## Original Research Reports

# Reification and the Refugee: Using a Counterposing Dialogical Analysis to Unlock a Frozen Category

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## Abstract

Thousands of individuals each year seek refugee status and the question of who can be accepted requires politicians within democracies to seek a public mandate. Unlike other socio-political categories individuals cannot self-identify as refugee; the category must be bureaucratically conferred. Therefore sustained humanitarian public concern is vital to the acceptance of refugees. This article sets parameters on this public concern. It examines how public narratives reify the refugee category. Showing how this reification constrains the citizenship, integration and opportunities of individuals, now safe, yet continually categorized in everyday public discourse as refugee. Interviews, focus groups (Study 1) and ethnography (Study 2) were conducted in Sweden and the United Kingdom (N = 57). The article introduces a counterposing dialogical analysis where public positioning of refugees is counterposed against dialogue by "refugees" anticipating their positioning. The analysis uncovers an hegemonic social representation of humanitarianism indexing "the refugee" as the passive recipient of help framed by a public narrative diachronically frozen in the initial act of flight. Three objectifying reification processes stabilize the category. "Refugees" in turn employ counter-positional tactics of distancing, compensation and future-orientation. The limited success of these tactics suggest the need to scale up such tactics to collective-level communication strategies. Success of communication strategies requires questioning the underlying function humanitarian-talk serves in creating a sense of European identity. Together these strategies could re-work the temporal features of the refugee category facilitating a repositioning and enabling the emergence of post-refugee narratives.

*Keywords:* reification, category, refugee, humanitarianism, narrative, dialogical analysis, citizenship, integration

### Non-Technical Summary

**Background**

Thousands of individuals each year seek refugee status and the question of who can acquire refugee status requires politicians in democratic countries to seek a public mandate. In this context sustained humanitarian concern by the public is vital to the acceptance of refugees into Europe. Furthermore, the public nature of the asylum-seeking and settlement process engages citizens, through their public discourse and everyday encounters, in the management of refugees beyond initial humanitarian support. The public therefore find themselves in a dual humanitarian and technocratic role.

**Why was this study done?**

In this study we wanted to understand the public's role. In particular how the public position refugees and how people categorized as refugee respond to this positioning. The study examines how well-intentioned public narratives on refugees potentially constrain the citizenship, integration, and equal opportunities of people now safe yet continually categorized as "refugee". We know from social identity studies that public discourse on any given category can help to freeze the category (reification). This study extends such research on the reification of categories by introducing a dialogical approach. Examining reification as a dialogical process reveals a variable self which uses a variety of different voices.

It also reveals the time-space features of socio-political categories. We argue that understanding these processes contain the keys to unlocking the refugee category.

### What did the researchers do and find?

We conducted interviews and focus groups involving 32 participants and combined this with an ethnographic study with 25 participants who had refugee status - both studies were in Sweden and the United Kingdom. We developed a two-step counterposing dialogical analysis. This involves mapping the terms used within public narratives on "the refugee", and then mapping how "refugees", anticipating these terms, counter-position themselves to avoid stigmatization.

We found shared public humanitarian concern, understood here as shared social representations, represents "the refugee" as the passive recipient of help. We also found the category to be objectified in three ways. First a public narrative of the refugee story as frozen in the initial "act of flight". Second, the absence of a post-refugee narrative means people who are settled are still referred to as "refugees" several years after status has been granted. Third, public narratives tend to position "refugees" as waiting or standing still rather than progressing with life. We did not find any public narratives of refugees as demonstrating agentic bravery in making the decision to move. The public is found to employ a deficit model of imagined language difficulties and lack of skills and cultural capital. European economic migrants, however, are positioned as skilled and automatically integrated through shared European heritage.

We found individuals categorized as "refugee", while privately proud of their refugee status, publically act to counter-position themselves in three ways; first, distancing themselves from the category in their daily encounters. Second, compensating by repositioning themselves in the humanitarian discourse from the helped to the helper. Third, actively re-working the narrative beyond the "flight" story of immediate settlement towards future plans.

### What do these findings mean?

Individual-level tactics by "refugees" have limited success, particularly as the frozen obstinate feature of the refugee category evidenced here suggest that humanitarian-talk on refugees is serving the public's sense of being European more than serving the needs of "refugees" once settled. Success of communication strategies requires questioning the underlying function humanitarian-talk serves in creating a sense of European identity. Communication strategies that scale-up the individual-level re-positioning and future-orientation used by "refugees" could unlock the frozen features of public narratives enabling post-refugee narratives to emerge. Public humanitarian concern provides a vital democratic mandate which is key to supporting the acceptance of people fleeing war and persecution. We suggest, once "leave to remain" or refugee status is granted, delineating the parameters of that humanitarian concern and collectively acting beyond the category are key to full citizenship, integration and equal opportunities.

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Thousands of people continue to risk their lives seeking refugee status in Europe. The arrival of 1,015,078 people via the Mediterranean Sea (UNHCR, 2016) in 2015 thrust the plight and threat of "refugees" into the public consciousness. Globally only 1% of refugees are actually settled, the rest live in precarious arrangements (Hansen,

2018). Europe has a long history of allowing settlement of refugees, however the recent crisis ignites debates about the parameters of who can belong to Europe.

This article uses social and political psychology's preoccupation with category-construction to contribute to the question of the limits of belonging to Europe for those categorized "refugee". Specifically we ask (i) what dialogical processes are used by the public to reify the "refugee" category (ii) and how do those categorized as "refugee" anticipate their social positioning by the public and develop counter-positions.

## The Political Origins of the Refugee Category

Narratives of the movement of people fleeing persecution have existed for thousands of years. However the "refugee" category, relating to coordinated international action, is relatively young. In 1922 the Nansen Passport was created allowing onward movement of refugees and in 1951 the UN charter defined the refugee as involving "a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion" (Convention 1951, Article 1A [2]). The refugee category began on the world stage, in so far as it was always a politicized public category. It was, initially confined to Europe and since the 1967 New York protocol extended globally. Co-ordinated action is currently framed by the UNHCR Global Compact on Refugees (2018).

These public origins on the world stage mean that public understanding of the refugee category is likely to involve not just self-other encounters but also macro-level lay understandings of international relations. The Convention definition prefigures the refugee as "a figure of humanitarian rescue, qualifying for protection only by virtue of the absence of any explicit economic aspirations' (Long, 2013, p. 7) creating a sharp distinction between refugees and economic migrants. For refugees asylum must be claimed when arriving in the host country whereas as for economic migrants, applications can begin from outside the host country and can be based explicitly on movement to improve quality of life and work prospects. This encodes oppositional tensions between agency (migrants) and non-agency (refugees) within public and political discourse (Goodman, Sirriyeh, & McMahon, 2017).

The politicized and public nature of the category means that "refugees" are alive to the social positioning processes through which categories of "us" and "them" are enacted, reified and contested (Figgou & Condor, 2006; Reicher, 2004; Scuzzarello, 2012).

The public mandate associated with the question of who can become a refugee means that the public, in their discourse, are actively involved in the reification of the "refugee" category. Reification in this article refers to the processes which sediment dynamic socio-historic relations as concrete, permanent and outside of history. Reification renders real and permanent what may be illusory, provisional and contestable.

In order to develop a dialogical approach to category-use and specifically the public reification of the refugee category we proceed in four steps. First, our departure point, rather than intergroup, is the figure of an embodied dialogical citizen (Mahendran, 2018; Mahendran, Jackson, & Kapoor, 2015). This refers to the process by which citizens are continually engaged in authoring others. Authoring refers to the capacity to take the actual or imagined voice of another when articulating positions in talk, text and encounters. The second step, explores how such authoring plays a potential role in unlocking reification around categories that cannot be claimed by the self but must be granted by others (i.e. other-conferred).

Political psychological investigation into reification tends to foreground self-categorization within intergroup contexts (Pilecki & Hammack, 2014; Reicher & Hopkins, 2001a, 2001b). Reicher and Hopkins (2001a) uncover three reification processes, externalization, naturalization and psychologization. Taking these as a starting point, our third step explores three additional reification processes: objectification, stabilization and ontologization, found to be particularly relevant to other-conferred categories. The fourth step contextualizes the analysis by introducing three institutional-cultural processes – bureaucratic fractioning (Zetter, 2007), anti-immigration discourse (Hanson-Easey & Augoustinos, 2011; Leudar, Hayes, Nekvapil, & Baker, 2008), and the existence in the European context of a pervasive affective-culturalism (Ålund, 1999; Ålund & Schierup, 1991; Eastmond, 1998, 2011). These are introduced very briefly to support the analysis because such institutional discourses influence the representational practice of various publics when asked to discuss the acceptance of refugees.

## Theoretical Frame: A Dialogical Approach to Category-Use

### Understanding the Public as Dialogical Citizens

As the public are involved in the management and acceptance of refugees we use the term "citizen" as opposed to "actor" or "individual", to foreground the political relations between individuals and between individuals and their governments in terms of rights, recognition, claims and responsibilities. We use the term "the public" rather than publics, not to reify the public itself but to foreground their evaluative attitude, the extent to which public opinion formation involves a dialogical relation to what the rest of the public think and to shared political knowledge.

The public, as dialogical citizens, continually enact a variety of internal *I*-positions, such as *I*-adventurer, *I*-peace-maker and external *I*-positions, such as *I*-manager, *I*-nurse aimed towards anticipated, actual and imagined encounters (Hermans & Dimaggio, 2007; Kinnvall & Nesbitt-Larking, 2011; Mahendran et al., 2015; Mahendran, 2018; Marková, 2003).

Such positions are partially delineated by ascribed categories within social representations structuring the ground upon which such dialogical citizens can act (Moscovici & Duveen, 2000). The social representations approach is pertinent here precisely because it arose out of Moscovici's rejection of the Marxist interplay between ideology and scientific thinking, which viewed public thinking as irrational and correctable with more rational scientific thinking. Moscovici was convinced that public thinking was its own common-sense rationality often arising out of daily practical application of such scientific knowledge (Moscovici & Marková, 2000, p. 228).

Central to the public positioning of "refugees" is that values within social representations often find expression in oppositional categories such as the agency of one group contrasted by the imagined non-agency of another (Marková, 2003) or normative versus non-normative (Staerklé, 2013; Staerklé, Clémence, & Spini, 2011). Normative social order representations are used when the public seek to legitimate their actions so as to defend and sustain their ideal social orders. These social orders might be driven by a sense of moral certainty, a belief in free-markets, social diversity or a fight against structural inequality. Part of people's psychological sense of citizenship, therefore, involves actively intervening in the organization of their worlds, using well-defined certainties, drawn from prescriptive social representational common-sense, to defend or sustain their ideal social order (Staerklé, 2013). Studies have begun into the extent to which training in social representations of international relations influences motivated reasoning amongst expert and non-experts (Beattie & Snider, 2019).

The counterposing dialogical analysis developed here interplays the micro-level *I*-positions of the dialogical self (Hermans & Dimaggio, 2007; Kinnvall & Lindén, 2010; Kinnvall & Nesbitt-Larking, 2011; Marková, 2003, 2016; Richardson, 2011) with macro-level social representations of international relations.

## Authoring – How Citizens Anticipate Their Categorization

Authoring, our dialogical capacity to give a voice to an imagined other, whether an individual, category, group or nation, is central to understanding tactical action. Not only do we author others, equally we imagine being authored by others before we act.

Dialogical approaches to questions of migration and integration, which emphasize this authoring process, arose as a growing critique of acculturation studies (Deaux, 2006; Howarth, Wagner, Magnusson, & Sammut, 2014; Rudmin, 2003). Rather than adopting separatist, integrationist or assimilationist strategies, this critique demonstrates how people have the capacity to negotiate "multiple and conflicting dialogical voices, histories, and *I*-positions" (Bhatia, 2002, p. 57). Buitelaar for example shows how the politician "Tahara" works with Islam as the dominant identity in integration talk in the Netherlands and takes up *I*-positions such as I am the "Muslim girl, with the headscarf, brain and big mouth" (p. 265), "I am a social democrat by origin" (p. 268) and later "I am the daughter of a guest-worker" (p. 273). "Tahara" simultaneously challenges the authoring of the female Muslim by Muslim audiences as pious and by Dutch audiences as oppressed (Buitelaar, 2006).

When positioned within a category and facing authoring and Othering, Marková's epistemic commitment to dialogicality allows for a dynamic sense of the strategic re-workings possible (Andreouli, 2013; Gillespie, Kadianaki, & O'Sullivan-Lago, 2012; Marková, 2003, 2016; Prokopiou, Cline, & de Abreu, 2012). Moving into a new country involves taking the other's voice, internalizing that voice as stigma and rejecting and delegitimizing that voice to enable new counter-positions and transformative effects on identity and decision-making (Kadianaki, 2014).

This dialogical research into intercultural encounters combines an emancipatory knowledge interest in microgenesis, a critical awareness of the political patterning arising out of sociohistorical events and a methodological focus on narrative-autobiographical accounts. A key contribution of this article is to switch to a wide-angle lens trained directly onto the category itself. Whilst categories are continually contested and constructed in self-other relations they retain an obstinate ability to "put themselves in quotation marks against the will of the speaker" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 294).

To sum up, we argue that individuals are dialogical citizens actively engaged in authoring processes. They both take up the voice of others and anticipate being authored by others. Equally, as members of the public such citizens see themselves as trying to act responsibly towards wider social norms such as migration-integration when authoring others. This, often well-intentioned, authoring inevitably works with inherited politically patterned categories creating normative constraints that influence the potential for novelistic self-expression, re-appropriation and re-categorization. Understanding reification uncovers these political patterns and normative constraints.

## Three Reification Processes Key to Unlocking the Refugee Category

The process of reification does not appear to be a parsimonious simplification but often an elaboration. This elaboration acts as an organizing principle within the processes of social representation (Elcheroth, Doise, & Reicher, 2011). As social psychological understanding of categorization processes has advanced, the focus has

been less on demonstrating our tendency to categorize and more towards the "symbolic, affective, political and ideological nature and function of social categorization" (Augoustinos, 2001, p. 203-205).

Reicher and Hopkins, investigating national identity in Scotland, focus on how reification varies according to the function of the category (Reicher, 2004; Reicher & Hopkins, 2001a). They foreground three reification processes: externalization, naturalization and psychologization, which are central to how politicians rhetorically claim 'Scottishness' within Scotland. Together, these processes enable the category 'Scottish' to become essentialized as permanent and timeless.

We developed the counterposing dialogical analysis by interpreting the existing literature on reification in the light of the authoring that was occurring within the data corpus detailed below. This iterative process suggests three further reification processes as occurring within this other-conferred category namely objectification, stabilization and ontologization.

The objectification of an abstract category enables it to become discernable perceptively real. It is through the naming, labelling and cultural encoding of the category within social representations, that what it comes to mean in concrete terms is established. The prototypicality of the objectified category contains "an idealised conflation of salient" and "readily identifiable points" of an iconic visual quality (Moscovici & Duveen, 2000, p. 43). The political discourse around refugees in boats in the Mediterranean or standing at fences at national borders within Europe illustrates this. Objectification, in this context, is a figurative perceptual process. The figure of "the refugee" emerges.

Other-conferred categories such as refugee are not understood as a dynamic grouping redefined according to context and usage, like an ethnic-category e.g. in the UK context, from West-Indian, to Afro-Caribbean, to African-Caribbean, but become stable and fixed in time. Stabilization, the second process, refers to the process by which certain categories lose this dynamic quality, they become "out of play".

Why some socio-political categories lend themselves to agentic re-appropriation whilst others are frozen is a key issue for political psychology. Ontologization, our final process, we argue, sheds light on this. Ontologization emphasizes being "refugee" as a distinct and Othered existence. Opotow's accounts of moral exclusion and Tileagă's examination of Roma in Europe reorient the term ontologization from a context-free inter-group psychological tendency to a rather context-dependent morally excluding practice of dehumanization (Opotow, 1990; Tileagă, 2007). Ontologization is vital to explain the reception of refugees in Europe. Specifically, the form of dehumanization of people fleeing conflict involves a psychologized elaboration of the bureaucratic refugee category into a way of being; for example, understanding a person who is struggling to acquire the host country language as being a feature of *their being a refugee*, rather than the prosaic reality for most people who move. In short, as the analysis will show, the processes by which individuals become dehumanized in public discourse could be the very same processes by which empty bureaucratic categories become pejoratively humanised.

Reification processes such as objectification, stabilization and ontological delineation serves to abstract "the refugee" category and the boundary-making involved, from the institutional and socio-historical contexts of its emergence. Together these processes index the refugee category. They begin a domestication within the European community which is mutually constitutive of other categories, particularly, as our analysis below reveals, "the European".

To understand the reification processes inherent in social-historical categories is to understand the prosaic creation of daily sociocultural orders, dominant and subordinate positions. That being said, it is worth being cautious about attaching positive or negative valence to the processes of reification per se. Reification can be a central part of pejorative Othering processes but equally reification forms the armory of a strategic vital essentialism. Categories once sufficiently abstracted begin to live a technocratic and political life of their own rooted in wider institutional processes. This makes it essential to understand the socio-historical conditions of their emergence.

## The Institutional and Cultural Context in Sweden and the United Kingdom

Three institutional processes influence the European context to reinforce reification - bureaucratic fractioning, anti-immigration discourse and affective-culturalism. Earlier we commented on the distinction between refugees and economic migrants. Zetter points out how further to this "bureaucratic fractioning" also delineates claimants from the more privileged term "refugee" using container terms, e.g. Internationally Displaced Person (IDP) and Indefinite Leave to Remain (ILR) (Zetter, 2007, p. 177). The once protective label "refugee" is no longer understood as a basic Convention right, but rather as "a highly privileged prize which few deserve and most claim illegally" (Zetter, 2007, p. 184). Such growing restrictionism discourse is further compounded by category use by researchers themselves (Polzer, 2008). Shared meaning around the refugee category facilitates cooperation amongst actors and continually highlights unresolved international issues (Cole, 2018).

However, those living within this category can become emblematic of international issues. This bureaucratic fractioning combines with anti-immigration media discourse, and the rise of far-right "true" nationalist parties across Europe, to create public anxiety and keep alive authoring and Othering around the category. Invasion and disaster-related metaphors, such as "breaking-point", "flood" and "influx" make it impossible for those understood within such categories to present themselves neutrally in public encounters (Kirkwood, McKinlay, & McVittie, 2015; Leudar & Nekvapil, 2000).

Ålund and Schierup (1991) argue that the refugee category creates in its audiences an affective-culturalism. This affective-culturalism combines a cultural lens with a burden of care (Ålund, 1999; Ålund & Schierup 1991; Eastmond, 1998, 2011). Such affective-culturalism organizes refugees into essentialized cultural groups, which in combination with "Swedish refugee policy has also often been criticized for pacifying, disciplining, clientilizing and exposing them (refugees) to culturalized problem/victim discourses" (Ålund & Schierup, 1991, p. 16). In public discourse, most often it is an ethnic-religious identity that is associated with the decision to flee. The public imagines the "Syrian-Christian, or Bosnian-Muslim" in flight, rather than the doctor, or indeed the "younger-brother" who left his "older brother" behind.

An overall conflation of mobility with culture can essentialize cultural difference and influence political decision-making. For example, when the cultural construct "Sudanese refugees" were understood to not "integrate so well" in Australia the refugee quota for Sudan was cut (Hanson-Easey & Augoustinos, 2010). Refugees are simultaneously viewed as a humanitarian object of "sympathy talk" and an out-of-place Othered object within one's own space whose natural home is somewhere else (Hanson-Easey & Augoustinos, 2011, p. 265).

Bureaucratic fractioning, anti-immigration media representations and pervasive affective-culturalism within the public sphere frame any integration difficulties refugees face not as rooted in structural inequalities within the host environment, nor in reasonable adjustments to moving to a new country, but attributable to essentalized notions of "their" culture and/or the trauma associated with the war-torn contexts of their fleeing.

# Methods

## Design

The data corpus draws from two studies with different methodologies. In Study 1 the two methods chosen, interviews and focus groups, involved a dialogical design. We brought participants (details below) into direct dialogue by exposing them to narratives about the European Union and their own nation using EU policy materials and national-level media articles related to integration and European citizenship. The design created a dialogue with the politicization of immigration, rather than reducing participant involvement to biographical-ethnographic accounts. In biographical accounts participants articulate their meaning-making around their experiences which risks compounding their marginality, in Study 1, we used stimulus materials to approach participants as citizens (Mahendran et al., 2015).

Study 2 involved an immersive ethnographic approach. The second author volunteered at migrant support centres in London, Norwich and Stockholm. All participants had refugee status, except for one person who was claiming asylum, and were recruited from these centres.

## Procedure and Participant Characteristics

In Study 1, 24 interviews and 4 focus groups (*N* = 32) were carried out by the first two authors. The study involved an equal number of migrant and non-migrant participants, in two cities – Stockholm and Edinburgh, between 2008 and 2009. The category "migrant" referred to any cross-border movement into either member-state irrespective of context, including crossing from England to Scotland, as an internal migrant. Recruitment involved placing adverts in adult education newsletters. This was supplemented by snowball sampling. Participants came from different occupational backgrounds. 50% were female and 50% male. In a structured interview with 30 questions, participants explored their understanding of the terms citizenship, integration and European citizenship. In the second part, they were presented with EU stimulus materials from the European Union's Hague programme and Common Basic Principles on Integration (European Commission, 2005) which were sent to participants in advance.

At the end of the interviews all participants were asked to participate in a focus group. Not everyone could accept; therefore, the focus groups involved between five and three already interviewed participants. The focus groups were carried out in February 2009 by the first author in Edinburgh and the second author in Stockholm. They involved three components, EU stimulus materials, viewing a five-minute EU film entitled "Building a citizen's Europe" (European Commission, 2007), followed by four Swedish (Stockholm) and Scottish (Edinburgh) national newspaper articles on immigrant-integration selected using the search term "integration" (the term is the same in both Swedish and English) within LexisNexis. Interviews and focus groups were transcribed and where relevant translated into English. Relevant stimulus context is footnoted throughout the analysis.

Study 2 involved depth interviews (*N* = 25) with people going through the process of asylum and gaining refugee status, in Stockholm, Uppsala, London and Norwich. The open-ended depth interviews invited participants to narrate their experiences of feeling compelled to flee, encounter the legal framework of the asylum process and acquiring refugee status (Magnusson, 2011).

## Developing a Counterposing Dialogical Analysis

One of the key contributions of this article is the development of an innovative theoretically informed counterposing dialogical analysis. This approach uncovers reification processes which stabilize and objectify categories and, in emphasizing dialogical capacities, provides the keys to unlocking them. In order to understand how citizens position or counter-position the first step identifies all instances of *I*-positioning, authoring and Othering (Marková, Linell, Grossen, & Salazar Orvig, 2007), and then all instances of the term refugee. This was organized into a data corpus.

The analysis then looked for oppositional binaries within category-use and the social representations which sustain it and any chronotopic (temporal-spatial) dimensions within the category. In Study 1, oppositional binaries became evident when participants discussed the EU's distinction between third-country and second-country nationals. In Study 2 instances of self-presentation, authoring and Othering (referred to in the introduction) in relation to what participants imagined publics thought of them, 'as refugees' began to show clear chronotopic dimensions.

The next step involved returning to Study 1 to interpret how these chronoptopic dimensions were being developed by the public. This step uncovered processes of objectification, stabilization and ontologization.

The final step of the analysis configures these micro *I*-positions, public narratives and social representational practice around the category, into one overall counterposing scheme this is presented in Figure 1. This sets-out the top-down reification processes that were found when publics talk about refugees, counterposed by the bottom-up strategies taken by "refugees" to de-stabilize these configurations. Figure 1 presents the key processes which we argue freeze the category and how it can be potentially unlocked.
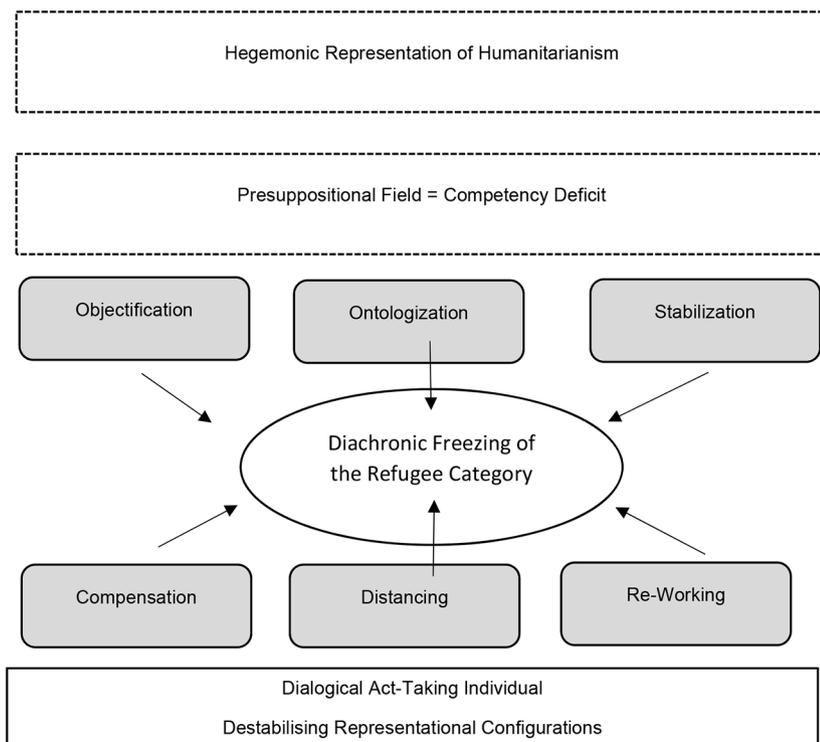


*Figure 1.* Dialogics of the Refugee Category within encounters in Sweden and the United Kingdom.

# Findings

## Counterposing Analysis Part I: Reification and the Refugee Category

The analysis draws selectively from across the data corpus. The first part of the analysis sets out the three reification processes and the social representational practice that underpins them. The second part sets out the counter-positioning tactics taken by "refugees" (Figure 1).

### Humanitarianism and the Authoring of a 'Refugee Family'

In Extract 1 the focus group 4 discusses a Dagens Nyheter news article about assimilation. The visible figure of "the refugee" sitting around drinking coffee becomes a running theme. Participant BG, a non-migrant, takes up a concerned reporter position in authoring a "refugee family", revealing an important temporal feature of a humanitarian public narrative of the refugee as stuck – both in space and time.

### Extract 1[i]

**BG:** *I spoke to a refugee family that had come to Sweden three years ago and (…) they said at least four times how grateful they are that Sweden helped them when they came here. That they were given food and all these things. But they were very critical of the fact that they weren't given the opportunity to work and that meant they were really not integrated (…) but still after three years they still hadn't got a single job. That's why I think you should be able to get an apprentice position straight away so you can immediately start to feel a part of things and help those that sit and drink coffee year after year. Of course they drink coffee, because they haven't got anything else to do. (Study 1, Stockholm Focus Group 4)*

In Extract 2, BG continues his dialogic empathic position developing an oppositional binary between refugee/non-refugee as he brings a second refugee family into anecdotal being.

### Extract 2

**BG:** *I spoke to a family of refugees that were in a city in the north (…). As for the child who had to go in a school where there are no other refugees she is not made to feel welcome in any way she's completely excluded. They don't want to talk to her and they laughed at her and she hasn't got any friends. Now she is placed into a class where only migrant children are placed and now she's happy (…). As for the family, there is no work (…). What do you do then because you are definitely not integrated. (Study 1, Stockholm Focus Group 4)*

The segregation of the discriminated school girl is presented as a pragmatic solution. BG recognises that both the practices of separating a child and being unable to work are barriers to integration. The "refugee family" is not positioned as a prototypical family who moved from a specific place, or a family who arrived as refugees, but become stabilised and objectified as a "refugee family" (see Figure 1). Being labelled "refugee" three years after arrival locks them into an indexical position in relation to the audience. This oppositional social representation locks discriminatory practices into the category.

The interplay of authoring and Othering processes reveals a hegemonic social representation of humanitarianism. The "refugee family" is held apart from the mainstream and made the object of our collective humanitarian concern. The asymmetry within BG's category-use is evident in the passive terms "grateful" and "placed", positioning the family as grateful but impotent through agency-restriction.

**The Refugee as Non-European**

Within Extracts 1 and 2 the refugee category is conflated with the broader migrant category. Extract 3, however, reveals a sharp oppositional binary between the refugee and European migrants.

**Extract 3[ii]**

**NM:** *The term third country nationals […] have you heard of the term before? It is referring to people from countries outside of EU and they make quite a clear distinction between European citizens and third country nationals, what's your opinion of this?[iii]*

**SC:** *Refugees and migrants then?*

**NM:** *Is that the distinction for you?*

**SC:** *Because refugees have fled and they have with them a big sorrow. They might not have wanted to even leave their country, they might have wanted to have stayed there but can't because of the different circumstances of their country. So that is an entirely different thing. So it demands something completely different to deal with them, it takes a lot of expertise to take care of this and they might not be ready for society and work. They might have to deal with their trauma first before they can be integrated into society […] so it's a whole different ball game, at the same time it is really important that they learn Swedish, that's really important.*

**NM:** *But isn't that the same for someone coming from the EU from say France, don't they have the demand on them to learn the language?*

**SC:** *Oh yes, they have an even bigger demand to learn the language; if they are going to become part of society then they have to learn the language.*

**NM:** *So in that sense there is no difference between them, in your opinion, both should learn the language?*

**SC:** *Absolutely, but I don't know how well refugees can take in the language, does trauma affect their ability to learn language, I mean what do you say as a psychologist? (Study 1, Stockholm, SC)*

The integration of the refugee is cast objectively as "entirely different" both in terms of context and demands as a part of oppositional representational practice. SC is not alone; she uses a distinction that is inherent within the on-going bureaucratic fractioning of Europeanized integration policy referred to in the introduction, where integration policy delineates between non-EU nationals/third-country nationals. EU nationals (second-country) are not seen as requiring integration support, partly because of the rights their European citizenship affords them, and partly because they are understood as being also European. This objectification of the borders of the refugee category, begins to reveal another category – the European. In Extract 4 QP delineates this further:

**Extract 4**

**QP:** *If you talk about (…) someone that comes from a third country in the Middle East compared with someone who comes from Switzerland or Holland for example it's an unbelievable difference and the image you have in front of you is perhaps more if you take someone from the Middle East who doesn't have an education and the person from Holland is maybe a doctor. Those two come into society in completely different ways and those that come from the Middle East have a much bigger change culturally speaking I think that means a much longer journey socially speaking than those coming from Europe. (Study 1, Stockholm, QP)*

QP's objectified refugee figure minimises the inherent settlement processes involved in mobility, irrespective of context of arrival and configures the refugee within a set of assumptions about skills, language and cultural deficit. It is unclear if this developmental deficit within Extracts 3 and 4 relates to trauma and dislocation or is associated

with displacement from an imagined more backward country of origin. Analysis of an exceptional response, OU, granted refugee status upon arrival in Sweden from Chile, demonstrates an alternative narrative.

### Extract 5

**OU:** *When it says third country nationals what do the statistics look like? How many are third country nationals that belonged to other countries that now belong to EU? They aren't third country nationals anymore. Those that were outside of Europe and are now in Europe so it is a real quick, quick, quick change (…). So this with third country nationals it has become a harder concept to understand because yesterday Poland was a third country national today they are not. (Study 1, Stockholm, OU)*

The level of explanation within OU's narrative throws into relief the extent of the ontologization of refugees in Extracts 3 and 4. In Extract 5 nation-states are the actors. This suggests the importance of understanding underlying social representations of international relations for counter-positional strategies. It is perhaps tempting to understand OU's exceptionalism in terms of his refugee position. Yet collective-level international relations narratives are also found in the Scottish context amongst non-migrants.

### Extract 6

**KM:** *What about the European Union themselves; what do you think about their making that distinction between third-country and second-country nationals?*

**MS:** *I (have) limited understanding of how it works, but you know, the idea that (the) Turkish community, and the North African community, I don't think that they were seen as always third world within Europe. But then there are (…) countries that are given far more status, you know, if you're French, or possibly Swiss. A Swiss citizen is superior to a Romanian citizen, and so on, you know. So it's very much a stereotypical thing and a hierarchy. (Study 1, Edinburgh, MS)*

Public narratives show how *I*-positioning of refugees relates closely to social representations of international relations. Within Extracts 3 and 4 oppositional positioning of "the European" and the "Middle Eastern refugee" evokes a shared representation of other regions, e.g. the Middle East as being culturally distinct and the site of intervention and humanitarian action, not present in Extracts 5 and 6.

## Caught in the Act of Flight – Diachronic Freezing

Such oppositional representations are compounded by the stability of the refugee category. Extract 7 is taken from a discussion on the importance of national-language acquisition. It reveals the diachronically frozen features of the refugee narrative. KB uses his own refugee context to moderate but not challenge the building consensus on language acquisition. BC, a migrant student, also authors an imagined refugee. TT and KT, both non-migrants, author the refugee-family as stabilized, separate and waiting "their whole lives" imagining returning to their home country.

### Extract 7

**NM:** *So what are your thoughts about this debate then?[iv]*

**KB:** *I think it is completely right that you demand from people that they learn Swedish if they are going to move to Sweden and that they should learn within a reasonable length of time. But the problem is that it's okay if you come to Sweden as a 22 year old like me and sit and do SFI[v]. But if you come as a 55 year old it's actually a lot harder to learn a language so maybe they need to take consideration.*

*[…]*

**TT:** *At the moment we don't even seem to have the possibility to take care of them all that come here anyway. Those that are in a bad way those that need psychiatric care. But if we try to help those that actually need help, need care, but on the other hand it's a problem that they just get care but they don't then try to learn the language but instead are just here and planning to go back when the war is over, and then they don't bother learning the language. They are just waiting and prepared to return at any time.*

*[….]*

**BC:** *I think that "ok I have come here, and ok I might only want to stay a couple of years because of the war" but I think you should still have to learn the language otherwise I'm a burden to that country and otherwise I'm just going to hang around for a few years in this country and I can't speak the language so how can I get a job=[vi]*

**KT:** *= I heard of a family that thought the whole time they would be going back any week and they spent their whole lives like this thinking soon we're going back, they spent all their time planning for their return. (Study 1, Stockholm Focus Group 3)*

The social representation of humanitarianism is hegemonic in its widespread uncontested acceptance in this context. It involves affective-culturalism, i.e. a duty of care combining with a temporal-spatial component locking the refugee into the position of having "just arrived" – a *diachronic freezing.*

This diachronic freezing stops the narrative from continuing beyond the point of arrival. The refugee category is loaded not with an act-taking individual, evoked in the 1951 Convention, but with the event of arriving in the receiving country.

Such processes freeze the category at the point of arrival (see Figure 1 above). Once stabilized, the category becomes objectified, salient perceptual features emerge "sitting around" and "waiting". Rather than being a transitional bureaucratic category or an important status relating to a brave decision, the "refugee" becomes ontologized and imbued with cultural psychological characteristics. Affective-culturalism (Ålund, 1999) works to both author the refugee existence as a distinct existence but also to voice technocratic concerns over potentially unmanageable demands. This diachronic block risks indexical injuries which have real consequences for those who must live with the daily enactment of this category.

## Counterposing Analysis Part II: Unlocking the Refugee Category

The second part of our analysis reveals three processes – distancing, compensation and future-orientation. This opens up the possibilities of action for those categorized as a refugee.

### Distancing

Citizens, who distance themselves from the category, consider it stable, immutable and unchallengeable. Sometimes referred to as "passing", this process is best understood as performative public distancing, to avoid stigmatization (Kadianaki, 2014) rather than a disidentification-based distancing. Citizens can imagine publically using the refugee category if public narratives integrated the idea of a "proud survivor". CT in Extract 8 delineates his *I*-proud survivor position publically distancing from the "refugee" category. This counter-positioning, which rests on common knowledge about civil wars, foregrounds again social representations of international relations.

**Extract 8**

**CT:** *I remember one time when I went to enrol at my course at the city college. After that I had to go to prove that I was a refugee and not an asylum seeker (…) that made me nervous and I went to the people*

*in charge the administrators and the principal. I said "I don't want the other students or teachers or something like that knowing" (NM: you told them that?)*

**CT:** *Yes so when I went to the classroom, other students asked me where I was from and I just answered that I'm from X-country because if I had said Y-country and well if you say a country they know is having a civil war or something like that then everyone will know that you are a refugee and then people will just see me all the time as the refugee.*

**NM:** *Is there anything that could happen that would stop you feeling like a refugee?*

**CT:** *No, no I can say that well put it this way I don't feel proud to be a refugee not to other people anyway but to myself, because that happened to me I feel that I should be proud of it. (…). I survived this so that I can feel proud of, but not proud to others. (Study 2, Norwich, CT)*

## Compensation

The first part of the analysis showed how those with refugee backgrounds must navigate a social representation of humanitarianism in their daily encounters in order to integrate. One counter-position is to move from helped to helper. This we propose is a process of compensation rather than a reciprocity, informed by an acute sense of indexical difference. BK (Extract 9) compensates his indebtedness with his potential to help. Critically the narrative reveals a foreshadowing where implicitly his potential to help is unlikely to be realized.

### Extract 9

**BK:** *I don't like this word [refugee] because it is like being a sick person. I just want to help people and then I feel less of a refugee. [NM: when you are helping people?] Yes but when I make the comparison to my life before usch (sound of despair). I feel it is difficult to explain to you this hard feeling, it is like a heart attack. I feel hurt, I feel hurt, it is like a pain it is difficult to explain or describe. Making the comparison is well from professor to hell. I was a decision maker but now when I go to the Red Cross even though I respect they gave me this opportunity. There is only so much I can do to help them – it's a big difference. (Study 2, Stockholm, BK).*

EL in Extract 10 locates himself within a presumed shared narrative of the refugee moving from camp to camp, "the classic refugee". Adding the polemical "if that exists". This is followed by a positional switch to an *I*-doctor identity which continues the polemic, opaquely framing becoming a refugee as a "good" experience. EL's performative use of the term "good" challenges the canonical refugee narrative.

### Extract 10

**EL:** *"I was the classic refugee, if that exists; I lived in the refugee camps. I had to move between six different camps, from one place to another, you know, so it was a good experience that's why I work as a doctor with questions of migration". (Study 1, Stockholm, EL)*

Extracts 9 and 10 may appear in tension with each other but both illustrate a compensatory orientation and the challenges in developing a post-refugee narrative.

## Future-Orientation

Our focus in this article is on reification of other-conferred categories such as "refugee" which unlike self-categorization, require individuals who arrive into Europe within this context to begin a process of extending the narrative. Here identities are actively managed to re-work prototypical features and potentially stigmatising alter-definitions unlocking the diachronic freezing outlined in the first part by emphasizing a future-orientation. Central to the rhetorical success of KZ's presentation of his actions in Extract 11 is both an appreciation of the terms in which

refugees are objectified and critically a multi-voiced dialogical account which authors two figures: *I*-bureaucrat and *I*-asylum seeker. Though the encounter succeeds in KZ's aims – it rests on a challenging problematic, "it is everywhere" – which throws down the gauntlet in calling for collective solutions beyond interpersonal counterpositioning.

### Extract 11

**KZ:** *One thing I want to say I went to (X-city) because that is where I had my interview so people there are used to seeing asylum seekers on arrival dressed like you know neglecting themselves. So one day I went there. I took my best suit, very good tie, looking very good and I took my brief case and when I arrived I said "I have got an interview". They said "what is your name are you here as a solicitor?" I said no "why do you ask?" I said "no it is me who has the interview" they said "oh it is you!" I understood why they had asked the question. They were "oh where is your client?" they told me they were sorry. So this is how you can be seen in their eyes. To them I couldn't be an asylum seeker because of the way I was looking, so it is everywhere, not just in the media but in the whole system as well. (Study 2, Norwich, KZ)*

Creating continuity between a previous life and a possible future is key to sustaining this future-orientation. EL arrived in Sweden in 1986, presenting himself initially as someone who *was* the *classic* refugee (Extract 10). In Extract 12 he reorients the narrative using the *I*-position of the settled and established doctor developing a post-refugee narrative and setting up a dialogue with you – the refugee who has just arrived.

### Extract 12

**NM:** *Your experience of being a migrant, does this influence the way you conduct your work?*

**EL:** *A lot (…) my experience is a large part of my instrument, the battery I use in my work is to (…) mirror my own experience and that is an important aspect for people that take themselves into this country. I can be a sense of hope for all those that find themselves in a real crisis. There is hope, if I have succeeded with this, then maybe you can also succeed too and I'm sure you can even do better than I have done. (Study 1, Stockholm, EL)*

## Discussion

Our aim in this paper was to develop a theoretically-informed analytical approach that could first delineate the processes by which the refugee category was objectified and frozen, then learn from people living with the category about some of the keys to unlock it. The counterposing dialogical analysis reveals how reification involves chronotopic dimensions and representational dimensions which have theoretical, methodological and practical implications.

In chronotopic terms (i.e. temporal-spatial features) public narratives freeze refugees as caught in the trauma of their initial act of flight. Such narratives ontologize the state of being a refugee and then stabilize the category as "stuck" and "waiting". These chronotopic dimensions of the category permit very little repositioning and identity play.

At the representational level the movement of refugees into Europe remains a vexed political issue that "calls a public into being" (Dewey, 1927/1954). The public, in the Swedish and British context, operates using a hegemonic social representation of humanitarianism which configures the refugee as a burden and passive recipient of help. This suggests the public's role is rooted in wider institutional-cultural discourses relating to bureaucratic fractioning (Zetter, 2007) and affective-culturalism (Ålund, 1999).

## Reification and Other-Conferred Categories

Existing analyses of reification has tended to concentrate on self-categorization pointing to psychologization and externalization processes as key to political claims of being Scottish (Reicher & Hopkins, 2001a, 2001b). When examining other-conferred categories, objectification, stabilization and particularly ontologization are shown to be key reification processes involved in creating indexical injuries. A political psychological examination of the strategic use of reification processes developed by Reicher and Hopkins could be integrated with the reification occurring in other-conferred bureaucratic categories, not least because reification associated with self-categorisation could support the re-framing of pejorative categorisation.

In this analysis those categorized as "refugee" counter-position by passing themselves off as non-refugee to avoid its mostly negative prototypical or stereotypical features. This involves distancing oneself from a hard fought for identity-status of which people are proud. Our findings are consistent with previous research, showing that "refugees" emphasize their social responsibility and willingness to work. Frozen into the act of arrival, they orient towards the future presenting a continuity between who they were before in terms of skills and professions and who they could potentially be (Eastmond, 1998, 2011; Leudar, Hayes, Nekvapil, & Baker 2008). They use processes of compensation to foreground their capacity to help others to challenge assumed competency deficit.

To delve into why this category resists re-appropriation requires examining the socio-political purposes being served (Augoustinos, 2001). In the context of this analysis, the refugee category finds its stability as part of an oppositional pairing with "European". This calls for fuller political psychological investigation into the relationship between humanitarianism and the role it plays in the development of a bounded and exclusive European citizenship understood by citizens as advanced and distinct from illiberal regimes.

It is striking the extent to which there was little sense amongst the UK and Swedish public that there could be continuity between being a refugee and being an economic migrant or being a refugee and being a European. Refugees often *are* fleeing illiberal regimes. Yet, the ontologization we uncover as occurring around the category serves to lock "refugees" into being emblematic of trauma and international tensions several years after they have settled in the new country.

One promising line of inquiring which arises out of the counterposing dialogical analysis is further studies into social representations of international relations as well as knowledge of international relations by the public (Beattie & Snider, 2019). Such representations are likely to relate to global social orders (Staerklé, 2013) and present day political narratives (Andrews, 2007). Investigation into everyday understandings of international relations is likely to support equal opportunities for people who arrive as refugees.

## Unpacking Categories Using Dialogue

A key contribution within this approach is in diverting the theoretical and analytical lens beyond the coping strategies and conditions of being a refugee and onto the category itself. This serves to examine wider processes and helps avoid essentialism in the presentation of the experience of marginalized people. To do this the article combines social identity approaches and dialogical-social representational approaches given their common pre-occupation with categories. Yet a limitation of this analysis, of which we are fully aware, is that it risks reifying itself the public and its oppositions between refugee and non-refugee which risks new binaries.

To make clear, we do not propose that host citizens consciously aim to position refugees using affective-culturalism and competency deficit discourse. Rather the analysis demonstrates the extent to which people categorised as refugees and people speaking about refugees, however well intended, co-author and are imbricated into shared category construction which risks moral exclusion and superiority (Opotow, 1990; Tileagă, 2007). The roots of this are likely to relate to a form of 'sacrificial citizenship' which downplays the fundamental privileges and stratifications within societies (Brown, 2016).

A counterposing dialogical analysis is not yet another way of discursively analysing a textual data corpus. It necessitates a design which actively intervenes by using stimulus materials to create a dialogue between citizens and the institutional-cultural use of categories. This approach socially represents public dialogue as other-directed. It demonstrates what social and political psychology can contribute to our understanding of public opinion formation and challenges the reliance on attitude surveys and public opinion polling (Mahendran, 2018). There are potential applications of both a dialogical methodological design and the counterposing dialogical analysis to other related bureaucratically conferred categories, e.g. "asylum-seeker" or "third-country national", as well as more broadly where public positioning is occurring in highly institutionalised contexts.

## Does Europe Need a Post-Refugee Narrative?

The extent to which this obstinate category becomes sustained in self-other relations long after refugee status has been achieved leads us to ask; is there a need for a collective-level post-refugee narrative? The onus cannot be on the limited tactics of those categorised refugee. Their actions suggest a strong desire to both re-appropriate the category and move past it into a post-refugee narrative which is intersubjectively understood and has public support.

There is no doubt that co-ordinated efforts such as the UN Global Compact (UNHCR, 2018) require the use of the term refugee. Future lines of inquiry are not therefore about less public or strategic use of the category in terms of asylum-claims making. However, beyond immediate arrival and initial settlement, studies into unlocking the category which challenge both its chronotopic and representational dimensions may well support belonging and equal opportunities. The use of compensation and future-orientation, found in the analysis, could be used to emphasis the mutual reciprocity involved in acceptance of refugees and could form the basis of collective level communication strategies.

As it stands the refugee act, rather than being understood as a striking act of agentic bravery, becomes mired in notions of humanitarianism which speak more to being European than being refugee. The refugee category is delicately balanced on a series of oppositional affective-cultural political constructions between agency and non-agency, refugee and migrant, refugee and European. We propose a post-refugee narrative is needed and it will be collective-level interrogation of the socio-political purposes of the category and the parameters of European humanitarianism that will facilitate such a post-refugee narrative emerging.

## Notes

i) In response to Swedish newspaper article - *Krav på svenskkunskaper skärps för invandrare (Demand on Swedish knowledge raised for migrants)* in Dagens Nyheter February 18, 2008.

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ii) Response to Question D32 The Hague programme make a distinction between European citizens and Third-country nationals – do you have any views on this? / Haagprogrammet gör skillnad mellan europeiska medborgare och Tredje-land medborgare, har du någon åsikt om detta?

iii) In Study 1, where participants expressed a preference to speak in Swedish interviews were carried out by Magnusson; extracts have been translated.

iv) In this focus group participants are discussing two Swedish newspaper articles: *Rädslans politik (Fear politics)* in Dagens Nyheter February 20, 2008; *Krav på svenskkunskaper skärps för invandrare (Demand on Swedish knowledge raised for migrants)* in Dagens Nyheter February 18, 2008.

v) SFI: Svenska för invandrare: Swedish for migrants. At the time of research migrants were given two years to learn the language.

vi) = denotes two speakers, speaking at the same time.

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