to international political subjectivity through accessing a form of political power that for Arendt is "utterly dependent on the relationships among persons whose collective solidarity enables them to act in concert" (Klusmeyer 2005:140). Thus, power can reside with collectives of individuals who act in solidarity. A pertinent example can be seen in Moulin and Nyers' study of Sudanese refugees acting to assert their status as political actors in global civil society without being considered subjects of a state (Moulin and Nyers 2007). Additionally Isin and Rygiel utilize an Arendtian conception of power to think of a border camp to be a space that irregular migrants come together to "mobilize against processes of securitization, criminalization, and abjection" imposed by the sovereign

state system (Squires 2009, Isin and Rygiel 2006). In these examples, migrants can access a form of international political subjectivity.

Here I return to Giorgio Agamben and his theory of “bare life” that is discussed in chapter one pertaining to refugees. To reiterate, for Agamben the refugee camp can be understood as a location of bare life in which individuals are banished from society and considered outside of the law. For Agamben, societal participation and legal rights are what constitute a being as human. However, the understanding of the refugee camp as a locale in which migrants can access political subjectivity as in the above-cited literature contrasts the understanding of such a space by Giorgio Agamben. Patricia Owens challenges Agamben’s construction of the refugee, using the example of refugee lip-sewing as an example of access to political subjectivity, contra the supposition that the refugee camp is a delimited space of bare life whose inhabitants are less than human (Owens 2009). I examine the tension between the competing conceptualizations of the refugee, albeit with an extended understanding of “refugee” to incorporate all migrants who are living without access to legal status. The people in question are not living in formal refugee camps although many of them spend time in detention centres and often live in informal camps or ghettoized city areas. Thus, they are not within a *delimited space* of “bare life” yet they do not have access to legal rights and are often marginalized from society. Furthermore, I look in the context of interactions with a sovereign state, in particular with how migrants are portrayed in public discourses within that state. The above examples all examine migrant interaction at the international level. In this chapter I suggest that immigrants in Greece at the state level cannot be considered political subjects as they do not have access to social and political participation.



In the Greek case there are instances in which migrant individuals engage in political interactions, in which they can be considered political subjects, for example through staging protests and strikes that garner national attention. However, I argue that the efficacy of their political participation depends on the construction of the migrant in society. True social and political participation and consequently human rights cannot be accessed by marginalized members of society who are not taking part in day to day interactions or who are marked in these interactions as different or as outsiders. Moreover, without legal status migrants are often afraid of the potential repercussions of political and social participation. Thus the construction of the migrant in popular discourses will contribute to perceptions of the migrant. Whether or not a migrant can become a political subject can be seen to depend on the construction of the migrant in national discourses. In what follows I look at the portrayal of the migrant in Greek popular discourses, in particular the print media. I suggest that the construction of the migrant in these discourses withholds subjectivity, creating instead migrants as a homogenous unit.

### **Greek national identity**

Modern Greek national identity is often traced to a defining moment, when Greeks fought for national independence from the Ottoman Empire in the Greek War of Independence (1821-1832). However, Koundoura demonstrates that competing modes of understanding Greeks and Greekness were adopted at different times, with more or less significance given to different figures and different political arrangements. The conventional narrative of Modern Greek history begins with the struggle for independence that culminated in war. The Greek people before the War of Independence shared a collective identity based on common language, religion, and cultural practices. The Ottoman Empire ruled by the *millet* system, and in doing so

maintained ethnic group identities as each *millet* was a religious “nation” or group and there were Muslim, Orthodox (the largest after the Muslim *millet*), Jewish, Catholic, and Gregorian-Armenian *millets* (Clogg 1999). While the Orthodox *millet* included all of the Orthodox peoples within the Ottoman Empire and thus included many more Eastern Orthodox peoples, the Greek collective identity continued to be manifested in periodic uprisings against Ottoman rule.

Prior to the Greek War of Independence the preoccupation with Classical Greece by the scholars of the West filtered to Greece although Greece was by no means at the forefront of the movement, given that it was alienated to some degree from the West. However, Greeks under the Ottomans were often exposed to Europe through trade and education. Clogg describes the interest that grew in Greece regarding Classical Greece as having reached “obsessive proportions” by the time immediately preceding the Greek War of Independence (Clogg 1999: 27). Thus, the notion of continuity from Classical Greece was present in the shared identity via historical myths of the Greek people.

The War of Independence was fought by Greek revolutionaries against the Ottoman Empire between 1821 and 1832. The latter is marked as the end of the war because the Greek state was made official in that year. However, what is known as the *μεγαλί ιδέα* or the “Great Idea”, the intention to add all the former territories of the Classical Greek Empire to the Modern Greek state, endured until 1922, and the end of the Greco-Turkish war. This demonstrates an ongoing political intention that was shared by the Greek people. However, the notion of continuity in the Greek identity grew post independence. The first mention of the Great Idea in political discourse was not until the debates preceding promulgation of the 1844 constitution. Furthermore, the linking of the Ancient, Medieval and Modern periods of Greek history along a single continuum has been attributed to Konstantinos Paparrigopoulos, a Greek historian writing in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century (Clogg 2002, Koundoura 2007). Prior to the work of Paparrigopoulos, the Byzantine heritage had been largely

overlooked in claims to Greek identity. On the other hand, a popular folk saying demonstrates the presence of the ideology in Greek culture of the time: “Πάλι με χρόνια με καιρούς / πάλι δικά μας θα’ναι” [Once more, as years and time go by / once more they shall be ours] (cited in Bolukbasi 2004).

The Great Idea represents a form of offensive Greek nationalism, as it aims to retrieve territory “lost” by the Greeks over time in order to recreate the Classical Greek Empire.

Barrington, drawing on a collection of scholars of nationalism, defines nationalism as “the pursuit – through argument or other activity – of a set of rights for the self-defined members of the nation, including, at a minimum, territorial autonomy or sovereignty” (Barrington 1997: 12). In this context, the Great Idea can be understood as a form of nationalism in which Greeks were seeking sovereignty over territory that extended east into Anatolia and south to Cyprus. The pursuit of this territory culminated in the Greco-Turkish war.

The attachment that Greek national identity has to Classical Greece adopts the idea of “civilization” as originating in Greece. This claim suggests Greek ownership of the tenets of Modern political thought. Koundoura recognizes the claim as within a perceived “Hellene / Barbarian dualism” where civilization is attached to Greek identity. However, for Koundoura the concept of Greek civilization develops through education, wealth, and civilization as opposed to an ethnic identity. Koundoura argues via a Hegelian philosophy of history that the Greek national identity that includes ethnicity is a product of the Modern Greek state (Koundoura 2007). The notion of a Greek “race” is present during the struggle for freedom led by the φιλική εταιρία [filiki etairia, or Society of Friends] who fought against Ottoman rule during the early part of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century and are attributed with motivating the War of Independence. The notion of a collective Greek “race” can be seen in philosopher Benjamin of Lesvos, who wrote “Nature has set limits to the aspirations of other men, but not to those of the Greeks. The Greeks were

not in the past and are not now subject to the laws of nature” (Benjamin of Lesvos 1820, cited in Clogg 2002). A noteworthy Greek historian Korais produced several works linking Modern Greeks with the Ancients, although he is known for rejecting the Byzantine period of the continuum (Clogg 2002, Koudoura 2007). It was only towards the middle part of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century that the continuum incorporating Byzantium was made popular by historian Constantine Paparrigopoulos and by the end of that century the link to the Byzantine Empire was providing justification for the Great Idea.

The form of nationalism that is evident in Greece during the century of the Great Idea portrays the Greeks as an oppressed people over centuries of Ottoman rule. While there are many examples in Greek culture, perhaps an excerpt from Giannis Ritsos’ *Romiosini* displays this most clearly. *Romiosini* can be translated as “Greekness” and the poem was intended to capture the spirit and essence of Greekness. It was set to music and recorded by Mikis Theodorakis in 1960, becoming well-known throughout Greece:

Τὸ χέρι τους εἶναι κολλημένο στὸ ντουφέκι / τὸ ντουφέκι εἶναι συνέχεια τοῦ χεριοῦ  
τους / τὸ χέρι τους εἶναι συνέχεια τῆς ψυχῆς τους - / ἔχουν στὰ χεῖλια τους ἀπάνου τὸ  
θυμὸ / κ’ ἔχουνε τὸν καημὸ βαθιὰ-βαθιὰ στὰ μάτια τους

Their hands are glued to their rifles / their rifles are extensions of their hands / their  
hands extensions of their souls – / they have anger on their lips / and grief deep  
within their eyes (Ritsos 1993)

The idea put forward in this poem is that the essence of Greekness incorporates a love of the country and the landscape, and a need to constantly fight to protect it. Greeks have been forced to protect their territory and culture for so long that the struggle has become part of their physical make up. The prevalence of the Great Idea in Greek popular culture suggests that the rhetoric of Greek nationalism was reinforced throughout Greece. The characteristics of Greek nationalism include a connection to the Classical Empire through a shared understanding of historical myths, manifested in a territorial attachment; shared language in which an attachment to the Ancient is

also implicated, through the official “katharevousa” (pure) version of the language that was derived from Ancient Greek and used in all official circumstances; shared Orthodox religion, which maintained the continuity with Byzantium; and the shared notion that Greeks have been historically oppressed and need to liberate Greek territories. While the Great Idea was abandoned at the failure of Greece in the Greco-Turkish war, later termed in Greece the “Asia-Minor Disaster”, the ideology continues to exist today in specific territories that remain contested, in particular Cyprus and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

The reception of migrants is often related to how a state views itself. For example, Huysmans studies security identities in the European integration process to understand the securitization of migration (Huysmans 2000). Studies of European identity of liberal democracy have explained the development of migration policies before and after the Cold War (Geddes 2003). The same phenomenon is apparent in Greece, where Greek national identity plays a role in the country’s reception of its many migrants. The notion of a state “viewing itself” in a particular way again borrows from the theory of ontological security. Ontological security is provided by a state’s ability to consistently reproduce its idea of itself via a national narrative (Steele 2008). Ontological insecurity is then created when state actions conflict with the narrative constitutive of national identity. Zarakol adds the idea that the ontological security of a state’s identity is also constituted through the perceptions of other states (Zarakol 2010). During the period in which Britain, the US, and other liberal states were welcoming asylum seekers that were defined as fleeing communism, Greece went through the political dictatorship of Metaxas, German occupation, Civil War, and a military junta, all of which saw Greece sending rather than receiving migrants and refugees. The interaction of incoming migrants with Greek identity is a fairly new phenomenon. Greek national identity has been continuously reinforced in things such

as the Great Idea, a number of political struggles, and the establishment of continuity with Classical Greece and of ownership over Classical Greece. Further, as a historically oppressed peoples, Greek identity frequently situates Greeks as the victims of oppression rather than the oppressors. While situating Greeks as victims of oppression, Greek identity also incorporates an attachment to Classical civilization and an ownership over Western political and scientific principles. Nationalist rhetoric in Greece cannot be understood simply as a backlash against migrants. Rather I posit that the presence of migrants in Greece creates a tension with Greek national identity and the result is that migrants are not attributed identity. More than redefining Greeks as the oppressors, Greek public discourse betrays a tension: Greeks as a historically oppressed people who have constantly fought to protect their territory must continue to protect it from this new invasion. However, at the same time Greeks might identify and empathize with migrants as they have recently been in a similar situation. Thus there is friction whereby migrants and migrant issues are portrayed in the context through which they alternately reinforce or threaten Greek identity but these contexts tend to be conflicting.

### **Greek identity and migration**

The presence of migrants in Greece is inextricably linked to the rhetoric of national identity. Laliotou observes that the growing presence of migrant communities in Greek cities led to not just observable racist actions but also the internalization of a “naturalized” racism. This naturalized racism is evident in Greek everyday life, in both the public and private spheres, internalizing discriminatory practices (Laliotou 2010). A particular example can be seen in the education system which glorifies the Greek “race” and the ancient ancestors (Zachos 2009). Zachos describes the education system as cultivating “an image of superiority of the Greek

“race,” overvaluing anything Greek, undervaluing anything non-Greek ... and ignoring the achievements, cultures, and histories of other peoples” (Zachos 2009: 146). This generalized disregard for other cultures can be seen in the contemporary experiences of migrant communities who are considered only within their capacity to affect Greeks in public and private life in much of the mainstream media and popular culture. For example, Laliotou asserts that the histories of migrants are silenced from public debate: “It is as if the non-native people who live in our neighbourhoods have no present or past history, but just happened to be there, a bizarre historical accident” (Laliotou 2010:249). Laliotou concludes that this lack of subjectivity is a result of internalized racist practices, asserting that any type of political mobilization on the part of migrants is met with radical repression (Laliotou 2010). The elevation of the Greek “race” or Greek identity that has been embedded in the reproduction of national identity through national historical myths and histories, as well as through the education system, prevents the migrant identity becoming a point of contention and protects the imagined historical continuity that has been so important since the birth of the Greek nation state.

Anastasia Karakasidou describes Athens as a “city of migrants, held hostage to its past as constructed through myths and fables of ancient civilization” (Karakasidou 2002: 148). Karakasidou reviews work by Neni Panourgia (1995) who argues that migrants from rural Greek villages crave the modern rather than the ancient past, and Marina Petronoti (1998) who looks at the lines demarking the difference between Eritrean migrants to Athens and Greek Athenians. She describes Eritreans as “modern nomads” who “generally live in unmarked basement apartments ... work(ing) in domestic service for upper-middle class Greek households” (Karakasidou 2002: 151). There are two points of significance for contemporary migrant experiences here. The first is the notion of modern nomads. The majority of migrants who

arrive in Greece do not consider Greece their desired country of final destination. This augments the number of undocumented migrants whether or not they consider themselves to be seeking asylum. Because many of the individuals do not wish to remain in Greece but to instead intend to join family elsewhere, or intend to travel to a location with a familiar language, they attempt to avoid being detected by the authorities because European law dictates that they must seek asylum in the first state of arrival within EU borders. They remain nomadic and therefore unable or unwilling to seek assistance. The second point of note is the dislocation between physical territorial borders and sociocultural borders. Karakasidou and Petronoti observe this phenomenon in the case of Eritrean migrants, who, despite their presence within Greek territorial borders, are unable to cross the sociocultural boundaries due to “poor language skills and resistance to linguistic diversity, ... discrimination in labour and housing markets, ... overcrowded living conditions, and ... intra-ethnic marginalization and nativist discrimination” (Karakasidou 2002). Thus, migrants in Greece are not easily absorbed into the social and political life, while at the same time any form of mobilization on the part of migrants tends to be repressed. However, over the last decade the number of migrants arriving in Greece has increased significantly. In fact, between 2003 and 2007 asylum applications in Greece increased by 185%, and as cited above an estimated 90% of “illegal” migrants to Europe pass through Greece (Papadopoulou-Kourkoula 2008). Unsurprisingly, migrant-related stories appear frequently in the news media and migrant-related political questions arise and become a tool of politics, the most notable event being the establishment of a nationalist party 2002. In the following section I examine the portrayal of the migrant in Greek popular discourse in the news media to examine how migrants in Greece are portrayed. I ultimately ask what the effect this portrayal has on asylum seekers’ access to rights.



## **Discourse analysis: the Greek media**

In this section I use the tools of critical discourse analysis to examine the continued production of the migrants without subjectivity in Greece. As detailed in the introduction, critical discourse analysis critically examines language understood as discursive events (Locke 2004). For Fairclough, a discourse is “a practice not just of representing the world but of signifying the world, constituting and constructing the world in meaning” (Fairclough 1992:64). The receiver of the meaning is implicated in the constitution of meaning: discourse constitutes meaning through collective understandings and the acceptance or rejection of a particular construction of meaning (Locke 2004, Fairclough 1992). Fairclough defines discourse as practice in that meaning is constructed in communication or “verbal and non-verbal signifying systems” (Fairclough 1992). Non verbal signifying systems include human activities such as collective memberships – belonging to an organization or group – which are also understood as discursive practices (Fairclough 1992, Gee 1996, Locke 2004). To summarize, discourse is not limited to verbal communication but is much thicker: “discourses are ... ‘ways of being in the world’; they are ‘forms of life.’ They are, thus, always and everywhere *social* and products of social histories” (Gee 1996, cited in Locke 2004). Here the “way of being in the world” that I examine is the way for Greece, understood as a national collective, to exist with migrants. By the term national collective, I refer to the state and society that defines itself through the shared national and cultural myths and historical narratives, as detailed above. I look at the portrayal of migrants in this context as an abstract body rather than as individuals who have identities and personal histories. I argue that the construction of migrants into a faceless collective demonstrates the lack of political subjectivity for migrants in Greece. The discourse in the media

in demonstrative of the way Greece exists with migrants because it influences and is influenced by the way migrant presence is absorbed into the national quotidian existence. I understand the media not as the agency constructing migrant identities. Rather the media is implicit in and subject to the practice of the hermeneutic reproduction of the meaning of migrant identities in everyday life. Thus I analyze the media as representative of the discourse, not actively creating the discourse.

In order to go about interpreting a given discourse, one must recognize the genre, or form of construction; the context; the social complicity between the maker and the receiver; the expectation of the participants; and the rules in which the discourse is constructed (Locke 2004). In order to examine migrants' lack of subjectivity in Athens, I understand the makers of the discourse to be the media, those who construct the discourse of public life such as politicians, policy makers, and public figures, and those who practice the meanings in everyday life. The population who do not interact with migrants but digest the portrayal of migrants as a faceless mass thus reproduce the discourse. In this way the discourses implicit in popular culture and in private life further reproduce the way migrant presence is absorbed into quotidian existence. For example, Laliotou demonstrates the appearance of migrants in contemporary Greek soaps, which were incorporated to present a realistic interpretation of Greek life. The physical presence of migrants is visible. However, the migrant characters tend to be in subservient roles or stereotypes that internalize racist or xenophobic connotations of racial, ethnic, and sexual otherness (Laliotou 2010). They are not attributed individual subjectivity outside of the stereotypes applied to migrants.

I use a single discourse genre in this analysis, that of the print media. I analyze articles from the two most widely read Greek newspapers from 2008 to the present, looking at the

articles that score over 50% relevancy with regard to the subject matter of migrants.<sup>11</sup> I adopt the word μετανάστες (metanastes) or immigrants<sup>12</sup> rather than προσφύγες (prosfiges) or refugees because there are a large number of migrants in Greece who are seeking asylum but do not wish to do so within Greece and instead wish to go elsewhere in Europe. Thus they become categorized legally as “undocumented migrants” or, more frequently as παράνομες μετανάστες (paranomes metanastes), meaning “illegal migrants.” In the discourse analysis I do not focus on any particular “meaning term” that was constructed but look to the portrayal of migrants as without subjectivity, which is less tangible. Thus I examine the context in which migrants appear and the different themes that emerge with relation to migrants.

I used open coding of the data to develop an understanding of the principle topics and themes that arise with regard to migrants. I did not pre-generate themes because the phenomenon I was looking for was a lack of migrant subjectivity rather than a positive repeated occurrence of a theme. Open coding the articles meant that I could identify the most prolific themes in articles that deal with migrants in Greece, and then look at the common portrayal of migrants within and across these different themes. The theme that most frequently occurred was “politicians / immigration professionals” which included any reference to policy or a political stance from government officials and professionals that consult on immigration matters who are not in an advocacy role, such as non-advocacy affiliated research organizations, and security professionals who are not elected officials. The second most frequent code was “migrant political action” which referred to organized action on the part of migrants for rights. These articles featured two main topic areas: the first was the vote for second generation migrants and,

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<sup>11</sup> I set the boundary at 50% as I felt at this the data was saturated. At this point articles regarding migratory species of fish and other unrelated phenomena tended to proliferate.

<sup>12</sup> While the word μετανάστες can be translated as “migrants”, I generally translate it as “immigrants” given the context of its use in relation to the English use of the same words.

while this topic area is removed from the asylum seeker question that is the primary subject of this research, the topic is relevant because it relates to the role of Greek identity that contributes to a theoretical understanding of the position of migrants in Greece. The second topic area refers to a hunger strike that lasted 44 days during which migrants protested for the right to remain in Greece. The hunger strike took place in January and February 2011, and was featured significantly more heavily in left-leaning Eleutherotypia. Other important themes that surfaced included “migrant / Greek relations” which included segments that detailed the relationship between Greeks and migrants, and “legal / illegal” which included any segment that referred to the legal status of migrants in Greece.

In order to identify a *lack* of migrant subjectivity I look at two separate themes that can be understood as representing migrant subjectivity. The first includes interviews that appear in the media giving firsthand accounts of migrants’ experiences. The second is political action that situates the migrants as a political subject or political agent, and I analyze the local reactions to the appearance of this phenomenon. In the context of the articles that appear in the media and the themes coded, firsthand accounts of migrant experiences are rare. The majority of appearances in the data occur between 2008 and 2009. Migrant political action appears frequently in the media. Therefore this is an important place to look at the portrayal of migrants to understand scenarios in which they can be thought of as political subjects. For a full tabular summary of the discourse analysis please see the appendix. The next section will analyze the portrayal of migrants in the four most frequent codes: politicians and immigration professionals, migrant / Greek relations, legal / illegal, and migrant political action (for a full summary of the data see table 4.1 in the appendix).

- Politicians and immigration professionals

In this category I coded articles that referenced statements by politicians and immigration professionals regarding migrants in Greece. These articles included the political stances of the different parties and political speeches that were reported in the news media. Politicians and immigration professionals tend to recognize the unpleasant circumstances in which many of the migrants in Greece live. The treatment of migrants in Greece raises political questions particularly in the context of international interactions. In the Greek media Greece is acknowledged as lagging behind the rest of Europe in terms of granting political rights to migrants, largely because of the tradition of *jus sanguinis*, that is, one has to be ethnically Greek to be considered a Greek citizen. Proposals to pass legislation to grant the vote to second generation migrants who have completed their schooling in Greece are met with opposition and this opposition is widely reported.

In the articles referencing politicians and immigration professionals, immigration is often recognized as being used as a political tool to serve the interests of the ruling or opposition parties. Greece is generally a left-leaning state, the political right being largely undermined by memories of the rightwing military junta that was in power from 1967-1973. However, the nationalist party ΛΑ.Ο.Σ. (Λαϊκός Ορθόδοξος Συναγερμός, or Popular Orthodox Rally with the abbreviation “LAOS” meaning “the people” in Greek), was founded in 2000 with the slogan “Greece for the Greeks” and the motivation of preventing immigration and cultural dilution. LAOS is currently the fourth largest party in Greece. Much of the political discourse regarding migrants in Greece is generated by Karatzeferis, the leader of LAOS. Karatzeferis claims that ruling party ΠΑΣΟΚ (Πανελλήνιο Σοσιαλιστικό Κίνημα or Panhellenic Socialist Movement, abbreviation pronounced PASOK) is endangering Greek sovereignty:

<<Αυτό που κάνουμε έχει μεγάλους κινδύνους. Όταν εντάξουμε 500.000 μετανάστες και τους κάνουμε Έλληνες, αυτομάτως την επόμενη μέρα λόγω

ανεργίας θα πληρώνουμε στον ΟΑΕΔ άλλους 500.000 ανθρώπους... Δεύτερον, έχουμε ευαίσθητα σύνορα... Να προσθέσω άλλες 400.000 μουσουλμάνους. Θα γίνει ένα μουσουλμανικό κόμμα στην Ελλάδα, όπως και στη Βουλγαρία>>

“The things that we are doing are hugely dangerous. When we legalize 500,000 immigrants and make them Greeks, we automatically have to pay out social security to another 500,000 people. Secondly we have a vulnerable border ... we will get another 400,000 Muslims. We will end up with a Muslim party in Greece, like there is in Bulgaria”

This rhetoric plays on the conventional Greek discord with Islam represented by numerous clashes with Turkey. The legislation that is being discussed would allow second generation migrants who have completed all their schooling in Greece to become citizens. This legislation refers to distinguishing between citizenship and nationality, something that has not been done in Greece. Karatzeferis suggests that passing such legislation is dangerous for Greece, raising an economic threat and a threat of increased migration. Thus, the notion of threat to Greece becomes associated with the idea of allowing second generation migrants Greek citizenship, and this will add to the general threat migration poses to Greece and Greek identity. Identity is implicated in this statement because the formative identity of Greece is constructed in opposition to the Ottoman Empire. This is emphasized further if the formation of the Greek nation is understood as establishing territorial sovereignty for the Greek Orthodox Christians who liberated themselves from Ottoman Muslim oppression. The idea of a Muslim party forming in Greece carries greater meaning attached to Greek identity.

The references to immigration from politicians and other immigration professionals group all migrants together as “μετανάστες” (migrants). The differentiation that arises is between legal and illegal migrants as opposed to other categories of separation (such as refugees, economic migrants, temporary migrants or permanent immigrants, etc.). That the Greek-born children of migrants are referred to as second generation migrants further creates a separation

that is based on identity. These children have completed all of their education in Greece and their primary language and culture is arguably Greek, yet they are understood as migrants and their right to political participation is contested.

Throughout the extracts in which politicians and immigration professionals refer to migrants, there is one example in which the humanity of migrants is of importance. The government accepted proposed legislation that migrants with temporary leave to remain can return to their country of origin in cases of humanitarian need (such as a close relative dying), and then re-enter Greece without a problem. While in cases the conditions in detention centres are described as “inhuman” there is a lack of rhetoric in which migrants are understood as human, or as individuals with different needs. Conventionally migrants are grouped together with the only recurring distinguishing characteristic being between legal and illegal migrants. To understand the legal-illegal distinction as a discursive event incorporates the attachments associated with thinking of a person as “illegal.” Migrants considered illegal are considered to have no right to be present in Greece and have no recourse to human rights. This is justified by the idea that they have broken a law and so have given up their rights through their criminal behaviour. The discourse of illegality that is reproduced by the politicians and immigration professionals is discussed in more detail below.

- Migrant – Greek relations

The news articles that are coded as discussing migrant Greek relations frequently distinguish between Greeks as an ethnic national group and migrants as a homogenous collective, with occasional generic differentiations such as “μετανάστες από την Ασία και την Αφρική” (Asian and African immigrants). The excerpts that reference relations between Greeks and migrants occasionally report overt Greek racism and discrimination and more frequently report Greeks

differentiating themselves from migrants. Additionally, these excerpts frequently differentiate between Greeks and migrants in the text. For example, the dichotomous choice is raised:

Πρέπει να καταλάβουμε οι Έλληνες και μάλιστα να το καταλάβουμε εγκαίρως ότι στο εξής θα (συ)ζούμε με μετανάστες. Συνεπώς τα ερωτήματα που εγείρονται είναι: ενσωμάτωση και ώσμωση; ή πολυπολιτισμικότητα και διχασμός; (δηλαδή ρατσισμός, καταστολή και γκέτο για τους μετανάστες, κίνδυνοι ασφάλειας και - ακόμα- εθνικής ανεξαρτησίας, για τους Έλληνες);

We the Greeks have to understand, and understand right away, that we live and will continue to live with immigrants. Therefore, the questions that are raised are: do we want to integrate and absorb immigrants? Or do we want multiculturalism and disunity (in other words, racism, oppression and ghetto for the immigrants, danger to our security and – moreover – national sovereignty, for Greeks)?

Immigrants must be assimilated and absorbed into Greek culture because multiculturalism presents a threat to security and to national sovereignty. Thus, the theme of the article situates the migrant as a threatening entity which can only be removed through assimilation, or through making the migrant Greek. The individual identities and attributes of migrants do not feature in this understanding of the role of migrants and the effects of migrants in Greece.

There are several different instances where one can see a rejection of the possibility that Greeks are racist; for example, a particular news article details that “Φοβικοί απέναντι στους μετανάστες, αλλά όχι ρατσιστές οι Έλληνες” (Greeks are fearful of immigrants, but are not racist). However, the clear grouping of “immigrants” into a single category that represents a threat to Greece here suggests that there is a lack of understanding individual migrants outside of their status as “immigrants”. Furthermore, the characteristics of the “immigrant” collective are frequently generalized. For example, an article in *Ta Nea* states:

«Λίγοι μετανάστες είναι καλοί και εργατικοί. Οι περισσότεροι πίνουν μπίρες στον δρόμο και κυκλοφορούν με τα αυτοκίνητα έχοντας τη μουσική στη διαπασών και προκαλούν. Θα ήταν ευχής έργον αν αύριο κιάλας έφευγαν όλοι από το χωριό μας» υποστηρίζουν οι περισσότεροι.



“A few immigrants are good and are hard workers. Most of them drink beer in the street and drive around in their cars with the music blasting. It would be nice if tomorrow all of them went back to their own countries” is what most people say.

While the article is not overtly applying negative characteristics to migrants itself, it is establishing the popular discourse. Since “most people” have this idea of migrants in Greece the article implies that there must be truth to the idea. The article suggests that this generalization is an acceptable viewpoint to have despite it being a statement about a group that is actually diverse. In the articles that I coded as characterizing the relationship between Greeks and migrants, the common portrayal sees migrants grouped into a collective that frequently is in opposition to Greeks, possesses negative attributes, or threatens Greeks on some level.

- Legal / Illegal

The Greek media frequently distinguishes between legal and illegal migrants. However, this distinction does not tend to point out the rights and privileges of “legal” immigrants, in fact the qualifier “legal” tends only to be raised in opposition to “illegal.” This means that if the topic of the article is deportation of illegal migrants, a phrase might explain that “legal and illegal immigrants were detained”. The subject of the article is the group of “illegal” immigrants although there is a separation within the immigrant collective that recognizes some as “legal” and therefore different. This separation is factual, yet continues to be problematic because it constructs “illegal” migrants as outside of the law. This can be seen as putting them in a space of “bare life”, and understanding “illegal” migrants to be less than human. Furthermore, the term “legal” is only used in opposition to “illegal”, which is the more prevalent term. The prevalence of the idea of illegality among migrants is then reproduced in national discourse. To understand the use of the word illegal as a discursive event means that the term is not a benign description of

whether a person has an immigration status. The repetition of the word “illegal”, the Greek παράνομος (paranomos), constructs a person as being outside of the law because his or her presence in Greece is a crime. Thus the majority of migrants, constructed as “illegal immigrants” are attributed criminal characteristics. This idea of illegality or criminality is then reproduced in popular perceptions of migrants, in political discourse, and in the actions of the police.

This major legal-illegal distinction persists in political opinion and in the relations between migrants and Greeks. For example, an article detailing the manipulation of immigrants as a political tool outlines that “Οι μετανάστες ορίζονται ως νόμιμοι ή παράνομοι με σκληρές γραμμές αποκλεισμών και με συνεχείς παλινδρομήσεις της εννοιοδότησης του «νόμιμου» και του «παράνομου»” [Immigrants are defined as legal and illegal with harsh lines of exclusion and with continuous divisions made between “legal” and “illegal”].

An important topic that emerged in the articles with regard to legality is “επιχειρήσεις-σκούπα”, or “operation sweep-up”, which is an initiative of the police force. In the context of the news media “operation sweep-up” is imbued with a sense of nationalism as the abbreviation for the Greek police force (Ελληνική Αστυνομία) is ΕΛ.ΑΣ, which, pronounced Ellas, means “Greek”. Thus the sense that is repeated throughout articles is that the Greeks are cleaning up the “illegal” and “clandestine” immigrants from the country, sweeping them out of the centre of Athens and transporting them to holding camps from which they will be deported. The immigrants then are further dehumanized, becoming matter that needs to be cleaned from the streets. This harsh action is justified by the notion that immigrants are illegal or criminal and do not have the right to presence in Greece.

It should be noted that there are exceptions in the news media, which, rather than participating in the dehumanization of migrants, instead point to the dehumanization of migrants as problematic. For example, an interview with a think tank, the *Institute for Political Immigration* appeared in *Ta Nea*'s "Twenty Questions" feature. In the interview the president of the group Alexandros Zafos states that the word "human" must be reinserted into rhetoric concerning migration: "Μια φράση διανθίζει όλες μας τις πρωτοβουλίες: «Για τους Έλληνες δεν υπάρχουν μετανάστες, υπάρχουν άνθρωποι» [One phrase underlines all of our initiatives: "For the Greeks there are no immigrants, there are people"]. Further to this, an article in *Ta Nea* deals with the potential negative effects of the dehumanization of immigrants:

“το κράτος χάνει από τη δικαιοδοσία του- και εν τέλει από τον θεσμικό του έλεγχο- έναν μεγάλο αριθμό ανθρώπων οι οποίοι, αν και επεδίωκαν να ενταχθούν κάτω από αυτήν τη δικαιοδοσία, ... βρίσκονται αντιμέτωποι και απειλούμενοι από αυτήν”

(the state loses their jurisdiction – and ... the institutional control – of a large number of people who, although they are seeking to join that jurisdiction, ultimately find themselves confronted and threatened by it).

This article does not establish the immigrants themselves provoking the threat. The threat is provoked by the reluctance of the state to include immigrants and the effect of maintaining an underground immigrant economy. "Illegal" immigrants then see themselves as oppressed by the state and in opposition to the state, and this creates potential for a backlash against the state. While this posits the inclusion of immigrants in the jurisdiction of the state, it justified the view through the threat posed by not including them. The discursive construction of migrants as a threat is still present.

- Migrant political action

I coded experts in which the newspapers reported political agency on the part of migrants. This is by far the most interesting theme with regard to understanding migrants as political

subjects. There were two main events relating to migrant political action during the three year time period I coded. Almost all of the excerpts coded as migrant political action were related to those two events. The first was the debate regarding legislation to allow second generation migrants to become citizens in some circumstances, The second was a hunger strike that lasted 43 days in which migrants petitioned for the right to remain in Greece.

The legislation that was under debate would restrict the privilege of citizenship to children of people with immigration status in Greece because Greece does not recognize *jus solis*, that is, people born on Greek territory do not automatically receive citizenship. The content of the debates surrounding this new legislation for the most part establishes that, while controversial according to conventional understandings of Greek national identity under *jus sanguinis*, it will bring Greece in line with the policies in other EU states. Opposition to the movement is reported in the news sources. However, opposition is frequently rationalized through raising questions of identity, for example:

Για τον κ. Μπουγιάρ, που είναι πατέρας τριών παιδιών, το ζήτημα της εκπαίδευσης και κυρίως η έλλειψη της δυνατότητας των παιδιών των μεταναστών να διδάσκονται τη μητρική τους γλώσσα είναι κυρίαρχο. «Πηγαίνουν τα παιδιά μας στα ελληνικά σχολεία αλλά δεν γνωρίζουν την αλβανική γλώσσα», λέει. Ο ίδιος πάντως δηλώνει Μυτιληνιός. «Αν με ρωτήσουν από πού είσαι, λέω Μυτιληνιός. Εδώ ζω, εδώ δουλεύω, εδώ μεγαλώνω τα παιδιά μου» τονίζει.

For Mr. Bougiar, who is a father of three children, the question of education and especially the question of the lack of opportunities for the children of immigrants to be taught their mother languages is of prime importance. “My children go to a Greek school but they don’t know the Albanian language” he says. However, at the same time, he calls himself “Mitiliniian. “If they ask me where I’m from, I say I’m from Mitilini. I live here, I work here, I raise my children here” he states.

Here, the interviewee wants his children to be able to maintain their ethnic Albanian identity.

The interview suggests that Greek ethnic identity would cease to carry meaning for the members of the nation, while other ethnic identities are preserved. Access to political participation

through citizenship is posited as undermining Greek identity while providing the political voice to establish means of preserving other ethnic identities. This is cited as an objection to the legislation. Furthermore, opposition to the legislation is rationalized through the idea of progress:

Την αντίθεση στην προοπτική η κοινότητα των Ελλήνων πολιτών να ανοίξει και σε άλλους, «αλλοδαπούς», «αλλοεθνείς», «αλλόθρησκους», «αλλογενείς», σε ξένους δηλαδή που θα έχουν λόγο στα πολιτικά πράγματα του τόπου όπου ζουν. Η αντίδραση αυτή δεν είναι καινοφανής: πριν από 170 χρόνια είχε ξεσηκωθεί δυναμική αντίδραση στην πολιτογράφηση και την απόδοση πολιτικών δικαιωμάτων στους «ετερόχθονες», όπως πριν από μισό αιώνα υπήρξε αντίδραση ενάντια στα πολιτικά δικαιώματα των γυναικών.

The opposition, from the perspective of Greek citizens, is that it (extending the vote) opens up to other foreigners, other ethnicities, other religions, other races, foreigners in other words that will have interests in the political occurrences of the place where we live. This reaction is not unprecedented: 170 years ago a dynamic reaction to naturalization and the access to political rights of “(people of) different origins” rose up, half a century earlier there was opposition to the political rights of women.

In this context however, the legislation is initiated because of EU obligations rather than as a result of action on the part of migrants themselves. While there is the potential for political subjectivity to be established for those who meet the criteria stipulated in the legislation, that is, second generation migrants who have completed all of their schooling in Greece and whose parents have legal status; the political subjectivity is not for migrants. The debate is whether the people in question can be thought of as Greek. If they are recognized as Greek citizens they will no longer be thought of as migrants. The people in question make the shift into political subjects because they shift to a Greek citizen identity as opposed to a migrant identity.

The second event that is widely reported and offers a view on migrant political subjectivity is a group of hunger strikers who protested their pending removal from Greece between December 2010 and February 2011. The portrayal of the immigrant hunger strikers

established the people as a group with a political motivation, and both support for and opposition to the strike is reported. However, there is a lack of critical consideration of the issues at hand apparent in the reports. Nor are the identities of the immigrants considered. The migrants taking part in the strike are consistently reported as “immigrant hunger strikers” or “illegal immigrants” rather than individuals. Thus, the potential for the acquisition of political subjectivity is as a group, rather than as individuals. This to some extent reflects Arendtian “power in concert”.

While the migrant hunger-strikes gain a lot of media attention, migrant participation in the public discourse is limited and migrant identity is established only as “hunger striker”. The explanations portray the hunger strikers as illegal immigrants who are protesting imminent deportation and have taken up residence in the Law School building of the Athens Polytechnic University. The residence of the migrants on hunger strike in the university law school becomes a political issue in Greece, as the university buildings are known as a refuge where one cannot be arrested. Thus many of the instances where the hunger strikes are reported and coded are simply reporting the political discussion regarding their presence in the University.

What is most striking about the portrayals is not the attention raised by the migrants but the notion that politicians are adopting the immigrant question to serve their own political interests. Instead of the issues at the core of the protests, the news media focuses on πολιτική αντιπαλότητα (political rivalry); ουδεμία συντονισμένη ενέργεια (a lack of coordinated effort); η ασφυκτική συσσώρευση προβλημάτων από την αδράνεια ή από λανθασμένους και αδιέξοδους χειρισμούς επί σειρά ετών στα ζητήματα που σχετίζονται με τη μετανάστευση (A massive accumulation of problems caused by inertia and by wrong and blind management of immigration related matters for several years); and η φοβική, γραφειοκρατική και αναποτελεσματική μεταναστευτική πολιτική (the phobic, insufficient, and bureaucratic politics of asylum). More

simply put, the migrant protests are reported in the media in relation to the political climate. Rather than portraying the migrants as political subjects with a political agenda, the protest itself becomes a political object around which different political parties serve their interests. Thus, rather than establishing political subjectivity in the national discourse, the migrants remain a faceless political issue.<sup>13</sup>

### **Conclusion.**

This chapter has explored the question of Greek identity and suggested that migrants in Greece problematize the Greek identity. The issue of migration towards Greece is prevalent in the news media and there are multiple stories reported in which migrants represent the principle subject matter. However, migrants are not given subjectivity or a strong identity. The discourse analysis demonstrates that the most common portrayals of migrants in Greece that emerge are the views of politicians and immigration professionals; relations between migrants and Greeks that group migrants into a homogenous category; the extant division within the migrant group, which is between “legal” and “illegal” migrants; and migrant political action. While it appears that migrant political action provides a scenario in which migrants are attributed political subjectivity, this is limited. The issues become active in political debate; however public discourse continues to construct migrants without subjectivity, making them instead into political objects. The portrayals give little description of the migrants themselves and do not offer a critical analysis of the political issues pertinent to the migrants, rather they analyse how migration affects politicking amongst the major parties. It is particularly noteworthy that the

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<sup>13</sup> However, that is not to say that there is no political agency or political subjectivity apparent at all. The hunger strikes gained international attention, and as a result the migrants were made concessions by the Greek government, and were given leave to remain (see Douzinas, C. (2011). These hunger strikers are the martyrs of Greece. The Guardian. In this context, the objectives of the migrants were achieved through collective action.

reports of the hunger strikers are frequently limited to the subject matter of politicking between parties and political actors, despite this representing spontaneous political action from a conventionally disenfranchised group. In the Greek national discourse the migrants are grouped together in a homogenous “migrant” category rather than being attributed individual identities.



## **Where is the human in human security?**

This chapter examines extant challenges to the state discourses constructing asylum seekers. In particular I examine the failings of the human security paradigm in providing security for “humans” as opposed to security for citizens. I then suggest a shifted conceptualization of human security, using the prism of ontological security to allow incorporation of individuals who do not have state-based identities through which they can obtain immigration status. In particular, I intend to allow for the human security paradigm to analytically include individuals who self—define as asylum seekers, regardless of whether the state recognizes their status. Theoretically and practically this potentially leads to the recognition of asylum seekers in Europe as insecure, and consequently interrogates the circumstances that create this insecurity.

My use of ontological security aims to demonstrate how conceptually this understanding can function to shift the human security paradigm away from state and citizen-privileged conceptions of security towards a broader understanding of “human” that does not rely on the dominance of the state. The conceptualization of human security that incorporates ontological security will question established political citizenship boundaries that are reinforced by the underlying paradigms that inform the human security paradigm: international human rights, and international development.

It should be noted that human security comprises both a theoretical paradigm and a policy agenda. These two separate approaches to human security lead to some conceptual ambiguity as the theoretical paradigm and the policy agenda are often left undistinguished in the literature. My focus is on human security as a theoretical paradigm, although it is necessary to incorporate

the policy agenda into this analysis. Human security, while based on human rights, offers a paradigm shift towards a conception of human rights that focuses on individual well-being. While the intention behind the notion of human security is to broaden and deepen a traditional understanding of security so it is focused on individuals rather than states (Commission on Human Security 2003), human security research has overwhelmingly focused on how security can be supplied in order to uphold human rights more effectively in failed states or developing states, in which the state apparatus is unwilling or unable to provide rights and security for its citizens. A general assumption would be that in an industrialized state with functioning democratic governance, human security would already be implied.

Human security is embedded in two frameworks that I argue impede the provision for a “human” understanding of security and reproduce dominant geo-political power structures that undermine the potential for security for people without state based identities in the form of citizenship or immigration status. The first of these frameworks is human rights, and the second is development. In this chapter I explore the roots of the human security paradigm as they are situated within these frameworks. I consider the power structures that are inherent to these frameworks as conventionally understood, demonstrating the tension in that they subscribe to the rhetoric of individualistic human rights advanced by international neoliberal governance, while at the same time preventing the realization of these rights for individuals who do not have, or have become alienated from, state based identities.

This design of this chapter is as follows: I offer a brief outline of the human security paradigm, characterizing the principle debates. I then demonstrate where the concept of human security incorporates and is influenced by human rights and human development, offering an understanding of the consequences of these imbrications. Following that, I move to a critical

perspective, engaging Mark Duffield's (2007) analysis of the human security paradigm that demonstrates human security in application as a form of biopower, and as an organizational method to protect the global consumer economy from surplus population that constitutes a threat to it. I then offer an alternative conceptualization of human security that incorporates ontological security and I demonstrate how the inclusion of ontological security can function to decenter the human security paradigm from the state, and allow for the self-definition of rights and security on the part of individual migrants. I suggest the incorporation of ontological security as a means of shifting the human security paradigm back to the individual human and allowing for subjective understandings of rights and security that are not determined by the state.

## **Human Security**

The 1994 Human Development report defines human security and provides a useful starting point for the study of the concept. The Human Development Report recognizes that “for most people, a feeling of insecurity arises more from worries about daily life than from the dread of a cataclysmic world event” (Human Development Report 1994). Human security and human rights, while not interchangeable concepts, certainly overlap. The 1994 Human Development Report proposes four dimensions to human security: it should be universal, it is interdependent, it is easier to ensure through early prevention, and it is people-centered. The final criterion demonstrates a shift from human rights in the conventional framework. While human rights are individualistic, they are still promoted and upheld by states. The understanding of human rights that any given state chooses to engage, whether referring to civil and political rights, social and economic rights, or a combination, fundamentally affects the rights to which individuals will have access. The definition of human security given by the human development report involves

two main aspects: “It means first, safety from such chronic threats as hunger, disease, and repression. And second it means protection from such sudden and hurtful disruptions in the patterns of daily life – whether in homes, in jobs, or in communities” (Human Development Report 1994:23). Human security initiatives have been implemented by international organizations when states appear unable or unwilling to uphold and protect human rights, and where states cannot provide for basic subsistence needs. The Human Security Commission, now succeeded by the Advisory Board on Human Security, established the Human Security Unit of the United Nations. The emphasis of the Human Security Commission is to develop methods of implementing human security through a concrete programme of action (Ramcharan 2002). A potential problem is that human security issues are thought of as being confined to the developing world where the availability of human rights protections and subsistence resources are considered inadequate. Human security at present is not helpful for those individuals in advanced industrialized states who are unable to claim rights, including basic subsistence needs. People without immigration status in advanced industrialized states fall into this category.

Human security purports to shift analysis away from state security to the insecure individual (Leaning 2004, Newman 2004, McDonald 2002). This allows analysis not of which rights are applicable for subjects of forced migration but of what these individuals are lacking in terms of their individual security. Looking at what individuals lack is important because such a question helps to identify which needs are dominant, that is, what is the most pressing need *for the individual in question*. Furthermore, human security is not as susceptible to being negated in favour of state security as human rights have been in the past. Human security creates a nexus between individual security, state security and the security of the international system (Human

Development Report 1994, Hampson 2004).<sup>14</sup> As all of these things are interrelated according to the human security school of thought, all three must be upheld in order for security to prevail. One cannot logically be substituted for another because removing one hinders the survival of the others. However, critical scholars of human security have suggested this is problematic as such a conceptualization emphasizes the state and the neoliberal, Western-dominated global system. Consequently, subaltern populations such as people with non-state-based identities are overlooked by these analyses or actively suppressed by these analyses (Duffield 2007, Nuruzzaman 2006, Thomas 1999).

Acknowledgment of insecurity on the individual level makes it easier to identify exactly where reform is needed. Generally, human security scholarship focuses on developing countries where human insecurity is pervasive. In these cases the dominant need tends to coincide for a large group of people. Not surprisingly, The Human Development Report demonstrates a linkage between development and improved security. Insecurity, according to the human security research programme, includes subsistence level security, in other words, the access an individual has to food, shelter, and clean drinking water. Insecurity is not just subsistence: it also includes physical insecurity on the individual level; for example the likelihood that violence will be targeted at an individual (as opposed to physical insecurity being understood solely as military or state warfare). The locations where human security literature is empirically focused include “failed” states, states in condition of civil war, developing states, and states that have experienced natural disaster. In these geographic locations, human insecurity is considered to be

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<sup>14</sup>For example, the human development report draws a connection between deprivation and discontent that can be seen to ultimately fuel violent conflict, whether domestic or international (see page 23-24). Also see Hampson (2004).

prevalent and is generally related to poverty or inefficient state institutions and a history of conflict.

According to the Human Development Report, the growth of human insecurity is related to human rights in the sense that humans are often unable to claim their rights. King and Murray point out the “people-centered” ambitions of human security and the aim to shift from consideration of individual nations to an individual level of analysis (King and Murray 2001-2002). However, the starting points listed above (“failed” states, states in condition of civil war, developing states, and states that have experienced natural disaster) all include the state as the basis for identifying insecure humans. To uncover the utility of the concept of human security from a people-centered perspective, one must remove the state from consideration as the defining provider or withholder of security. If the state is considered as the principle agent of security provision within the theoretical conceptualization of human security, then the security of a human is dependent upon the security of the state and this overlooks a) individuals without a state-based identity, and b) insecure individuals who are within what are considered “secure” states. Through engaging a conception of human security that focuses on the insecure individual as a separate entity from the state, I look at human insecurity when it occurs within stable, relatively wealthy states. In these locations, individuals are assumed to have access to their human rights and human insecurity is not generally considered an insurmountable problem. However, if one engages the notion that human rights are applicable only under an arbitrary hierarchy determined by citizenship or state-based identity, then a locus of human insecurity can be uncovered in these states. In other words, the rights available to citizens and those with immigration status differ from the rights available to people considered undocumented migrants or “failed” asylum-seekers. Asylum seekers are often located in an advanced industrialized state

that would not be identified as a location of insecurity. However, the individual security of people seeking asylum is often threatened.

Human security has evolved since its conceptualization in the early 1990s. Human security as a concept for the study of international relations has been criticized as fuzzy, vague, and difficult to put into practice (Shani et al 2007). It has also been linked to the reinforcement of the state as the principle actor in international politics despite its emphasis on *human*. How to understand human security has been subject to debate. For example, there are two cores to human security, understood as based on human rights and human development. The human-rights based core is also known as the “narrow” understanding of human security and it relies on the framework of negative civil and political rights spawned by Enlightenment Liberal thought (Tadjbakhsh and Chenoy 2007). The human development based core is the focus of human security espoused by the Human Security Commission chaired by Amartya Sen. The latter is known as the broader understanding of human security and looks at the prospect for human security based on human development goals such as the Millennium Development Goals (Tadjbakhsh and Chenoy 2007). Migrants who move towards advanced industrialized states tend not to be incorporated in analyses of human security either with a rights based focus or a development based focus; however, consideration of migration highlights a paradox within human security and liberal governance: that states which identify as liberal often employ illiberal migration policies that create human insecurity. I offer the category of ontological security as a way of reconfiguring human security in order to move the concept away from state centric models, models based on citizenship, and models that are based upon liberal self governance understood as neo-imperialist globalization.

Others contend that the fact that human security is embedded in human rights signifies that it fails to add anything new, particularly to theoretical conceptions of human rights. Barry Buzan argues that there is limited analytical difference between human rights and human security, and all that the concept of human security adds is “the possibility of allowing human rights to be discussed in places where that term causes political difficulties” (Buzan 2004). Human security does provide that advantage in states where human rights norms are posed as politically problematic, such as environments opposed to the neoliberal political model. However, I suggest that human security can operate inversely, not disguising human rights and the neoliberal model of government, but interrogating the neoliberal model. Human security, when shifted away from the state, can highlight the negative effects of neoliberal government on given populations and offer a decentered understanding of human security and insecurity that does not rely on the proliferation of global neoliberalism but is formed via a different set of goals and objectives that can be normatively determined by the individual. In the cases discussed in this study, human rights are not a politically problematic concept. Yet the implementation of human rights for certain collectives is not part of the dominant human rights discourse even in these advanced industrialized liberal democracies. In these cases, one can observe the neoliberal model of government operating as a factor that prohibits access to human rights for some people, particularly those without state-based identities (Duffield 2007). Thus, human security as a theoretical concept can shift our understanding of the locations and causes of human insecurity, critically interrogating the neoliberal global system.

Heretofore, I have identified many issues with the human security paradigm as it currently stands. Thus, one might ask why it is at all useful. Human security as a concept is useful here for two main reasons: The “fuzziness” or vagueness of the concept along with the



emphasis on “human” means there is potential to use human security as a vehicle to decenter the study of security in international relations while still conversing with both the academic paradigms and with practitioners of human rights and development. The emphasis on “human” further calls for such a decentering. The “fuzziness” of the concept means that the academic dialogue is open to reinterpretation and subjective understandings as opposed to being limited by hard boundaries. I offer an understanding of ontological security which, coupled with the focus on human, can give insight into individual subjectivities, and can expose the problematic power structure of the neoliberal economic system centered on the political unit of the nation state. Ontological security focuses on the security-of-being of the individual in question, shifting the agency to identify the most immediate needs for security to the insecure individual. In the context of this study, ontological security provides scope to recognize and understand the boundaries constructed by the state that prevent realization of security for some people within secure states.

Bertrand Ramcharan (2002) in his discussion of the utility of human security emphasizes that “security is a secure condition or feeling.” The notion that it is a feeling or condition means that human security can be studied more easily than human rights as something a person possesses or does not, with focus on the individual as opposed to the juridical model or the relevant governing administration. Therefore, human security has the potential to go beyond the absolute juridical standards of human rights and therefore to resolve the tension between human rights and the de facto structural inequalities that are entrenched by the commitment to the rule of law. While human security can be broken into categories such as physical or economic security, a single incomplete category signals insecurity. That is, all of the categories should be seen as necessary conditions for security. Furthermore, as the focus is on a *feeling* of security,

one cannot equate individual security with state security. An individual may feel insecure within a secure state if his or her security needs are not fulfilled. Furthermore, it is problematic for states to be seen as the providers of security because this creates several levels of differentiation and potential exclusion as discussed in chapter two. Human security again has the potential to work around the different levels of differentiation and exclusion if the concept of human is inclusive of non-state based identities. Below I will analyze the human security paradigm, first examining the influences of human rights and human development then moving on to critical perspectives.

### **Framework of human rights**

In this analysis, I posit that because human security is embedded in the international framework of human rights, the human security policy agenda is subject to impediments prohibiting its application, particularly when it comes to subjects of forced migration. There is extensive academic debate about the value of human security as a concept from which to study human rights. Proponents of human security believe that the paradigm contributes to human rights by providing a tool through which access to human rights can be given to those who lack it (Paris 2001, Hampson 2004). Human rights grew out of classical liberal individualism and they comprise a set of duties states are obliged to observe. Under the framework of international law there is no real forum for an individual to contest their treatment by a state, other than petitioning another state. Hence, international human rights cannot function effectively at an individual level.

As stated by the United Nations Deputy Commissioner for Human Rights, Bertrand Ramcharan, “international human rights norms define the meaning of human security [and] the

essence of human security is to respect the human rights and fundamental freedoms that have been distilled and articulated by the international community” (Ramcharan 2002:1). In international relations as a discipline there is an overwhelming focus on the state and its capacity to grant or withhold human rights. Human rights studies in international relations and in comparative politics tend to abstract the victims of human rights abuses. In situations of forced migration this is a particular problem because the victims often have no recourse to a state willing to provide them with human rights. There is a substantial inconsistency between state capabilities to uphold human rights and the individuals who are provided with access to human rights. Even in cases where the level of analysis is the individual, the individual tends to be situated within a state or within a “failed state,” which binds understandings of his or her human rights to the willingness or ability of the state body to uphold and protect human rights. In studies that take an international legal approach this disconnect is still apparent. States are the subjects of international law and the law binds these states to uphold human rights for their citizens. However, advanced industrialized states who are proponents of human rights based on classical liberal conceptions of natural rights and equality also tend to be proponents of the rule of law as established for citizens, and do not adhere to human rights standards universally (Guild 2005). State interests are privileged and human rights are often conceived as a contract between the state and its citizens. In short, the positivist legalist conception of human rights that sees rights as legal entitlement codified in state law prevails. Consequently individuals who are not subjects of a given state do not have access to the same rights as citizens.

Under international law there is no official hierarchy of human rights; all subjects are presented as equal and certain human rights are presented as inalienable and universal. However, when it comes to the application of human rights by states, a hierarchy becomes

apparent in terms of the understanding of what comprises rights and in the groups of individuals who can claim human rights from the state in question. In the conception of rights, civil and political rights are prioritized in Western states over economic, social, and cultural rights. Collective rights and group rights are often not viewed as “true” human rights, and are often debated as to the utility of understanding some human rights as culturally relative. In terms of the individuals to whom the rights apply, non-citizens do not often qualify for the same rights as citizens; citizens have more rights than non-citizens, in part due to the predominance of civil and political rights; for example, only citizens have the right to vote or hold public office. Regardless of whether one agrees with this distinction, one can argue that this hierarchy precludes the notion that rights are equal and universal. Furthermore, because states are the only subjects of international law, states can privilege their own interests over individuals.<sup>15</sup> For instance, human rights are often substituted in favour of national security arguments. In times of war it is common for human rights, in the form of civil liberties, to be withheld for the protection of national security.<sup>16</sup> State security is given priority over individual rights, with the notion that individuals are secure if the state to which they belong is secure, and rights can be overlooked in favour of security.

The question of universalism itself provokes an issue with regard to theoretical debates pertaining to human rights. The development of rights discourses has provoked a dialogue as to the nature of rights, between universalists, who claim objective absolute truth and universal

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<sup>15</sup> I make this claim as there is no forum for an individual to make a legal petition against a state outside of that state. The International Court of Justice is a forum for states to interact. The International Criminal Court deals with individuals who are in breach of international law but does not provide a forum for an individual to prosecute a state. Other international courts are regional and so do not provide protection for individuals outside of state membership.

<sup>16</sup> For example, in the United States post 9/11 there was a strong movement for the curtailment of civil rights in order to protect national security, resulting in the PATRIOT Act which allowed the breach of a number of formerly legally upheld civil liberties.

rights and values; and cultural relativists, who claim that human rights are culturally dependent (Strauss 1957, Donnelly 1984, Rao 1995, Perry 1997, Otto 1997, Donnelly 2007). There are problems with both of these perspectives. The notion of universal rights relies on a conception of objective truth, the rationalist assumption at the basis of modernist political theory, which is not essentially compatible with transcendental, pragmatist, or interpretivist epistemologies. Thus, the notion of the universal stems from the European tradition and Enlightenment liberal rejection of the transcendental. The European Enlightenment tradition provides the “standard” for contemporary human rights in international law and international organizations (Otto 1997:8). The cultural relativist position, while epistemologically compatible with non-rationalist schools of thought, can be a dangerous justification for maltreatment of certain populations. For example, cultural justification for the subjugation of women is provided under the cultural relativist position (Rao 1995). The consensus Otto recognizes between these positions sees a compromise in international human rights law: there are a set of fundamental human rights that are accepted as universal, and then there are the remaining rights that are at the discretion of state bodies and so are accepted as non-universal but culturally relevant. However, there are two initial problems generated here relevant to the subject matter discussed in this text. The first is the Western standard of universal is privileged and accepted. If there are any universal rights, then relativists must concede the rationalist assumption of universal truth. Thus, having fundamental human rights as the standard for all states requires tacit acceptance of objective truth. Schools of thought that might not agree with the notion of universalism are then subsumed into this standard and lose their autonomy (Otto 1997:8). The second is the perceivable realities that despite using the rhetoric of universal, Western states do not apply human rights universally. Human rights depend on legal citizenship status. Therefore the tension within classical liberal

values is apparent. Access to human rights is dictated via the rule of citizenship law. Those who are not considered citizens do not have the same juridical recourse to human rights as citizens. Understood this way, within the logic of practical application, universal human rights are only for those individuals who are considered to be within the law. Thus non-citizens or people with non-state-based identities who are considered to be without citizenship law become less than human.

The conception of human rights as universal creates potential inadequacy in the potential reach of current studies of human rights, as studies tend to focus on whether a state recognizes human rights rather than whether human rights are implemented on a universal basis. This focus reifies the universality of human rights, treating human rights as an objective fact rather than a yet to be realized ideal. Analyses of whether human rights are present remain at the state level. I contend that stateless people, asylum seekers, and refugees comprise a vast number of people who have no access to human rights and for whom current conceptions of human rights prove inadequate.<sup>17</sup> Human security, due to its basis in human rights, experiences similar conceptual limitations; however, the individualistic focus, with revisions, has the potential to allow for a broader analysis away from the state level.

### **Framework of development**

The concept of human security is embedded in human development, given that it arose from the 1994 United Nations Human Development Report. Development addresses the

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<sup>17</sup>The number of refugees in the world is currently estimated as 16 million, with an estimated total of 42 million people “uprooted” worldwide according to figures provided by the UNHCR ([unhcr.org](http://unhcr.org), last accessed June 2011). It is worthy of note that these figures do not include economic migrants as these people are considered illegal and may belong to a state. Conceptions of human rights still uphold that it is not the role of the international community or advanced industrialized states to provide for economically motivated migrants.

“freedom from want” section of human security, with the objective being the eradication of global poverty (Easterlin 2000). The human development agenda was largely inspired by Amartya Sen’s “capabilities approach” which moved away from conventional economic aggregate measures of development, in favour of returning to the human aspect; that is, the “real purpose of development” being to improve human lives (Fukuda-Parr 2011). This was complemented by Mahbub ul Haq’s United Nations-sponsored initiative of the Human Development Reports, the 1994 edition of course launching human security. Proponents of the human security paradigm recognize the flawed logic of measuring development based on state GDPs and aggregate measures of wealth (McGrew 2007). Human development instead looks at the human experience, redefining security as a subjective experience (Tadjbakhsh and Chenoy 2007). Human development abandons the “trickle down” logic that neoliberal understandings of development employ; however, human development projects tend to be committed to the same notion of “betterment” as is at the heart of the industrializing model (Tadjbakhsh and Chenoy 2007). While economic growth continues to be instrumental to the human development project, the overarching goal is to enable humans to live enriching lives (Sen 1999, Fukuda-Parr 2011). The Millennium Development Goals grew out of the human development initiative and comprise a blueprint to operationalize human development objectives, pledged by United Nations member states (United Nations, accessed 2011). These goals comprise eight people-centered objectives that are based on development indicators: end poverty and hunger, implement universal education, implement gender equality, improve child health, provide access to maternal health, combat HIV and AIDS, support environmental sustainability, and develop a global partnership for development (United Nations, accessed 2011). The Millennium Development Goals

demonstrate the movement away from aggregate economic indicators of development that tend to be used by economists, prioritizing human centered goals (Easterlin 2000).

Human security is embedded within the human development project. The Commission on Human Security suggests that human security offers a narrower set of goals than human development, in that human security is concerned with absolute need, rather than ongoing development (Human Security Commission, Sen 2003). However, a suggested advantage of human security is that it allows for security to be redefined according to subjective experience (Tadjbakhsh and Chenoy 2007). Focusing only on populations in “absolute need” removes the potential for an autonomous understanding of security that human security, by focusing on a “secure condition of feeling” can offer. For example, the objective of human security becomes redefined as simply providing care for people in dire need. While it has been claimed that this narrower goal gives the term more analytical value (Thomas and Tow 2004), as an advocacy or praxis based analytical paradigm, the narrower focus undermines the potential of the broader goal of eradicating poverty as it does not address the causes, but only provides for the effects.

Human security has alternatively been seen as a vehicle through which development goals become state policy priority. Scholars point to the need to understand poverty as a form of human violence, in order to garner the same attention as that which goes to military policy (Dunne and Wheeler 2004). This logic suggests that by reconfiguring development into a security issue, development goals will become prioritized by states. State actors can justify spending on development, humanitarian intervention, and aid to their populations through the rhetoric of security. However, this has been seen to reinforce the primacy of the state, an objective that theoretically human security intended to move away from (Leaning 2004, Thomas 2004, Bellamy and McDonald 2004). While the community aspect of human security is



emphasized with the premise that living in a community produces security (Thomas 2007, Linklater 2005), the continued prevalence of the state as the provider of security reinforces the notion of states as the legitimate power-holding community. This consequently overlooks and makes insecure those individuals with non-state-based identities (Nuruzzaman 2006).

A second debate suggests a concern that human security as a concept will broaden the notion of security. The potential consequence is then that the security dialogues of states will lack a clear focus (Thomas 2004). The lack of a clearly defined understanding of what is a security threat can potentially broaden the scope for humanitarian intervention and military action in the name of development and democratization (Kaldor 2007, Thomas 2007). Shani suggests that consequently human security can be seen as provoking a form of democratic imperialism spreading the goals of neoliberal Western economic and governmental organization (Shani 2007).

The principle debates at the development core of human security rest on whether human security is understood as an analytical concept to further understand international development objectives, or whether it is understood as a policy objective to provide sustainable security for groups of insecure humans within insecure states. The scholars that focus on the policy objectives look at the role of the state in the ability to provide human security, and individuals considered tend to be citizens of a state or people who can be incorporated as citizens of a state. The state remains a practical tool in international politics for the provision of goods and services to individuals, security being one of these goods. The scholars that engage human security as a policy objective tend to remain within state based thought and rhetoric (Hampson 2004, Seidensticker 2002). Theoretically, human security requires a shift from the state as the referent object of security to the human. This offers potential as an emancipatory theoretical basis

(Thomas 2004, Leaning 2004, Dunne and Wheeler 2004, Nuruzzaman 2006, McDonald 2002). However, a distinction between citizens and humans in the provision of human security endures (Guild 2009). This reflects debates regarding legitimate communities. Clarity can be given to the concept of human security by separating the development based policy agenda from the theoretical concept.

### **Decentering human security**

In order to usefully separate the human rights rhetoric, the development based policy agenda, and the utility of human security as a theoretical concept, it is necessary to decenter the concept of human security as an analytical tool, disconnecting it from state-based rhetoric and practice. Both the human rights and human development paradigms have been subject to critique by poststructural and postcolonial voices in international relations theory and these critiques can be further applied to the human security paradigm.

#### **i) Economic organization, blame, and responsibility**

Development is related to the neoliberal organization of the world, therefore the implementation of human security goals must contend with this dominance. Tayyab Mahmud (1999) suggests that the development project can be understood as epistemic violence, in that it “continually reduces poverty and degradation to failures of technological advancement.” Furthermore, for Mahmud the development project can be understood as what he terms an omni-historical reality that does not interrogate or confront geopolitical power and instead becomes “the primary mechanism through which particular parts of the world and particular subjects are produced and produce themselves, thus precluding other ways of imagining, seeing, and doing” (Mahmud 1999:26). This allows the Western-dominated power status quo to be reproduced.

Development becomes an immutable fact and a value neutral process (Mahmud 1999). The lack of critical engagement of the praxis of development based agendas means that development, neoliberal economics and goals of industrialization become the desirable endpoint where they are applied. Lack of critical engagement means that this is not subject to questioning. Postcolonial scholars of human rights and human development such as Mahmud suggest that this is part of a bigger dialogue, legitimizing the West or global North, while delegitimizing the global South (Mahmud 1999, Thomas 1999).

Mahmud (1999) asserts that both the rhetoric of development and development projects reinforce a trajectory in which problems such as poverty and degradation are seen as simply failures of technological advancement that can be solved by the “civilizing” effect of development. This assumption is problematic for Mahmud as it does not challenge geopolitical power or the effects of the global economic structure. Rather, poverty is understood as a failure on the part of the global South not as an effect of the global environment over time. Thus, blame for “underdevelopment” rests with the global South who have failed to implement efficient development projects and emulate the ways in which the global North achieves economic growth.

Further to this, as discussed above, the principles of classical liberalism are embedded within human rights. These principles endorse a commitment to formal legal equality and so neglect substantive and structural inequality. The liberal economic order is reinforced by an illiberal colonial ideology, displayed within a set of attitudes attributed to non-Western lives that are deemed culturally inferior (Thomas 1999). The endurance of this colonial ideology acts as a force that directs attention away from defects in the international order; that is, if these states do not do well in the international economy, it’s because of some cultural defect, or some inferior

characteristic shared by the people. The following table, borrowed from Chantal Thomas, summarizes the colonial ideology:

|                     | <i>North</i>  | <i>South</i>   |
|---------------------|---|--|
| <i>Geographical</i> | Here/centre   | There/periphery  |
| <i>Cultural</i>     | Civilized<br>Modern<br>Scientific<br>Rational<br>Industrious / ambitious<br>“Rule of law” | Barbaric<br>Traditional<br>Mystical<br>Irrational<br>Lazy / dishonest<br>Lawless |
| <i>Racial</i>       | White   | Non-white  |
| <i>Economic</i>     | Capitalist<br>Efficient<br>Growing  | Pre-capitalist<br>Inefficient<br>Stagnating                                      |

(Thomas 1999: 6)

Thus, this ideology reinforces the logic of global development in a paternalistic way. The colonial ideology delegitimizes the local and privileges the characteristics associated with the North. In doing so, the ideology removes potential for merging or dynamic outcomes between the local and what might be autonomously adopted from global discourses at local levels. Therefore, it removes the potential for autonomy and means that the value of the characteristics of the North is privileged and unquestioned.

ii) Human rights

Critiques of the human rights discourse identify power relationships that are reproduced by the framework of human rights and development. As discussed above, human rights scholars are often conventionally divided into universalists and cultural relativists (Otto 1997-1998, Rao 1995). Dianne Otto demonstrates that the dialogue between universalists and cultural relativists reproduces the dominant standard whereby there are given rights that are understood as inalienable and uncontested, and remaining rights that are culturally relative and therefore conceded to be of lesser importance, as discussed above. However, ontologically this relies on the assumption that there is objective truth that has been accessed by the Western standard of universal rights and therefore is not subject to critique. The lack of critical interrogation maintains the status quo, not of Western dominance, but of the wealth disparity between elites and masses. Otto demonstrates that the concessions towards the notion of universal human rights have been made not to provide human rights but to perpetuate the masculine dominated power dynamic and the economic interests of the powerful states. For example, the incorporation of women into the workplace in many places has effectively provided cheap and exploitable labour, enhancing the globalization of capital (Otto 1997-8, Rao 1995). Furthermore, Otto suggests that the argument that human rights are not compatible with Asian values has an economic rather than a cultural motivation: a degree of authoritarianism in political economy has proved lucrative for Asian style capitalism. Otto argues that the elites want to maintain their comfortable position (Otto 1997-8). Chantal Thomas (1999) demonstrates that the commitment to equality in law on the part of the neoliberal global system means that structural inequalities that were imposed by the colonial period have not and cannot be counteracted. This provokes an apparent tension in international human rights law whereby the values that are inherent to human

rights within the rhetoric of liberal individualism are not manifested in the international legal system.

iii) Managing peoples

Mark Duffield (2007) advances a critique of the human security paradigm that sees it as a tool for the management of the population. He suggests that sustainable development goals, that is, development that focuses on self-sufficiency within communities, can be seen as a mechanism of managing a surplus population. Sustainable development keeps communities contained in a position where they can manage their own poverty according to liberal ideal. They are the surplus population who, unmanaged, would threaten the global mass consumer economy. Migration then becomes threatening to security at the global level as it represents the seeping of the surplus population into mass consumer society. Duffield distinguishes between insured peoples and uninsured peoples. The global North has a system of social insurance while the global South has been developed according to classical liberal economic principles that emphasize a free economy but not social insurance (Duffield 2007). Consequently, the world can be divided into insured peoples and uninsured peoples and this division endures across geographic borders. For example, when people migrate from an uninsured state to an insured state, they keep their uninsured status unless they legally immigrate. Given that eligibility to immigrate has contracted and immigration laws have tightened in recent years, the number of peoples who remain uninsured despite being present in insured states is rising.

This is where the human security paradigm as a theoretical concept can offer insight. Primarily, through identifying insured and uninsured people, it becomes clear that human insecurity exists within “secure” states and calls for the concept to be broadened in order to incorporate human insecurity that is not limited by geographic boundaries. In order to

incorporate insecure or uninsured peoples present in secure states into the analysis, the concept must be decentered at the human level as well as the geographic, to include non-state-based identities, non-citizens, and people without immigration status. By decentering the concept in this way, human security can provide a means of demonstrating the paradox of liberal governance that is coupled with an illiberal approach to global migration.

Human security has conventionally applied to the developing world, or the populations in most immediate and dire need as a policy objective. That is, human security has been applied in insecure states. However, the analysis offered by Duffield calls for further investigation. If the human security objective is the security of peoples, then it should apply indiscriminately to all peoples. I argue that some of the greatest levels of insecurity can be seen among subaltern populations within secure states. As is seen in the previous chapters, the state constructs these individuals as a threat to state security. Human security as a theoretical concept can potentially contend with that, and expose the lack of *human* security provided by the sovereign state, which instead favours a discriminatory *citizen* security. Below, I use the theory of ontological security to demonstrate how human security can be reformed to provide insight into the potential for security for humans. Ontological security provides the theoretical basis to decenter human security, whereby individuals identify the needs most immediate to themselves as individuals.

### **Ontological human security**

In order to identify human insecurity in a state where civil war, natural disaster, or poverty is not an immediate concern, I turn to an understanding of ontological security. In ontological security I refer to the description of human security as a “condition or feeling” cited above (Ramcharan 2002). Ontological security resides within the individual and is determined by

security in the individual's daily life and societal participation. Because this notion of ontological security is individualistic and connected to individual experiences and identity, it allows for consideration of human insecurity within secure states.

According to the Human Development Report, "human security ... means protection from sudden and hurtful disruptions in the patterns of daily life –whether in homes, in jobs, or in communities" (Human Development Report 1994:23). Here, the notion is that people should be protected from these disruptions. The importance of this protection to the human security definition, as it was given by the drafters of the report themselves, suggests that continuity and stable expectations in daily life are a fundamental basis of human security. This assertion can be complemented and engaged in greater complexity through the use of the conception of security employed in social action theory, with roots in sociology and Anthony Giddens' structuration theory (Giddens 1993, McSweeney 1999).

As discussed in previous chapters, ontological security and structuration theory engages a sense of reflexivity, referring to "the unconscious or taken-for-granted skill which all display of necessity, in drawing on and producing the routine which makes action comprehensible to oneself and to others" (McSweeney 1999:140). Giddens considers this subconscious knowledge that configures social interaction and participation as comprising two analytically separable elements: these are " 'mutual knowledge', which refers to the interpretive schemes whereby actors constitute and understand social life as meaningful; ... (and) 'common sense', which can be seen as comprising a more-or-less articulated body of theoretical knowledge" (Giddens 1993:21). Both these elements are relevant to human security as they provide the foundation to Giddens' portrayal of ontological security. Giddens asserts that ontological security is based upon "human wants (that) are hierarchically ordered, involving a core 'basic security system'



largely inaccessible to the consciousness of the actor” (Giddens 1993:124). Individual security is dependent on subconscious knowledge of functioning in social life, which is inherent to an individual’s identity. One’s identity is constituted from experiences founded in social interactions and incorporates the body of subconscious knowledge that makes these interactions possible. When this knowledge is removed or made irrelevant through unexpected changes in quotidian life, an individual has no foundation on which to base expectations.

McSweeney applies Giddens’s conception of social knowledge to security studies in general. He identifies the logic behind assuming a hierarchy of needs in order to give primacy to some conceptions of security over others, both for states as international actors, and for individuals as the referent subject of security in a critical conceptualization of security. That is, the hierarchy of needs places the most urgent need at the top of the hierarchy. The aspect of security an individual (or state, or collective) most critically lacks must be considered the most important to secure that individual (or state, or collective). McSweeney emphasizes that the hierarchy reflects a normative judgment, not a “universal league table” of needs that is generally applicable, underlining that the predominant need will be the thing that is lacking. I argued in chapter two that prioritizing the state in conceptualizations of security puts an emphasis on negative security (freedom *from*) for state members, and allows the state to make a normative judgment as to what security is, who is in need of security, and who is deserving of security.

At the individual level of analysis that is used here, McSweeney utilizes the concept of ontological security, taking the basis from Nietzsche, who “made the link between knowledge and security,” and Garfinkel and Goffman, who “have shown the centrality of such a link ... to the maintenance of social life” (McSweeney 1999: 155). McSweeney applies ontological security, noting that “the basic sense in which we must understand the order of ‘the social order’

is one of pattern and regularity affording the confidence of being able to function, to go on, to get by, to make sense of our particular segments of activity” (McSweeney 1999:156). The relevance of ontological security is that it emphasizes that an individual’s intrinsic sense of security comes from knowledge of the pattern of daily life, which to some extent can be understood in the form of expectations; that is, an individual has a basic sense of what to expect in the functioning of quotidian life. Arguably, knowledge of the social order is necessary to function in society. This mirrors the Human Development Report’s assertion that disruption to the pattern of daily life provokes human insecurity.

In traditional understandings of human rights, the right to life is more than simply the right to being alive. Life means potentiality, “the pursuit of happiness.”<sup>18</sup> In the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the right to life appears as “the right to life, liberty, and security of person.” This implies more than simply being medically alive, and “security of *person*” can include ontological security, as well as physical security, which is dealt with more specifically in articles four and five.<sup>19</sup> The fact that physical security is dealt with separately suggests that the use of “person” applies not only to the genetic body but to the other elements that comprise an individual, such as the mind, freedom of choice, community, and personal life experiences.

A key insight of ontological security that can be helpful in the case of asylum seekers is that of the structure and agency dynamic. Rather than thinking of structure and agency as dichotomous concepts, ontological security examines how structure and agency combine and produce each other. They are not analytically separable. Rather structure is the dynamic in which the autonomous agent manages his or her actions. Thus, “ordinary day-to-day social life

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<sup>18</sup>The pursuit of happiness is listed alongside life and liberty and an inalienable right of man in the US Constitution.

<sup>19</sup>Article 4 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is “no one shall be held in slavery or servitude; slavery and the slave trade shall be prohibited in all their forms”; Article 5 says “no one shall be subjected to torture, or to inhuman, cruel, or degrading treatment or punishment.” Available at <http://www.un.org/Overview/rights.html>

... involves an ontological security founded on an autonomy of bodily control within predictable routines and encounters” (Giddens 1984:64). Returning to McSweeney’s analysis: “we can only do security, or do identity, if there is a body of typified actions, mediated by structure, from which to draw in order to make sense” (McSweeney:166). The asylum seeker can be seen as embedded within a structure that bounds their choices but does not determine them, limiting but not erasing agency.

The structure – agency dynamic at the core of structuration theory and ontological security offers particular insight into categories of migration. For example, Emma Haddad describes the analytical difference between a refugee and a migrant: refugees are forced to migrate whereas migrants choose to migrate. However, asylum seekers fall somewhere in between. They carry the burden of having to prove that their migration was forced. This burden exists in the context of state discourses constructing asylum seekers as potential criminals, cheats, and generally undesirable persons. In many cases they are treated as agents who have willingly engaged in criminal activity for which they must be held responsible. Consequently asylum seekers are denied autonomy within their own existence before, during, and in many cases after their case is processed by the state to which they are seeking asylum. The understanding of the structure – agency dynamic offered by structuration theory and engaged by the theory of ontological security makes redundant the extant distinction between refugees who are victims of purely structural forces and “illegal immigrants” who are rational agents seeking to better their lives. Structure does not completely negate agency, nor are agents freewheeling actors who face no structural constraints. The theory of ontological human security forces reconsideration of migration processes and practices in terms of access to human rights and human security and categories of deservingness.

Ontological security can be considered the core human defence against existential anxieties (Giddens 1991). Two categories of Giddens' fourfold categorization of existential questions are particularly salient for cases of migration: self-identity and the experience of others. Giddens defines self-identity as "the self as reflexively understood by the person in terms of his or her biography" (Giddens 1991:53). Self-identity composes a core part of ontological security. An asylum seeker's self-identity is then constituted within his or her biography, which of course incorporates the experience of migration. The process of seeking asylum is part of the practice of self-identity. The experience of others is the second category of existential anxiety that ontological security deflects against. The experience of others includes interactions with others and faith in how others will receive you and act towards you (Giddens 1991:51). This is of course applicable for asylum seekers who are appealing to a state for acceptance and being simultaneously generated as the "other".

I contend that the lack of knowledge for the asylum seeker or refugee regarding the quotidian functioning of life and the rupture to life patterns and expectations that leads to questions of self identity and problematic "othering" interactions makes individual ontological security a necessary starting point in understanding the dominant needs in terms of establishing or re-establishing security for people with non-state-based identities and in this case asylum seekers. To clarify, a migrant has already experienced disruption to his or her life pattern and expectations, through the action of leaving his or her home community. In order to regain a sense of ontological security, the person must have the bodily autonomy to establish new patterns and expectations. However, the possibility of doing this is constantly obstructed by immigration status, or lack of it. The manoeuvrings of states in order to "burden share," which allows for persons seeking asylum to be removed to third countries, as well as state security

rhetoric that calls for protection against people termed “economic migrants,” “bogus asylum seekers” and “illegal immigrants” further aggravates people in a position of ontological insecurity. Thus, receiving states counteract the possibility of gaining or regaining ontological security for migrants by instead establishing the constant potential for further disruption to the pattern of daily life for incoming migrants.

The side of human security that focuses on development in order to prevent a disruption to daily life arguably overlooks individuals who have already experienced such a disruption, either one that has forced their migration to another state, or simply their migration to another state, which can be considered a disruption in itself. Those asylum seekers who are situated in advanced industrialized states in particular are disregarded because these states are perceived as capable of establishing the immediate security of vulnerable persons. However, the ontological security of these people has not been fulfilled as long as they are not provided with a framework for social participation, the autonomy to develop their own clear expectations of daily life, and the capability to fulfil them without obstructions. Ontological security should be recognized as a need within understandings of human rights because it is directly linked to the right to life, understanding life as continuity rather than the physical state of being alive. While an understanding of the social order to which the victims of forced migration are subjected or in which they are potential participants may be their primary need, studies have suggested that participation in social community must exist before a political voice can be gained. Consideration of the right to a political voice fits into more traditional conceptions of civil and political human rights (Moulin and Nyers 2007). Social participation comprises functioning as a member of a community and developing a sense of identity within that community. This participation can be thought of as the basis on which ontological security is built. Social and

community based participation leads to a sense of security in quotidian life, the autonomy to develop personal social and political expectations, and the capability to autonomously fulfil these expectations. Therefore, it can potentially provide a form of human security that is arguably what refugees and asylum seekers lack.

Advanced industrialized states recognize the right to life. However, both social participation and political participation are denied to victims of forced migration. These individuals have already experienced a rupture in their daily life creating an ontological insecurity in which they have little or no autonomy to establish and realize expectations of daily existence. The denial of social participation prevents the accumulation and re-institution of social knowledge and the bodily autonomy that would establish or re-establish ontological security. Constantly changing immigration status and living circumstances over which the individual exercises no control remove autonomy in daily life. Therefore, ontological insecurity remains. The theory of human security could benefit from the incorporation of an understanding of ontological security in order to decenter the paradigm away from the state system to address the security needs of subaltern populations and people without state-based identities.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter I have deconstructed the human security paradigm and identified the problematic centering of the paradigm around the global neoliberal system, privileging state-based authority and legitimacy. I suggest the incorporation of ontological security in understandings of human security in order to decenter the concept and remove the emphasis that is currently placed upon the state. Ontological security by definition places emphasis on the individual and allows for the individual to autonomously determine what provides security as a

secure *feeling*. Situating ontological security within the human security paradigm allows interaction with international relations theories of human rights and human development. It allows interaction with the rhetoric employed by policy makers and so gives the concept potential for realization. The following chapter will examine the utility of the application of ontological security in an empirical study of the narratives of asylum seekers in Europe.

## **Ontological insecurity and asylum seeker identity**

### **Ontological human security**

Chapter five advanced the thesis that incorporating an understanding of ontological security into conceptualizations of human security could be helpful for analysing situations that create insecure individuals who are situated in secure states. This chapter analyses narratives of asylum seekers in Europe with three main objectives. The first is to understand ways in which individuals self-define as asylum seekers in order to understand the disconnect between state based asylum seeker definition and contemporary asylum seeker identities. I then move to the question of ontological security and insecurity, as it appears in asylum seeker narratives. I will analyze how narratives of asylum seekers can offer insight into the causes and provocations of ontological insecurity and the connection between instances of ontological insecurity and the disparity in asylum seeker definitions.

### **Methodology**

I gathered narrative interviews in Greece and the UK. I have been involved in some capacity with organizations that assist migrants and asylum seekers in different locations for over a decade, and with a view to this particular project I spent time in participant observation at several different organizations in order to establish a presence and observe the experiences of people seeking asylum in Europe. In Greece I visited two asylum shelters and I regularly observed the work of *Caritas Hellas*, a Greek Catholic organization headquartered in Athens. Every day the organization distributes food to those people in Athens who are seeking asylum but have no shelter or work. Hundred of asylum seekers queue outside the *Caritas Hellas*



building daily for the food distribution. *Caritas Hellas* also operates a clothing store where asylum seekers can get second hand clothes. There are two separate food distributions, one for women at 9am and one for men at 11am. More men tend to turn up than women. The male queue would begin to form at about 9am and grow steadily. There was a single food distribution each day, the allocation normally consisting of two pots of yoghurt, a bag of chips and an apple. People were hungry and there was a struggle as the doors opened. Everyone would push towards the front of the queue. Some people would climb over the top of other people. Arguments would often break out and occasionally become physical. I spent time queuing and chatting with the asylum seekers. Generally people wanted to speak to me and sought me out to tell their stories. They often expressed frustration at their position and made it clear that they wanted to bring public attention to the circumstances in which asylum seekers live in Greece.

The second organization in Athens where I spend a considerable amount of time was in the *Doctors of the World* asylum shelter. *Doctors of the World* is an organization that provides healthcare for marginalized populations in Athens. Asylum seekers are one of the main groups *Doctors of the World* has worked with in recent years, given that they now form a large portion of the homeless population of Athens. They run a health clinic for asylum seekers, migrants, and other vulnerable populations in Athens. They have an asylum shelter that houses particular asylum seekers who have been identified as vulnerable. I visited the shelter and spent time talking with the employees and the asylum seekers that lived there. I spent time interviewing asylum seekers in the offices of Doctors of the World.

In Newcastle I worked with two major organizations. The first was *Walking With*, a small organization established in Wallsend, North Tyneside, which is a small town located in the greater industrial area of Newcastle. This organization collects food donations from local

churches and runs a food store room where each week asylum seekers can receive a distribution of food items. They also offer financial support that is generated by donations, and pay out 5 pounds sterling per asylum seeker per week. The money they give to asylum seekers is raised through charitable donations. *Walking With* offer help with paperwork, legal advice, and emotional support. I volunteered distributing food to asylum seekers and talking to them. I participated in different events that the organization ran.

The *West End Refugee Service* in Newcastle is the fourth organization where I observed a case worker and collected interviews. This service assists with paperwork and offers some translation services, counselling, and befriending. It also provides a store of clothes and household items for asylum seekers in the area. WERS provides financial support of 35 pounds sterling per week for asylum seekers who are destitute and cannot seek support from the local authorities or from the Home Office. Money for this organization is raised via charitable donations and grant funding.

I interviewed a total of eighteen asylum seekers, some more forthcoming than others in terms of sharing their experiences. I used a narrative participant-led style in which I did not ask direct questions but asked participants to talk about their experiences. For example I asked “tell me how you came to be in the UK,” rather than “why did you come to the UK.” This meant that the participants would emphasize what was significant to them regarding the experiences that brought them from their home country, rather than answer a direct question. The people I talked with had been in traumatic situations and might not have felt comfortable reliving their experiences so I wanted to minimize pressure to answer questions. I also did not want encourage certain responses, preferring the feeling of an organic conversation in which themes that arose were things that occurred to the interview participants. My intention is to analyse the narratives

as a whole rather than extracting particular items. However, in this analysis I focus on asylum seeker identities and ontological insecurity where they appear in different narratives, and so some examples are taken from the complete stories although I contextualize them within the narrative as a whole. I do not intend to offer psychoanalysis here; I do not pretend to be qualified to understand the psychological state of the people I interviewed. My understanding of the narratives is contextualized by my experience with the organization and exposure to the different issues that arise for asylum seekers. Sitting in participant observation with two organizations in the North East of England, and two organizations in Athens allowed me to see the daily occurrences and issues that arise for individuals seeking asylum in Europe. My interpretation is of the narratives of asylum seekers rather than of the states of mind of asylum seekers.

### **Asylum seeker definitions**

All the participants considered themselves to be asylum seekers and were either in the process of seeking asylum, had sought and received, had sought and been denied, or were intending to seek asylum at a point in future. When I introduced myself and outlined my project to the interview participants I stated that I was looking for asylum seekers and refugees, thus by agreeing to be interviewed the participants identified themselves to be refugees or asylum seekers. Within the narratives not all the participants directly referred to themselves as asylum seekers but it was often implied. The following demonstrates some examples of individual narratives in which the individuals identify themselves to be asylum seekers. In some of these

cases an asylum seeker identity would not be attributed to the individual according to the conventional state understanding of asylum seekers and refugees.<sup>20</sup>

- *Jonny*

Jonny is from Ghana. He is seeking asylum in Greece. Jonny narrates the tale that led him to flee Ghana. His narrative is chronological and he speaks about what generated his fear to remain in Ghana before he speaks of himself as an asylum seeker. Thus his identity as an asylum seeker was generated out of fear to remain in his home country and subsequently fear to return to his home country.

Jonny explains that he was the eldest son of his father's second wife and when his father died he did not inherit anything and he was living with his uncle. However his uncle's house was burnt down and Jonny's uncle died in the fire. Jonny describes the fire as arson that was politically motivated in which case his uncle died in a political dispute. Jonny got into a fight at his uncle's funeral. Over the course of the conflict which included several altercations and lasted a few days, fighting escalated:

“So during the fight all of a sudden I also took a stick intentionally I hit one and he fell down. So what I heard is, and I struggle to run away. So what I heard after the fight, they said they took him to hospital, I don't know, what I heard is that he died, he's dead. So I'm the cause of the death. So you know that, I was panicked too. I was panic. And they said they had reported the case and I also ran away.”

Jonny describes that he panicked when he learned that he might have killed someone, and he ran away. He crossed the border into Burkina Faso; however, he did not feel safe there: “So

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<sup>20</sup> All the names of the interview participants have been changed. I tried to be mindful of ethnic and cultural nuances in names to avoid ascribing identity in the names. I chose to use pseudonyms rather than single letter abbreviations because I did not want to dehumanize the participants by referring to them only as a symbol.

when I entered Burkina Faso, still I was still panicking, I know I am not safe anywhere. Maybe they might trace me wherever I am. So I try to run away.” Jonny explains that the journey was difficult and he aimed to get to Libya. While he was travelling he met other people and, in his words, “what I could see is, I’m there in Greece”. According to Jonny’s description he fled because he was afraid of the consequences of the fight he was in. He describes the dispute as politically motivated. He does not describe aiming to travel to Greece or to Europe in particular. He panicked and fled. Jonny met people while he was travelling and went to Greece with them. He claimed asylum when he arrived in Greece because he was seeking protection and was afraid to return to his home. Jonny does not articulate a specific moment at which he began to identify himself as an asylum seeker, but he became an asylum seeker because he had left his home country and was afraid to return home. Seeking asylum was the mechanism available to him. Jonny’s story arguably fits the asylum seeker definition given that he was fleeing persecution by a group presumably outside of state control, for reasons of political opinion. However, his status is complicated because he could be charged with a crime in Ghana. Further, Ghana is not considered by Greece to be a country of origin of asylum seekers. Greece generally accepts asylum seeker applications for processing from Somalia, Afghanistan, Iraq and Sudan (Interview with Greek Refugee Council, July 2010). Other applications are likely to face expedited rejection. When Jonny arrived he was urged by the people he travelled with to claim as a Somalian. He says he did so because he was afraid of the repercussions if he did not – he described having seen the people he travelled with to Greece push another migrant into the water to drown because he refused to agree to orders. Thus, this creates an additional complication in Jonny’s asylum case as he could be considered to have defrauded the asylum authorities in Greece by claiming a false identity.

- *Amir*

Amir is a Shiite Muslim from Afghanistan. He has been in Britain for two years. He told his story spontaneously with very little prompting and few questions from me. He tells it in a chronological order, and he described his intention to seek asylum in Britain specifically was generated from a radio broadcast he heard after having left Afghanistan. Amir tells me that he left Afghanistan in 2007 because he had “big problems”. He is a Shiite Muslim and the Taliban are Sunni. Amir tells me that in Afghanistan under the Taliban Shiite Muslims are not permitted education, and he says he did not receive any education in his country. Amir repeats several times that he had “big problems” in his country and elaborates on his lack of access to education. However, he does not outline the nature of the problems, but simply explains that he had to leave. The way he describes his departure suggests that he was forced to leave – he does not talk about the particular choices he made but talks about having to leave.

After leaving Afghanistan, Amir went to Iran. He lived in Iran for six months and found work packing boxes. However, he says he was “constantly in fear” because he did not have an ID card. He was afraid he would be stopped and sent back to Afghanistan. He describes that he heard on BBC Farsi that Britain was the best place for asylum seekers and he decided he had to go to Britain and ask for asylum. He indicates here that he identified himself as an asylum seeker at that point in Iran. He explains that he could not stay in Iran or Pakistan because he felt too close to Afghanistan and the same things that caused him problems in Afghanistan would continue to cause him problems in Iran or Pakistan. Thus, Amir thought of himself as an asylum seeker. He was forced to leave his country. He travelled to the UK to seek asylum and continues to consider himself an asylum seeker.

Amir's journey fits the stereotypical portrayal of an "illegal immigrant" according to UKBA, despite the fact that throughout the story he does not suggest that he has made choices, instead repeating that "I had to leave Greece" or "I had to get to Italy". According to the way he describes his experiences, Amir was compelled to leave. This contradicts the emphasis on agency that the UKBA attributes to "illegal immigrants". Rather than being characterized as a "criminal" illegal immigrant who is looking for an illegal way to break into Britain to take advantage of social security, Amir was compelled to leave his home country and was in a situation of constant fear in Iran. Therefore, to alleviate that fear he decided to travel to Britain.

I asked Amir how he travelled from Iran to the UK. he is frank in his description of working in Iran "illegally" and replied to my question laughing as if it is obvious "illegally, I go illegally." Amir does not mention the rules regarding the different borders he crossed, or the rules and regulations regarding seeking asylum in the EU. Amir went over land to Turkey and then crossed into Greece. He does not elaborate about this part of the journey, although he tells me that it was arranged by an agent. Amir does reflect at length on Greece. He talks about Athens, saying that there were hundreds of people seeking asylum. He describes people living several persons to a room and living on the streets and in the parks. He says "many many hundreds of people who are so hungry every day they go to one place, it's like a church, an organization like from the church and they queue to get food, only once a day and they are so hungry."<sup>21</sup> Amir describes himself as lucky. He had saved enough money working irregularly in Iran to stay in a hotel in Athens. He did not claim asylum in Athens. He simply says he "had to leave." Amir does not mention how this might reflect on his status as an asylum seeker. His description of Greece suggests that the protection he sought was not available to him in Greece and so he left.

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<sup>21</sup> He is referring to the organization *Caritas Hellas* that distributes food to asylum seekers in Greece.

Amir went to the port of Patras. He tells me that is where people go to try and leave from Greece, illegally, “no travel papers”. He stayed in Patras for four months. He says he got very sick. There was “nowhere to wash, no water, no hygiene.” He had to go and wash in the sea. Amir tells me that he does not like the sea because he is from Afghanistan and there is no sea so he doesn’t know how to swim. He would go to the sea and wash but he wouldn’t go right in because he was afraid. He was sick and coughing up blood and he knew he couldn’t stay there any longer. The camp where Amir stayed is a camp notorious for being full of male irregular migrants or “illegal immigrants” from Afghanistan. The same camp was bulldozed in January 2011 and the inhabitants were sent to different detention centres in Greece and given deportation documents.

Amir left Greece “illegally” by hiding under the chassis of a truck. He was alone. He describes the process as difficult and dangerous. He was on the ship for three days and tried to cut through the binding of different trucks to hide inside so he could get off undetected. He did not manage it and ended up curling up beneath the electrical cables that attach the brake lights to the cab. He said he knew that the authorities would check underneath the trucks so he curled up beneath the cables to be undetectable.

Amir describes reaching Italy, where he was eventually detected when the driver pulled over to unload. Amir remembers very clearly the words the driver spoke to him, despite them being a language that he does not know.<sup>22</sup> He managed to make his way from Italy to France via train and he comments that he was very afraid because he expected border checks, although he had not planned ahead regarding how to evade them. He says once he made it to France he contacted Iranian friends for more money so that he could hire an agent to help him enter Britain. The

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<sup>22</sup> The words were Greek and Amir recites them to me but does not know the meaning. The translation is to the effect of “get lost, asshole”.



agent arranged for Amir to hide in the back of a truck that was delivering chocolate bars to Britain. He was with seven other people and he says they were all very afraid. They had a plan to hide behind the doors if it was opened for checks. Although Amir's plan was to go to the UK to seek asylum, he wanted to enter without being discovered. During the narration of his journey Amir expresses fear of being discovered by immigration authorities throughout the story. One might assume that his fear of the same on entering Britain was not because he actively wanted to enter undetected and become an undocumented migrant. Rather, he had lived with fear of detection for several months. When Amir was discovered at Dover he claimed asylum immediately.

- *Ali and Sharif*

I interviewed two men in Athens, Sharif from Somalia and Ali from Sudan, who talked about wanting to seek asylum and the issues preventing them from doing so. At the time of the interview they were both in Greece without documents. The narrative they offered was not chronological but instead they made several forceful points throughout the conversation. The points that Sharif and Ali emphasized focused on problematic nature of the Greek asylum system, the injustice and entrapment they felt, and their anger at the Greek asylum system. They both think of themselves as asylum seekers but have not claimed asylum because of the difficulty of doing so in Greece, hence their frustration. Ali tells me:

“I go to the ‘Alagapo’ immigration site. They are pushing me one, two, three, and I stand there. If I count the amount of people here in that’s wanting to seek asylum they are more than a thousand. But imagine, as the police came here I mean they will say ‘this is black, I am white’ ... and after then after now out of that one thousand they will choose just ten people that they think to give them the pink card.”

Ali describes the experience at the immigration centre as time consuming given that the application process is very slow. Asylum seekers are advised to go to the centre and claim asylum in order to get a pink card, which is the asylum seeker identity card. The pink card provides a work permit, access to Greek language lessons, and minimal access to health care. However, the immigration centre only has the capacity to take a handful of applications every day. Thousands of people queue and do not get seen. Ali elaborates that police authorities at the immigration centre give preference to white people. The difficulty in filing an asylum claim in Greece leads many people to attempt to travel elsewhere. Sharif talks about his wish to return home. However, without documents it becomes impossible to leave since Greece does not have the resources to enforce deportation and instead provides migrants with deportation orders instructing them to leave the country. Sharif expresses a sense of entrapment.

“I went to GCR to get to go back again. And told me to got to have pink card. How do I have pink card when the people and they choose twenty people out of hundred. I'm telling you. Every Friday you go there and they ... choose out of five thou, maybe five hundred, they choose sixteen or eighteen.”

Both Ali and Sharif have attempted to claim asylum. They are seeking asylum but have not processed the paperwork, hence would not be considered asylum seekers by the state-given definition. They remain understood as “illegal immigrants” or “undocumented migrants”. It appears futile to these migrants to attempt to process the necessary paperwork, yet attempting to leave is equally problematic: “Now they will give you one month’s paper. To leave the country. Why you want to leave the country? You go to the airport. They will catch you, they will send you one month, two months in prison.” Each time undocumented migrants in Greece are caught attempting to leave the country, they are imprisoned. On their release from prison they are given

the deportation order that instructs them to leave, but is not accepted as a travel document by the Greek authorities. Sharif shows me he has five or six of these orders.

The men understand themselves to be asylum seekers who intend to process the paperwork to seek asylum but have not yet managed to do so. They both say they no longer go to the immigration centre but instead focus on trying to leave Greece. They both describe having fled their homes. Sharif tells me his home was hit by a bomb in Somalia. He says he doesn't know where the bomb came from, whether it was the peace keeping force or someone else. He says "I leave my wife for save my life. You understand that?" However, according to the state-definition he is an "illegal immigrant" because he has not filed a claim for asylum and he has not fulfilled his deportation order. Ali from Sudan is attempting to travel to France to meet up with his wife and daughter. He describes sending his wife and daughter to France after facing violence in Sudan that he attributes to his wife being half Eritrean. However, when Ali arrived in Thessaloniki he was given a deportation paper. He managed to travel from there to claim asylum in Belgium. However, when his case was processed he was returned to Greece because he had been fingerprinted in Greece. Yet, Greece had given him a deportation order. He describes:

"Everybody send you here. Greek and they tell you "I don't care." Because Greeks are saying before, they are looking for us, everything. ... Every time I ask, maybe I ask myself for more than a hundred times. Why these people they are doing like that? You know, I'm telling. Ismir to Mytilini maybe 30 minutes one hours. By boat, okay. But Mytilini to here maybe more than ten hours. But they didn't like me. Why they are sending me here? Why they no turn me back? Why? I ask myself this more than any or one hundred times. Why? Why?"

Ali expressed confusion as to why Greece would ask for him to be returned there, when they will not process his claim. It is common for people who are returned to a "safe third country" to be

told that the country has requested their return. This is a way of appeasing the deportee (Interview with GRC, July 2010). The irony here is that both Ali and Sharif would be eligible for a pink card if they filed an asylum claim because they are from states that are recognized by Greece as dangerous (Interview with GRC, July 2010). However, the impediments to their obtaining the card, such as Ali's desire to reunite with his family, means that they are given deportation orders because they have not filed an asylum claim. They become illegal immigrants not because of the characteristics detailed in the convention definition of a refugee but because they have not filed a claim. This demonstrates a failing of the refugee and asylum processes and practices.

- *Ellie*

Ellie is from the Democratic Republic of the Congo. She narrates her story chronologically, responding to my questions although elaborating on a particular item that she is worried about. When she travelled to the UK she had been asked to bring children with her to reunite them with her parents. She was fleeing Ghana and was afraid. She did not want the people who arranged her passage to Britain to take away the opportunity. So when they told her she would be bringing children with her she complied. In the interview she expresses a particular worry that her experience with the children will complicate her asylum claim which is still being processed.

Ellie travelled to the UK on a fake passport, fleeing a conflict in which both her parents later died. Her partner was in the military and he provided her with a passport for travel. She says that when she arrived in Britain she intended to enter the country with the fake passport but she was stopped by customs officials: "the problem is that they check this and they asking me

say is this my passport, I say no no, it's no my passport." Ellie claimed asylum when she was discovered with the fake passport; however, she has further complications in her asylum case:

"What happened with the passport how also, it was the men they give me like a .. a three children. I don't know because I didn't come they don't know they my children they my children say the parent live in the UK if I can bring the children in airport and the parent phone the children the parent need to pick the children in the airport in the air... in the airport. I didn't know that. I try to say the children, to say the children is mine. Three three three children now, become a big problem now, because the Home Office ask well where is the, the children go?"

When Ellie entered the UK she said the three children who were then travelling with her were her own children. When she claimed asylum she presented the children as her dependents.

However, since arriving in Britain the children were collected from her and now she is constantly afraid that she will be charged with an immigration crime. She made her asylum claim with the three children as dependents and as a result she could be charged with human trafficking. Unless she can prove that she was coerced into bringing the children to Britain and verify their whereabouts, she is liable to be charged with the crime of trafficking minors. If the Home Office charges her with this, she will be considered a deportable foreign criminal rather than an asylum seeker, thus her self-definition as an asylum seeker is complicated by her actions. However, Ellie expressed being compelled to take the children. She did not actively seek to defraud the British system or intend to traffic children into the country.

- **Discussion**

The above narratives of asylum seekers demonstrate the context in which they might seek asylum, or that they might be considered "illegal." In order to enter Britain and Greece they have avoided inspection crossing borders, used agents, and used fraudulent documents. While

they all consider themselves asylum seekers, they are not all accepted as asylum seekers by the state. Further, the state understands some of the actions they have taken to be criminal acts, in which case the individuals would be considered foreign criminals before they are considered asylum seekers. The self-definitions of these asylum seekers do not coincide with state-definitions. As a result, there are impediments to the reestablishment of a daily life that includes stable expectations. This is one of the key components of human security. Human security “means protection from sudden and hurtful disruptions in that patterns of daily life: whether in homes, in jobs, or in communities” (Human Development Report 1994:23). The asylum seekers in question have already experienced the disruption, which can be understood as putting them in a position of insecurity.

As discussed in chapter five, ontological security relies upon a core basic security system which is composed of the reflexive knowledge of daily life. This reflexive knowledge can be divided into the categories of interpretive social interactions and the theoretical “common sense” knowledge. For asylum seekers these two categories have been disrupted. The first refers to the “mutual knowledge”, or the interpretive schemes through which actors constitute and understand social life as meaningful. When there is a discontinuity in that mutual knowledge, in other words when knowledge is no longer mutual, there is a lack of ontological security. The interview participants understand themselves to be asylum seekers. They have travelled, often at great personal risk, to seek asylum in a particular state and then they find that their self-conception as asylum seekers is not shared by the state authorities. Thus the knowledge of their identity is not “mutual”; the immigration officials do not accept that they are asylum seekers. Considering oneself an asylum seeker is not sufficient for the state. Furthermore, the state holds the power in making determinations as to who can be considered an asylum seeker. Thus, the agency of the

individual asylum seeker is removed and their identity is determined by the state, leaving the individual powerless. This conflict of identity creates a potential for ontological insecurity.

Secondly, the body of theoretical knowledge, or “common sense” that orders daily life needs to be rebuilt when daily life has been disrupted. This type of common sense is disrupted whenever a person is in an unfamiliar environment. However, being able to learn the common sense ordering of the local environment in which one finds oneself allows a sense of security to be regained. When one is not in a familiar place, one has to rebuild both the theoretical and interpretive knowledge of daily life and reform one’s expectations of quotidian life. However, because there is a dispute in the conceptualization of identity for many of these individuals who are seeking asylum, they remain in a position of ontological insecurity. They cannot reform expectations of daily life because their identity remains in flux and so their access to participation in daily life is hampered. Thus, I assert that asylum seekers in Europe often are in a position of ontological insecurity and regaining that sense of security is debilitated. In the following section I investigate the appearance of ontological insecurity in the narratives of asylum seekers.

### **Ontological insecurity**

Many of the interview participants described their daily lives. I asked those who did not offer a description spontaneously to describe their experiences to me. Rather than ask specific questions, I wanted them to describe the things that were important about life in Britain or Greece. Themes of ontological security were raised in different examples. The themes that recurred in different interviews included the lack of agency, or of simply *not knowing* what

might happen; the lack of autonomy in questions of living space and location; and the fear or in some cases the reality of destitution.

- Lack of control

Gervais from Burundi has been in Britain since 2002. His narrative is not chronological and is fuelled by frustration. In the interview he launched into speaking before I had asked any questions and he described in detail his frustration with the Home Office because he has been waiting so long for a determination on his asylum case.

Gervais claimed asylum on arrival in the UK. However, the Home Office did not and does not believe his story. He was identified as deportable, but the Home Office thinks he is not in fact from Burundi. As a result they cannot deport him. He has been in Britain for nine years in a limbo status. He has been detained several times and has been identified as deportable three times. Given that the British government is unable to deport him to Burundi and is unwilling to give him legal status in the country, he remains in a state of limbo. In our interview, he expresses his frustration:

“My head is so confused right now. I don’t know what to do. I been in this country nine and a a half years right now. You know so all my friends you know, you know if you got your friends with you and they got their papers ... and you ain’t got a paper so it’s difficult because you.. you’re facing the music in front of you like you don’t know what’s going to happen to you. You know what I mean?”

A source of frustration to him is that every week he has to travel to the immigration office to sign a paper reporting his whereabouts. However, he is not provided with a stipend for the transportation.

“You see immigration so I told them last time I was so upset and I went there and I told them listen ... unfortunately I’m not gonna come back here again because this this this is



ridiculous you don't provide me with, with anything. If I get caught in the Metro I have to pay for that fine. So which ... which..I I mean, I told them why don't I have sign at the police station next to my house, it's more better than to take the risk taking the metro from the from St. James to your place I'm taking the risk because I'm just jumping on the train. I aint got the money to spend .. to get the ticket you know buying me the ticket how come every week if you don't ... oh they went if you don't coming to sign you gonna get problem because we gonna send the immigration people to your house and collect you to put you in detention centre and I say well you can put me in detention centre right now if you want because I'm not gonna suffer anymore like this.”

The act of having to go and sign means that Gervais risks being fined for the petty crime of neglecting to buy a ticket for public transportation. Moreover, he expresses a sense of injustice that he is expected to go and sign when he has been in the country for a long time and the immigration authorities have failed to either deport him or provide him with status. The overwhelming sentiment that Gervais expresses is one of frustration at the lack of control he has.

One of the common issues that arose in the interviews is expression of a lack of ability to be in control of one's own life. In Britain in particular, the Home Office extensively regulates the whereabouts of asylum seekers and what resources they can access. Most of the interview participants who were in Britain mentioned at some point during their interview the dispersal programme that had led them to Newcastle.

- Dispersal

Alexis is a refugee from Rwanda who entered the UK in 2002. His case was approved very quickly and he now works as an immigration support worker in Newcastle, which has given him extensive experience of the asylum system and the experiences of people seeking asylum who go to him for assistance. Alexis talked about the difficulties he faced as a result of the dispersal programme: “I learn that I was going to be dispersed to Newcastle. Well, Newcastle, I try to learn about Newcastle and many people told me that it's a horrible place to be. There's a lot of racist people, in particular if you're a black person, it's really bad for you to be dispersed

there.” People he had met in London at the temporary hostel advised him to ask for a different location, but he did not because he was told being in Newcastle would facilitate access to specialist medical treatment at a facility in the city centre that he needed for injuries sustained in prison in Rwanda.

“In 2002 I can say in Newcastle, it was very hard to see an African man in Newcastle, or any, any black minority people. Except Asian people. You can see Asian people but not African people. It was very very isolated if you African. So when we are sent here, we could not speak English. So it was very hard to communicate with this, local people. So through that, we begin to get a lot of horrible things, racist, you know, you at home you just come back find horrible smell they throw eggs, things like that. So from that time, we begin to put ourself together, say we need to do something. Because anyone who was dispersed here, after getting better they decide to leave immediately.”

Alexis talks about the struggles to build a community because so many asylum seekers who were dispersed to Newcastle decided to leave and move to more diverse cities as soon as their cases had been processed. Liya From Eritrea has a similar story to Ali. She arrived and was dispersed to Wallsend. She says that during her first few months in North Tyneside she was afraid to leave the house. She felt stigmatized and self-conscious because she did not know any other black people. Her health worker encouraged her to enroll in college and learn English but she kept dropping out because she did not feel comfortable. She followed the advice of a health worker and started a community group. She says the most important thing is to feel you are in a community. Liya founded the North Tyneside African Group and for three years the group had only two members, she and one other asylum seeker, yet they continued to arrange activities and to try and encourage other people to participate. She says this group helped her feel comfortable in North Tyneside; without the community she would have continued to feel isolated and self-conscious. Liya and Alexis both express the importance of community participation and their

descriptions of ontological insecurity regard their lack of community and their isolation when they first arrived in the North East of England.

It was usual for the asylum seekers I met with in the UK to have moved several times during the time their claim was being processed. Many of them talked about the uncertainty that this causes and the inability to feel rooted to a home. The lack of control given to asylum seekers to determine where they live and when they move can be seen to prevent a person building a sense of continuity attached to place. It becomes more difficult to interact within a community and to build ongoing relationships.

The dispersal programme arose spontaneously in a conversation as I chatted with Ana, an Armenian asylum seeker who is in Britain with her husband Ruban and two children who were both in their teens when they arrived. Having grown up in a military family from Armenia but frequently posted abroad, she is accustomed to travelling and living in several different locations. However, the travelling and relocating that she has done as a result of her seeking asylum have been quite different. Ana and her family are currently processing an appeal of their asylum decision. They were denied asylum but it was ruled that deportation would contravene human rights. Ana's husband is Ukrainian and, while Armenia agreed to accept Ana and the two children, the country would not accept Ruban. However, the Ukraine would not accept the rest of the family. This means that in order to deport them Britain would have to divide a family.

After their asylum claim was denied the family had all of their support withdrawn and they were ordered by the Home Office to move out of the accommodation that the state had provided them with during the processing of their asylum claim. However, it was not possible to enforce the family's removal from Britain as Britain could not ignore the international norm that families remain together. They relied on money raised via a local church as their sole source of

income for a year, before they were summoned to appear before a judge in London. Ruban went to the hearing and was reinstated with the right to accommodation. However, both the children had reached the age of eighteen while they were in the UK. As a result, they were dispersed to separate accommodations and are currently no longer permitted to live with their parents. If they do, their immigration case will be treated as abandoned, in other words the Home Office will disregard the case and they will be without immigration status and without leave to remain in Britain.

This scenario has seen the family unable to plan for a secure future and uprooted several times over recent years. Ana talks in detail about the insecurity caused by being forced to move over and over again and being given no warning. The dispersal programme means that the Home Office decides where they live. Each time a claim or an appeal was rejected the family was relocated. Further, changes among the organizations that the Home Office and local councils contract to provide accommodation for asylum seekers provoked further insecurity. A house might have been allocated to asylum seekers for a time but then removed from government programme. Ana talks about being afraid to plant a garden because she says if she has to move it will not be worth it. The thing that bothers her is that she has “no say in it”. The Home Office does not take her preferences into account and despite the fact that one of the moves was just up the road, she had no power to lobby the home office to allow her to stay in the house she was already living in.

- Lack of agency

This lack of agency is not just caused by the dispersal programme, but is a symptom of the larger process of seeking asylum. The same idea of a lack of agency in everyday life arose in an interview with Jonny from Ghana who was residing at an asylum shelter in Athens. He

emphasizes how he feels that daily life in the hostel prevents him from being able to manage his own ability to survive:

“This situation is very difficult because no work no nothing here. And the food we eat here is managed here. In fact because I taking the meal in the afternoon, in the evening nothing. Just in the morning and the afternoon. And so in the evening maybe I have to pass by some friends you see if they are able to cook maybe I can join hands and sometimes before they cook you know, I better have no choice. It’s like when you visit a friend any time that he cooks that time is your survival. Because if you go and he doesn’t cook then that means no food for you. But if he cooks then you are lucky. Now sometimes you go and they go maybe by the time that he cooks maybe you are late at your hostel you need to rush and you need to eat and survive before you come to your hostel.”

He cannot buy food to eat because he cannot work. He must comply with the mealtimes and the curfew at the asylum shelter. He has no focus, stating that he just walks around. His words suggest that he feels a lack of control in his own life, which leaves him unable to generate expectations of everyday life or build a sense of community and social participation. The way that Jonny chooses to emphasize that he does nothing suggests that this is a big problem for him:

“I don’t work. I don’t do nothing. I just walk about. I don’t do nothing, nothing. It’s very difficult. I don’t do nothing. I don’t do nothing. Nothing at all. If maybe I could get a job maybe I can try to find one I can try to find out their contacts. But nothing. ... All I know I just need a survival. Wherever I will survive.”

He is looking for ways to survive. His choice of words suggests that he does not see his current existence as living a life. He links his boredom and his lack of activity in life in Greece to his family. He talks about missing his family and being unsure of what to do about the future. He plans to return to Ghana at some point but he is too afraid of what will happen to him. At the same time, he stresses his responsibility to take care of his family: “I can’t go empty because if I go empty how will they survive. There is no one to take care of them. I’m like a father to them.

I have no family is taken care of. My family my mother or my brothers or sisters. I'm the one.” He wants to take care of his family but he does not possess control over his ability to return and he feels like he cannot return without a means of support for his family. Yet his impotence and inactivity in daily life mean that he cannot generate that means of support.

- **Discussion**

A sense of personal agency contributes to ontological security. Giddens's definition of ontological security details a hierarchically ordered core basic security system that is largely inaccessible to the consciousness of the actor (Giddens 1993). Without personal agency, a person does not have the capability to meet their own hierarchically ordered needs. Rather, someone else identifies the needs of the generalized population and determines how to meet them. This is problematic for two reasons. First of all the subconscious hierarchy that determines an individual sense of ontological security might differ per individual. If the asylum system prevents individuals from identifying their needs and prevents them from accessing the capacity to meet those needs then ontological insecurity is produced and reproduced. Secondly and perhaps more importantly, the system puts limitations on who is considered to be a “genuine” asylum seeker that reflects a definition of a refugee that was written in the 1950s and arguably does not correspond to the demographic of humanitarian or forced migrants today. Those who are instead “illegal immigrants” or “failed asylum seekers” have no right to even the security determined by the state and provided by the state for asylum seekers. Thus, they do not have the right to attempt to regain a sense of ontological security. The narratives of asylum seekers suggest that the deterrence methods incorporated in policy, such as the dispersal programme, the vouchers programme, and the ban on employment effectively work to create

ontological insecurity for asylum seekers. The following examines a sense of ontological insecurity that is inflicted upon those determined “failed” asylum seekers.

### **“Failed” asylum seekers and destitution**

The main place one sees ontological insecurity among “failed” asylum seekers is with regard to economic sustainability. According to legislation, “failed” asylum seekers are not eligible for support. They must make arrangements to leave the country in the form of voluntary deportation. However, there are many asylum seekers who cannot be deported from Britain, voluntarily or otherwise, because Britain does not have diplomatic relations with the state from which they have come. Furthermore, those individuals who fear to return but whose cases have been ruled incredible by the Home Office similarly face destitution in Britain. One such example is provided by Jamal, an asylum seeker from Somalia who regularly visited *Walking With* in Wallsend, North Tyneside. When I met him, Jamal was eligible for a monetary stipend of five pounds sterling per week from *Walking With*, out of money raised through charitable donations. He also used the food distribution service provided by the organization. The first time Jamal came in he talked about a construction course specializing in electrician skills he was taking at Tyne Metropolitan College. While his case was being processed by the Home Office he was eligible for some education funding. However, he recently found out that his funding would end in September 2011 and he would be unable to complete his course. He was very disappointed about this because he wanted to finish and he would have to withdraw from the course and resume his studies if his asylum application was accepted.

The next time Jamal came in to the centre that housed *Walking With* he was visibly upset. He went for a private conference with the resident health worker. His last appeal for asylum in

Britain had been rejected. His support was to be withdrawn. However, because he was an asylum seeker from Somalia he could not be deported. In the decision on his appeal both his support system in the UK and his chance of leaving the UK were taken from him. Jamal refused to take any food that day as he did not feel like eating. He expressed disappointment and concern about the future. He hugged everyone before he left.

A week later Jamal returned to *Walking With*. He says that during the course of the week he has been constantly worried that immigration officers will come for him and detain him. He is unable to relax. He knows that he no longer has support and it is only a matter of time before he will be evicted from his accommodation. At his last meeting an immigration officer asked him to sign for voluntary deportation to Kenya. He would not be allowed to enter Kenya, but would be escorted by Kenyan officers to Somalia. He says he is afraid. He says the area of Somalia where he is from has many conflicting tribes. If he gets handed to the wrong tribe by Kenyan officials his life would be in danger. But he also says he is afraid in Britain. He might be detained any day and he has no financial support or access to shelter or food other than the donations from *Walking With*. As Jamal weighs up the options a volunteer at *Walking With* asks him “but would you be safe?” (if he was returned to Kenya). Jamal replies “I am not safe here”. He is left in a state of insecurity by the system he appealed to for protection.

Salah is an asylum seeker from Sudan. He does not tell me his age but he appears to be very young, possibly in his teens. He has been in the UK for ten months and is homeless. When a support worker asks where he lives he spreads open his arms and says “just anywhere”. He travelled to the UK from Sudan via Greece, like many asylum seekers. He says the journey itself took him two years. He spent nine months in Greece before he was able to leave hidden in a truck to reach Italy. He asks for support from *Walking With* and gives the support worker the



contact details of his lawyer. However, the support worker cannot get in touch with his lawyer, which means that he cannot be given financial support. He is homeless, so he cannot take food that needs to be cooked. I ask him if he could cook at a friend's house and he says "No, no friends. Friends are no good". We refer him to another service but he says he has visited the service already and the people there ignored him, "all people like that". Salah appears despondent – he cannot find people willing to help him and he seems to be alone in the UK. He always seems reluctant to leave the centre. Without access to a community and without access to shelter he is in a situation of insecurity. Human security recognizes subsistence security, including access to food and shelter. It also acknowledges the need to protect the patterns of daily life. Salah is in a situation of insecurity without access to basic subsistence and without the capacity to build a daily life with secure expectations.

- **Discussion**

The status of asylum seeker, whether self-defined or state defined, carries some connotation of insecurity. An individual who is seeking asylum is outside of his or her home country and has experienced a severe disruption in the pattern of daily life. The asylum system is in place to offer protection. While the convention definition of a refugee is a person seeking protection from persecution, it suggests a very individualistic understanding of the word. The persecution has to be aimed with intention at a particular individual. As a result structural causes are ruled out. In the way the asylum system has developed, the individualism at its heart then shifts the assumption of agency to all people who claim asylum. That is, structural causes that compel people to leave their home countries are not taken into account. Rather, people are either asylum seekers who have been forced to leave by their persecutors who are also individual

agents choosing to persecute, or people who claim to be asylum seekers are actively trying to circumvent the law, to enter Europe clandestinely so that they can carry on criminal lifestyles, provoking a danger to state security within Europe. The functioning of the asylum system attempts to deter people from doing this. Thus, the restrictions within the asylum system ensure that the sense of security being sought is not offered until a person has been positively identified as a refugee by the state authorities. The policies designed to deter those people who the state determines illegitimate, such as the dispersal programme, lack of the right to work, and lack of monetary support all contribute to ontological insecurity. The result is that ontological insecurity is maintained within secure states.

The human security paradigm offers an alternative conception of security that does not have to depend on the state. However, in its application it tends to belie the assertion that it offers a non-state based conception of security, as insecurity is generally identified via the international system of states (see chapter five). Furthermore, the distinction between the “insured” and the “uninsured” that Duffield identified (2007) is maintained across international borders. In other words, human insecurity is identified in geographic locations. Yet a person who travels across borders and regions carries with them their security or insecurity, depending on their status. Asylum seekers become a subaltern uninsured population who are not offered access to security until they have been positively identified as a refugee. Identification as a refugee represents a shift from being an irregular or “illegal” migrant, to being conceptualized as having moved through “legal” channels of migration. However, the evident paradox is that many individuals do not conceive of their movement as “illegal” yet the state does. Crossing borders becomes a criminal activity, yet for asylum seekers it is often impossible to obtain travel documents. Before asylum seekers are identified as having moved through legal channels, their

insecurity is maintained. This demonstrates the discriminatory understanding of security at the human level as applied by states: not human security but citizen security. The evidence of ontological insecurity amongst individuals who are seeking asylum exposes such a discriminatory offering of security.

The ontological insecurity in the narratives considered above demonstrates that the conceptualization of the immigration system as incorporating deterrents for “illegal” immigrants creates and maintains ontological insecurity. Furthermore, the functioning of the asylum system allows states to continue to dominate security concerns, given that states hold the power to discriminate between who is permitted security and who is not. This contradicts the objectives of human security because human security then remains subservient to state security.

## **Conclusions**

While the narratives detailed above do not solve the security paradox at the heart of immigration, they expose the contradiction at the heart of human security that was discussed in the previous chapter. The assumption of individualism in the asylum and immigration system, along with the neglect of economic structural causes of migration in the asylum system, means that migrants are perceived as criminals regardless of criminal intention or personal knowledge of illegal behaviour. The binary of structure and agency posits the refugee as a victim of structure and the illegitimate asylum seeker as an agent intent on exploiting the system. The incorporation of ontological security as an important part of human security shifts the agent of security from the state, which is currently free to discriminate, to each individual. Further to that, structure and agency are reconfigured as mutually constituted and dependent on each other (Giddens 1984, McSweeney 1999). In this way the asylum seeker such as Amir can be

understood as having made decisions that were available to him in his circumstances rather than an individual who exercised criminal agency. Thus, rather than citizen security, ontological security can offer insight into a human security that is at least capable of incorporating all humans.

## Conclusion

Throughout this project I have sought to understand the paradox that asylum seekers – some of the most vulnerable peoples in the world – are constructed as a threat in advanced industrialized states. I looked to Europe because increasing numbers of people seek asylum there because of the geographic proximity to areas that generate outward migrants. Furthermore, Europe has opened its borders to people migrating within the economic area but has simultaneously hardened the borders for those attempting to enter from outside the economic community. My discourse analysis of Britain shows the importance of economics particularly in the tabloid discourse in terms of identifying who is genuinely in need of protection and who is not. The analysis of Greece demonstrates the difficulties in acquiring political agency for migrants who are constructed as a collective that does not reflect how the people grouped into the collective perceive themselves. I question the “genuine” categories and the “illegitimate” categories as constructions that are reproduced through a specific international understanding of forced migration that has been adopted by states. The second part of this project then examined the paradigm of human security, considering first the efficacy of this paradigm to meet human needs and proposing a theoretical development of the paradigm to incorporate ontological security. I then turn to the narratives of asylum seekers to offer insight into the disparity between self-identities of asylum seekers and the identities attributed to them by states. This serves to demonstrate the power structure that relies on the state for security and access to rights at the expense of individuals without state based identities. The narratives of asylum seekers can also highlight ways in which ontological security offers a more comprehensive understanding of human security that does not rely on the privilege of citizenship.

In this conclusion, I briefly reiterate my answers to the research questions I identified in the introduction. I will then consider what questions I leave unanswered and identify directions for future research.

### **Research questions and answers**

1. What are the mechanisms in place in international and domestic politics that lead asylum seekers to be constructed as a threat?

In chapter one I considered a genealogy of the asylum seeker definition to understand the spatial, temporal and circumstantial constraints on how asylum seekers are understood in Europe. I identified the disparity between asylum seeker self-definitions and the limited definition of an asylum seeker as it is applied by European states. The people who consider themselves to be asylum seekers but do not comply with the state definition are constructed as a threat to national security, national unity, economic prosperity, and general societal wellbeing.

In chapter two I moved to examine this threat construction in more detail via critical security theory and post colonial theories of security and migration. These two bodies of literature intersect in such a way as to offer insight into the construction of asylum seekers as a homogenous threatening unit. A post colonial understanding of global politics demonstrates how identity and therefore political subjectivity is not accessible for specific groups, particularly groups of people who do not have a state based identity. I apply the insight garnered from a post colonial understanding of global politics to the experiences of people seeking asylum in Europe and examine how the process of seeking asylum denies subjectivity, particularly when an individual is not considered an asylum seeker by the state in which he or she is present. I argue that an asylum seeker must first define him or herself to be an asylum seeker before enacting the

process of seeking asylum. During transit to the country where an individual intends to seek asylum he or she is not considered an asylum seeker. If an asylum claim is denied by the state then the individual is no longer considered an asylum seeker. However, in many cases the people who are not considered by the state to be asylum seekers still consider themselves to be asylum seekers. Yet when an asylum seeker identity is denied to an individual by the state, he or she ceases to be recognized by that state as a political subject. Simultaneously, extant power constructs asylum seekers as a homogenous unit that threatens the wellbeing of the receiving state. This construction of asylum seekers as a homogenous threatening unit further denies individual subjectivity, instead taking all asylum seekers to share the same characteristics, which are usually portrayed as criminal or threatening. Consequently more asylum seekers fall into the category of “illegal immigrant”. This then provokes the state to further restrict asylum creating a hermeneutic process in which the number of “illegal immigrants” rises because the criteria that establishes one as “legal” is contracting.

Chapter three breaks down the extant power that constructs asylum seekers as a threat in Britain. Through this deconstruction it becomes apparent that the threats portrayed are multiple. Asylum seekers are seen as potential “illegal immigrants” who are criminal individuals. They are constructed via a threefold power discourse as people who want to take advantage of the economic prosperity of Britain. Chapter four examines the lack of agency attributed to asylum seekers in Greece, which allows them to become seen as a homogenous group rather than as separate individuals. Chapter four shows in detail how migrant identity in Greece interacts with national identity, both to reinforce national, social, and historical narratives, and to prevent a “cultural dilution” of Greek identity in the face of growing migrant visibility. The two case studies that look at the construction of asylum seekers in state discourses find that asylum

seekers are understood as a homogenous unit. This unit takes on threatening and criminal characteristics in Britain. In Greece the unit is portrayed as “illegal” and there is little consideration of individual migrant identities. The collective identity often portrays migrants in Greece as lazy, criminal, and separate from Greeks. The evident paradox is that migrants are denied political subjectivity but are portrayed as responsible agents who have committed criminal acts. The mechanisms that lead migrants to be constructed as a threat are the legal frameworks that rely on state based identity and the discourses that establish migrants as a security issue.

2. What are the characteristics of international human rights that lead migrants to be excluded?

I primarily answer this question in chapters one, five and six. Chapter one examines the establishment of the refugee definition in international law and how it has been interpreted in state law, given the failure of the attempt to draft an internationally shared asylum-seeker definition. To reiterate, this understanding relies on the refugee convention definition of a refugee. The convention definition was established in the climate of Europe immediately following World War II and reflects the political climate at the time and the needs of the European states at the time. Further to that, a person is understood as an asylum seeker by a state after he or she has filed an application for asylum. This disregards the period of time in which a person is forced to migrate from his or her home country, and the entire time spent in transit. Many migrants in transit identify themselves as asylum seekers but are not recognized as such by a state. Thus, the understanding of an asylum seeker in international and state law is limited.



Furthermore, the demographics of asylum seekers and the landscape of global politics have changed significantly since the refugee Convention was entered into force. On the other hand, the definition itself has not changed. Thus, I argue that the refugee definition does not meet the needs of contemporary forced migrants. It was designed with the intention of providing refuge but has been consistently used to meet the needs of states in terms of limiting forced migration.

In chapter five I look at the concept of human security, which synthesizes security and human rights to some extent. Further to that, human security can offer valuable insight into the issues of forced migration. International human rights do not incorporate poverty as a legitimate factor of forced migration. Human security offers a consideration of human rights that was generated by development goals and so includes subsistence security and economic concerns. However, the application of human security in practice has been conventionally influenced by states and has focused on meeting the most immediate needs of those humans within states that are considered unable or unwilling to supply for basic needs (Thomas 2004, Nuruzzaman 2006). There is little critical consideration of the way human security can break away from the understanding of global politics that focuses on the state as the central unit. However, those efforts to critically understand human security demonstrate the possibility of shifting the focus to a human one. Mark Duffield in particular demonstrates that the state centred power and the structural economic power that informs how security is understood and practiced maintains a Western neoliberal bias. Individuals in the states that are considered insecure might be subject to development goals but these goals tend to be based on the principles of neoliberal economics. Duffield identifies a significant difference between the developed Western states in the form of individualised security, or social insurance. The principles of neoliberal economics do not

incorporate social insurance and Duffield offers an understanding of a world divided into insured and uninsured people (Duffield 2007). This can also be rephrased into secure and insecure humans. The uninsured or insecure people retain their uninsured status when they cross a border. Consequently, people who migrate from uninsured or insecure states remain insecure while in transit and until an application for leave to remain, or in the particular context of this project an application for asylum, has been processed and accepted. In other words, human insecurity persists in secure states. Migrants are excluded from human rights until they leave behind their status as a migrant and become an immigrant member of the receiving state.

Chapter six offers empirical insight into the exclusion of migrants from human rights, via the narratives of people who consider themselves to be asylum seekers. I look at how the individuals characterize themselves as asylum seekers and I consider how this fits with the dominant state discourses that refer to asylum seekers. Many of the migrants are seeking human rights, yet they cannot access them because the state that they are petitioning does not concur with their asylum seeker identity. In many cases individuals find themselves unable to seek rights because of structural impediments, such as the cyclical process that is evident in Greece. Migrants in Greece are often unable or unwilling to seek asylum there – interview participants has a variety of reasons such as the unfeasibility of having a claim processed or the desire to join family elsewhere. However, if they do not file a claim they are attributed the identity of “illegal immigrant.” Migrants who have not filed, if stopped by the police, are given a deportation document instructing that they leave the country. However, this document is not a travel document. Thus if they attempt to leave they are imprisoned for a period of time then given the same document again instructing that they leave. In chapter five I propose the incorporation of ontological security into the theoretical paradigm of human security. Ontological insecurity then

represents a lack of access to human rights and security. According to the narratives of asylum seekers in chapter six, the major places in which ontological insecurity is present can be characterized by a lack of control or a lack of agency in everyday life. Consequently, the discourses that construct asylum seekers as a homogenous unit combined with the process of seeking asylum that does not allow individual agency in quotidian life can be seen as a factor that impedes access to the realization of human rights for asylum seekers in Europe.

3. In what ways is the concept of ontological security relevant for the individual rights-seeker?

The concept of ontological security focuses on an individual sense of security that is dependent on maintaining a core basic security system composed of mutual knowledge regarding the operation of the world around us, and common sense. This security can be understood as part of the right to life in that the right to life carries more meaning than the medical state of being alive. The right to life can incorporate more broadly things such as the mind, freedom of choice, community and personal life experiences as discussed in chapter five. Individual migrants seeking human rights can be seen as having had their core basic security system ruptured in several different ways. The initial rupture is through movement away from the familiar surroundings. This disrupts the regular expectation of the functioning of daily life. Further, one can assume that an event took place that generated the initial need or desire for movement. Again, that event would represent a further rupture to the functioning of daily life that removes the core sense of security.

Ontological security can be particularly important for the individual rights-seeker, especially in cases of forced migration. Migration removes a sense of ontological security as it puts the

individual into an unfamiliar situation. Furthermore, many people remain in that situation of flux for several months or years as they seek the ability to develop familiarity in a given location without the fear of another rupture in the form of being forced to move once again. Examining the experiences of individuals seeking asylum in Europe demonstrates that there are many people in prolonged situations of uncertainty. Their identity as asylum seekers is disputed as is their right to remain in the state where they have sought protection. Prolonged ontological insecurity is maintained by the uncertainty and by the lack of an ability to build an existence that could potentially cultivate a renewed sense of security.

An important contribution of ontological security theory for migration studies is the shifted understanding of the structure-agency dynamic. The differentiation between legitimate refugees and those considered “illegitimate” or “illegal” is the attribution of agency. Refugees are understood as forced migrants. As Emma Haddad identifies, refugees are seen as being forced to migrate while other migrants make a choice. Refugees want to rebuild what they have lost, while other migrants want to build a better life (Haddad 2008). However, asylum seekers who move for a variety of reasons then are faced with proving that they were forced to migrate and that the compulsion is based on one of the refugee criteria. The migrant is an agent who has freely chosen a particular path. If that path includes activities that states determine as illegal then the migrant bears the responsibility for illegal behaviour. Ontological security provides movement away from structure and agency as dual concepts to a dynamic in which is constituting the other. This is an essential difference in understanding migrants as agents who operate within structural constraints, making choices and taking action as a result of those structural constraints. Applying ontological security theory to asylum seeker definitions permits the criteria that determine forced migration to become more reliant on individual circumstances

and less static and absolute. The agency to normatively rank security concerns moves from the state to the individual migrant.

4. How can human rights be reconceived in order to empower the individual rights-seeker?

Human rights currently privilege citizen rights. In cases of forced migration the individual rights seeker is not recognized as a citizen. A decentered conception of human rights and human security that moves away from the privileges of citizenship and the privileges of the neoliberal economic system is needed to empower the individual rights seeker. Currently, forced migrants do not have the political agency to establish and practice their identities as asylum seekers. The determination of asylum seeker relies upon the state. Moreover, asylum seekers who states do not recognize are often labeled as illegal immigrants or criminals. Their identity is being reconfigured by states and that does not comply with how they see themselves, which further ruptures ontological security. I ultimately conclude that ontological security theory can expose the state based and security based biases in international human rights. Considering the ontological security of the individual rights-seeker recognizes the importance of bodily autonomy and thereby permits the migrant the agency to determine his or her own identity along with the agency to identify the needs most immediate to him or her in a way that could allow the rights-seeker the ability to reacquire a sense of ontological security.

**Directions for future research:**

This project exposes failings in the international system of protection for asylum seekers, in particular with regard to how it functions in Europe. Moreover, it demonstrates to the lack of individual agency to determine identity and acquire security for asylum seekers. Paradoxically,

this lack of individual agency is juxtaposed with an attribution of agency whereby “failed” asylum seekers or “illegal immigrants” are held responsible for any activity that states understand as unlawful or criminal. Ontological security theory offers insight into the limitations of the asylum system because ontological security focuses on a sense of security that is intrinsic to each individual. Ontological security then requires a decentered understanding of security, which cannot be generated by a culture of care that impedes political agency and social participation.

Due to time and space constraints I have looked at only two European countries to understand the experiences of asylum seekers in those areas. A more detailed look at the journey of asylum seekers towards and through Europe will provide understanding of the maintained insecurity that is present during the journey and is often a result of European security policies. The concept of agency for asylum seekers is dealt with briefly in this project and requires further investigation. There are cases within Europe where asylum seekers have asserted individual agency and have consequently asserted their presence as global political actors. The notable case that comes to mind is that of hunger strikers in Greece. While this case was to some extent suppressed in Greek discourse, it gained international attention. This along with other cases that have been researched in IR show the spontaneous assertion of agency, yet this tends to be in conflict with the prevailing authorities. The most extreme cases have developed into riots and violence such as recent events in Australia. If power can move away from the rigid state-determined conceptualization that is extant in global politics and attribute political agency to individuals that is not dependent on membership to a territorial unit there is reason to believe a dialogue could be generated that precedes and negates conflict situations between migrant groups and states. Thus, spaces in which asylum seekers who are without rights yet have generated

political participation for themselves is a fertile direction for future research. Research in this area has already outlined asylum seekers gaining an international political voice (Moulin and Nyers 2007, Budz 2009). The interaction with the nation state and the role of national politics in the contemporary global system remains an interesting space for further study.

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## Appendix

### Key

Tables show the numerical frequency of code appearance in data. Tables 3.1, 3.2 and 3.3 refer to data from Chapter 3; Table 4.1 refers to data from Chapter 4.

Spe. = party platform speeches

P1-10 = Parliament Standard Notes

Deb. = parliamentary debate

SOCA 1 = Serious Organized Crime Agency briefing on immigration crime

SOCA 2 = Serious Organized Crime Agency Lorry Crime Prevention Booklet

UKBA1 = UK Border Agency Annual Report 2008-09

UKBA2 = UK Border Agency Annual Report 2009-10

UKBA3 = UK Border Agency Annual Report 2010-11

Media = UK Tabloid Media

Ta Nea = Greek newspaper

Eleutherotypia = Greek newspaper

Table 3.1: Political discourse

| Code  | Spe. | P1 | P2 | P3  | P4 | P5 | P6 | P7 | P8 | P9 | P10 | Deb. | Totals |
|---|------|----|----|-----|----|----|----|----|----|----|-----|------|--------|
| <b>Bogus/Suspicious</b>                     | 1    | 2  | 5  | 29  | 2  | 6  | 1  | 12 | 3  | 7  | 2   | 1    | 81     |
| <b>Cheats</b>                               |      | 1  | 1  | 1   |    |    |    | 2  |    | 1  |     |      | 6      |
| <b>Destitution</b>                          |      |    | 1  | 2   |    |    | 9  | 14 | 1  | 2  |     |      | 29     |
| <b>Illegal / criminal</b>                   | 1    | 3  | 9  | 25  | 12 | 15 |    | 1  | 4  | 6  | 5   | 1    | 86     |
| <b>Irregular / undocumented</b>             |      |    |    |     |    | 2  |    |    |    |    |     |      | 2      |
| <b>Limiting Access</b>                      |      | 7  | 3  | 13  |    | 2  |    | 4  | 1  | 2  |     |      | 32     |
| <b>Responsibility / earning citizenship</b> |      | 1  | 14 | 3   |    | 1  | 2  | 5  |    | 5  |     |      | 31     |
| <b>Separation / Difference</b>              |      | 1  | 1  | 2   |    |    | 2  | 4  |    | 1  |     |      | 11     |
| <b>State security</b>                       | 1    | 2  |    | 14  | 13 | 1  |    |    | 1  |    |     | 4    | 41     |
| <b>Terrorism</b>                            | 1    |    | 1  | 1   | 6  | 1  |    |    |    |    |     | 2    | 17     |
| <b>Threat</b>                               | 7    | 10 | 15 | 14  | 2  | 4  | 1  | 1  | 3  | 1  | 1   | 7    | 61     |
| Econ  | 5    | 7  | 11 | 3   |    | 3  | 1  | 1  | 3  | 1  |     | 5    | 35     |
| Phys  |      |    | 2  | 3   | 1  |    |    |    | 2  |    |     |      | 8      |
| Soc   |      | 5  | 3  | 3   |    | 2  |    |    | 2  |    | 1   |      | 16     |
| <b>Totals</b>                               | 20   | 39 | 66 | 119 | 36 | 37 | 16 | 44 | 20 | 26 | 9   | 20   |        |

Table 3.2: Security professionals

| Code  | SOCA1 | SOCA2 | UKBA1 | UKBA2 | UKBA3 | Totals |
|---|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|--------|
| <b>Bogus/Suspicious</b>                     | 4     | 3     | 5     | 5     | 1     | 18     |
| <b>Cheats</b>                               |       |       |       |       |       |        |
| <b>Destitution</b>                          |       |       |       |       | 1     | 1      |
| <b>Illegal / criminal</b>                   | 4     | 3     | 10    | 10    | 12    | 39     |
| <b>Irregular / undocumented</b>             |       | 3     | 2     |       |       | 5      |
| <b>Limiting Access</b>                      |       |       | 10    | 3     | 12    | 25     |
| <b>Responsibility / earning citizenship</b> |       |       |       |       |       |        |
| <b>Separation / Difference</b>              |       |       | 3     |       |       | 3      |
| <b>State security</b>                       |       |       | 6     | 7     | 14    | 27     |
| <b>Terrorism</b>                            |       |       | 2     | 1     | 2     | 3      |
| <b>Threat</b>                               |       | 1     | 2     | 5     | 2     | 10     |
|   | Econ  |       |       | 1     |       | 1      |
|   | Phys  |       | 1     | 1     |       | 2      |
|   | Soc   |       |       | 1     |       | 1      |
| <b>Totals</b>                               | 8     | 10    | 39    | 34    | 44    |        |

Table 3.3: Tabloid media

| Code  | Media |    |
|---|-------|----|
| <b>Malcontents</b>                          | 6     |    |
| <b>Bogus/Suspicious</b>                     | 42    |    |
| <b>Cheats</b>                               | 7     |    |
| <b>Destitution</b>                          | 5     |    |
| <b>Illegal / criminal</b>                   | 51    |    |
| <b>Irregular / undocumented</b>             |       |    |
| <b>Limiting Access</b>                      | 7     |    |
| <b>Responsibility / earning citizenship</b> | 1     |    |
| <b>Separation / Difference</b>              | 1     |    |
| <b>State security</b>                       | 39    |    |
| <b>Terrorism</b>                            | 16    |    |
| <b>Threat</b>                               | 65    |    |
|   | Econ  | 42 |
|   | Phys  | 10 |
|   | Soc   | 4  |
| <b>Totals</b>                               | 269   |    |

Table 4.1: The Greek Media

| Code  | Ta Nea | Eleutherotypia | Code total |
|---|--------|----------------|------------|
| <b>Advocacy</b>                                   | 18     | 36             | 54         |
| <b>Crime / criminal association</b>               | 20     | 19             | 39         |
| <b>Description of migrant situation</b>           | 69     | 44             | 113        |
| From migrant                                      | 16     | 6              | 22         |
| From other  | 15     | 4              | 19         |
| <b>Health</b>                                     |        | 14             | 14         |
| <b>Identity</b>                                   | 8      | 12             | 20         |
| <b>Legal / illegal</b>                            | 55     | 42             | 97         |
| <b>Migrant opinion / story</b>                    | 33     | 8              | 41         |
| From migrant                                      | 17     | 5              | 22         |
| From other  | 9      |                | 9          |
| <b>Migrant motivation: poverty / unemployment</b> | 13     | 16             | 29         |
| <b>Migrant political action</b>                   | 42     | 92             | 134        |
| <b>Migrant / Greek relations</b>                  | 53     | 43             | 96         |
| <b>Politicians / immigration professionals</b>    | 110    | 61             | 171        |
| <b>Racism / discrimination</b>                    | 24     | 31             | 55         |
| <b>Residence temporary/ permanent</b>             | 11     | 1              | 12         |
| <b>Security</b>                                   | 18     | 15             | 33         |
| <b>Separation btw. Greeks and migrants</b>        | 19     | 16             | 35         |
| <b>Systemic Failure</b>                           | 1      | 9              | 10         |
| <b>Vulnerability</b>                              | 13     | 30             | 43         |
| <b>Rights</b>                                     | 14     | 34             | 48         |
| <b>Totals</b>                                     | 578    | 538            |            |