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The Way Refugees Are Portrayed in the Comment Sections of Norwegian Online Newspapers:

A Critical Discourse Analysis of Readers' Comments on
Articles Discussing the 'European Refugee Crisis'

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Abstract

This thesis analyses how refugees are portrayed in the comment sections of Norwegian online newspapers during the “European refugee crisis”, with a primary focus on events occurring from 2015. It applies a Critical Discourse Analytical (CDA) framework, and finds that commenters perceive refugees as threats due to both economic and cultural anxieties. By reading the data qualitatively and quantitatively, it becomes apparent that xenophobic and “racial” language has been used consistently after the Paris terrorist attacks on 13 November, while discursive aspects focusing on the threat to “our economy” were more prevalent prior to this date. Through examining to what extent the language used by commenters correlate with different forms of discourse, elite discourse in particular, the study finds that the fear of refugees is legitimised through well-established Western discourse, typically related to the portrayal of migrants and refugees as the “Other” and the influence of Orientalism and Islamophobia. In order to move away from a situation where refugees’ mobility is consistently delegitimised, the thesis suggests that a similar approach to the one introduced by Fridtjof Nansen in the 1920s should inspire the international community.

Preface and Dedication

The decision to write about how refugees are portrayed in the comment sections of online news outlets was made after having read numerous comments featuring derogatory and xenophobic language used to describe asylum seekers. In a period before choosing to write about the topic, I had stopped looking at the comment sections because I found the language used too provocative. However, I eventually decided that rather than shying away from such views, this would be a good opportunity to understand them, and the discourses that facilitate them.

I wish to thank my supervisor Professor Ragnhild Lund for her valuable advice in times when guidance was greatly needed.

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1 Introduction

The so-called “European refugee crisis” or “European migrant crisis”, hereinafter referred to as the “refugee crisis”, has intensified debates on immigration throughout Europe, and the European cooperation during the crisis has been lacklustre. Even before it was decided that refugees were to be detained in Greece following the EU-Turkey deal struck in March of 2016 (European Commission 2016), several European states had closed their borders to refugees, and anti-immigrant far-right parties have soared in polls in several European countries (Bogdan and Collett 2015). In Norway, the political landscape has been marked by a highly polarised debate between the government parties, especially the Norwegian Progress Party (Fremskrittspartiet, FrP), on the one hand, and parties with more liberalist views on immigration, on the other (Røset and Wedèn 2016). The impact of the refugee crisis on debates on immigration is however not only seen in the language used by politicians, but also in how ordinary people voice their concerns about refugees. One arena where such concerns are voiced in a relatively free form, is the internet. In November 2015, the frequency of comments of a hateful nature targeting refugees on social media prompted the Norwegian National Criminal Investigation Service (Kripos) to start an online patrol on Facebook to follow up on such comments (Midtskog et al. 2015). While hate speech is removed from the comment sections of mainstream newspapers, comments with coded racial language still typically remain and deserve significant scholarly attention (Hughey and Daniels 2013, p. 337).

The thesis examines 971 readers’ comments responding to articles about the refugee crisis, published in the three most popular online newspapers in Norway, Verdens Gang (VG), Dagbladet and Aftenposten. With help from the tools developed in the field of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), the thesis aims to identify recurring topics and discursive elements related to how online commenters portray refugees. The thesis is divided into 6 chapters. Chapter 1 focuses on providing a background for the concerns expressed by online commenters responding to articles about the refugee crisis, of which the majority focuses solely on the arrival of refugees to the “Western world.” Therefore, the first chapter provides some background information about the European asylum policy and how the refugee crisis has unfolded in Europe and Norway. The refugee crisis within Syria and its neighbouring areas is intentionally left out in Chapter 1 and will be discussed in more depth in the main analysis. Assumptions about potential findings and a description of research questions will be discussed at the end of chapter 1. Chapter 2 outlines the chosen methodology and places CDA

within the methodological spectre, explains its main characteristics and links it to the study at hand. Also, the chapter explains the choice of newspapers as well as the methods used to read the data. Chapter 3 explores previous research on xenophobic language in the virtual space and discusses three relevant concepts/theories for analysing the language used to depict refugees. These are “the migrant ‘other’”, Orientalism and Islamophobia. Chapter 4 features the main analysis. Here, recurring topics and discursive strategies used by commenters in the description of refugees is investigated, the overall focus being on how the mobility of refugees is delegitimised. Chapter 5 suggests an alternative approach to how the refugee crisis could be handled by looking to previous refugee crises in Europe and the success of the so-called “Nansen passport.” Chapter 6 summarises the main findings of the thesis.

It should be clarified that while the current refugee crisis has been identified to be dating from about 2011, the thesis primarily focuses on the happenings from 2015, when the situation intensified in Europe (Bundy 2016, p. 6). However, in order to provide some context, it is necessary to deliver some information about European migration policy.

1.1 European Migration Policy

Although not a member of the EU, Norway has been a part of both the Dublin System and the Schengen Agreement since 2001 (Ministry of Justice and Public Security 2014), two pillars of European migration policy. The so-called Dublin System which takes its name from the Dublin Convention, was signed in 1990 by 12 signatory countries and came into effect in 1997. The Dublin rules specify that the member state in which a refugee first enters the EU is responsible for hosting the refugee and handling all procedures related to his or her asylum application. The Dublin rules were introduced to guarantee the right of asylum in a signatory country, while other provisions of the Convention sought to prevent people from applying for asylum in several countries, a practice referred to as “asylum shopping” (Kasperek 2015, p. 61).

The Dublin system has its roots in the Schengen Convention of 1990, which in turn outlines the implementation of the Schengen Agreement of 1985. The purpose of the Agreement was to abolish internal border controls while reinforcing the external borders of the constructed Schengen Area, the goal being a shared responsibility for migrants and asylum seekers. Schengen consequently represents the birth of the European External Border as an institution and European policy field. In addition to strengthening cooperation on matters of external borders, the 1990 convention introduced new visa rules, reinforced police and legal

cooperation and implemented the rules for the Schengen Information System (SIS). The SIS was the first supranational European data-base, allowing an exchange of information about third-country citizens, particularly migrants and refugees (Kasperek 2015, p. 61).

While the Schengen Agreement was important to developments in Europe already, it was not incorporated into EU law before the Amsterdam Treaty of 1997, as legislative competences of migration and border policies shifted to the European level. This led to the establishment of the Common European Asylum System (CEAS), the aim being to create a harmonised European asylum system (Kasperek 2015, p. 62). When the Treaty of Amsterdam came into force in 1999, it had opened the way for EU cooperation on matters of asylum and the EU had set ambitious goals for its common policy: The fundamental right of asylum to people fleeing persecution or serious harm, a right to be applied across all participating EU states. The common policy was introduced to guarantee that refugees would be treated in a dignified and fair manner, to set clear rules regarding which member state was responsible for an applicant and to ensure fair burden-sharing. The last year has shown just how far these objectives remain out of reach (Berger and Heinemann 2016, p. 2).

1.2 The Refugee Crisis in Europe

More than 1 million people fleeing from the Middle East, Asia and Africa arrived on the Mediterranean shores of Europe in 2015. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), some 80,000 refugees arrived in Europe in the first six weeks of 2016, more than the first four months of 2015 (Clayton 2016). As of 19 April 2016, more than 179,000 people had reached the Mediterranean shores since the start of the year. The Number of deaths of people trying to cross the Mediterranean Sea also substantially increased from 69 in the first six weeks of 2015 to 409 in the first six weeks of 2016 (UNHCR 2016a). The total number of deaths or missing persons in 2016 is 761 as of 19 April. Syrians fleeing from their country's civil war are most heavily represented among the refugees, making up more than 43% of Mediterranean shore arrivals in 2016, while 80% come from the top three refugee producing countries represented in the Mediterranean shores: Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq (UNHCR 2016a). The situation has been described as the "largest global humanitarian crisis" of our time (UNHCR 2014) and German Chancellor Angela Merkel has emphasised that the crisis will define this decade (Holmes and Castaneda 2016, p. 1).

Increasing pressure caused by the many refugees arriving in Europe's border countries, especially Greece, has proved to be a formidable challenge for the Dublin system. While the Dublin rules were implemented with the intention of sending asylum seekers back to the first country they arrive in (Kasperek 2015, p. 61), other EU member states have not been able to send asylum seekers back to Greece since the European court of human rights in 2011 ruled that conditions for refugees there were so bad they were equivalent to degrading treatment (Papageorgiou 2013, p. 88). The asymmetrical pressure put on the external borders of the EU has led to calls for applicants being relocated to other European countries. However, although the EU adopted a plan calling for 160,000 applicants to be resettled, this process has largely been rejected (Rankin 2016) as increasing anti-immigrant sentiment has risen throughout Europe (Bogdan and Collett 2015), and governments have aimed to become more restrictive than its neighbour rather than focused on fair burden-sharing (UN News Centre 2015). The overwhelming of the border states of Europe has led to significant secondary movements inside the Schengen area (Long 2015), which has been responded to by the raising of razor-wire fences (BBC 2015a) and reintroduced border controls in several countries (Traynor 2016).

The European political "solution" became the deal struck between the EU and Turkey on 18 March 2016 saying that all new "irregular migrants" crossing from Turkey into Greek Islands will be returned to Turkey, and for every Syrian returned to Turkey from Greek Islands, another Syrian will be resettled from Turkey to the EU (European Commission 2016). Amnesty International (2016) reports that people detained on the islands of Lesbos and Chios have virtually no access to legal aid, limited access to services and support and hardly any information about their current status or possible fate. The humanitarian organisation has also emphasised that the automatic detention of all those currently arriving on the Greek Islands has led to a failure to take the special circumstances and needs of particularly vulnerable groups into consideration. These include torture victims, families with very young children and babies, women travelling alone with children, people with disabilities or in need of immediate health care, pregnant women and people in need of psychological care. The Greek interior minister, Panagiotis Kouroubliis, has even described the Idomeni refugee camp as being "as bad as a Nazi concentration camp" (Worley and Dearden 2016).

1.3 The Refugee Crisis in Norway

Similar to the situation elsewhere in Europe (although far from the situation in Greece), the increasing number of asylum seekers in 2015 caused a rather chaotic situation in Norway. The main point of entry to Norway during the refugee crisis has been the border crossing station by Storskog on the Russian-Norwegian border. From only a handful of refugees crossing the border in the beginning of September 2015, hundreds were crossing daily only a few weeks later. Peculiarly, all asylum seekers crossed the border by bike, as the border agreement between Norway and Russia states that the border cannot be crossed by foot. By taking the Arctic route, asylum seekers avoided the dangerous travel by boat across the Mediterranean Sea, and Norway became the first Schengen country of entry, meaning asylum seekers were not forced to register applications in countries elsewhere. From September to the end of November, around 5500 asylum seekers came to Norway through Storskog. A third of these came from Syria, slightly more than those coming from Afghanistan (Matre and Johnsen 2016).

As more asylum seekers came, the political pressure in Norway grew, with a particular focus on those crossing the border by Storskog (Matre and Johnsen 2016). An asylum settlement with the purpose of stopping the “stream of migrants and refugees”, which it has frequently been referred to by politicians and media (Halvorsen 2015), was reached between six of the eight political parties with parliamentary representation in Norway on 19 November 2015. The Liberal Party, the Labour Party, the Centre Party, the Christian Democratic Party, the Conservative Party and the Progress Party reached common ground, while the Socialist Left Party and the Green Party opted not to be a part of the agreement as they found the amendments too restrictive (Stortinget 2015). The implemented restrictions and the fact that there was no consultation process was criticised by lawyers and humanitarian organisations. The Norwegian Progress Party (Fremmskrittspartiet, FrP), which together with the Conservative Party (Høyre, H) comprises the current government of Norway, quickly proclaimed that the measures introduced in the asylum settlement would mean Norway having the most restrictive stance on asylum in Europe (Lofstad and Ottosen 2015). Some of the more controversial parts of the agreement involved the introduction of new forms of temporary protection, increasing the threshold for family reunification and implying that international conventions are unsuited for periods of mass migration (The Green Party 2015), although this last point was denied by Liberal Party leader Trine Skei Grande, who stressed that the agreement respected international conventions (Røset and Wedèn 2016).

Before the legislative amendments were instituted, the Norwegian state could only deny treating an application for asylum in the event that the asylum seeker came from a country where he or she was not being persecuted, and he or she had the possibility to apply for asylum in that country. Following the amendments, this last point was dropped. Thus, the Norwegian state could now deport asylum seekers to Russia, without considering the likelihood of them being able to apply for asylum there (Matre and Johnsen 2016). At the same time, the Department of Justice was given the power to instruct the Directorate of Immigration (UDI) and the Norwegian Immigration Appeals Board (UNE), a right the ministry used immediately to decide that applications from asylum seekers arriving in Norway after having resided in Russia should be rejected, without assessing cases individually (Ministry of Justice and Public Security 2015a). The amendments also gave bigger room for detaining and arresting asylum seekers who were likely to have their applications rejected (Matre and Johnsen 2016).

While three out of four Syrians crossing the Russian-Norwegian border by Storskog were granted asylum in Norway before the implemented restrictions, only one out of 259 applications from Syrians were approved following the 19 November agreement. The decision to deport asylum seekers to Russia was seen by the Norwegian Association for Asylum Seekers (NOAS) to reveal a major disparity between how the UDI and the Ministry of Justice and Public Security view the safety situation for asylum seekers in Russia, whereas the FrP emphasised that many Syrians had been residing in Russia for a significant period of time before crossing the border to Norway (Matre and Johnsen 2016).

The government proposed further restrictions on asylum on 29 December 2015 in the form of a 40-point plan, involving increasing the period for being granted a permanent asylum residence from three to five years, opening up for the possibility to deport those who have been granted asylum in the event that there is peace in the asylum seeker's home country, reassessing the asylum cases of unaccompanied minors when they turn 18, and requiring that asylum seekers have four years of work experience or education in Norway until family reunification can be granted (Ministry of Justice and Public Security 2015b, pp. 8-10). These proposal received substantially stronger opposition from other parties, departments and civil society, and no party outside the government agreed with all the proposed measures. For instance, the Liberal Party, which has been cooperating partner with the government parties since the 2013 parliamentary elections, disagreed with all the 40 points (Røset and Wedèn

2016) and countered with their own list, which they argued would restrict immigration while at the same time respected international conventions (Støbakk 2016).

The UNHCR has stressed that Norway needs to process all applications for asylum individually, and warned Norway that Russia is not a safe country for asylum seekers, as there have been reports of Syrians being deported from Russia to Syria. The agency has also voiced concerns regarding the arrests of asylum seekers, including children, made by the National Police Immigration Service (Politiets utlendingsenhet, PU). The Norwegian Minister of Migration and Integration, Sylvi Listhaug (FrP), has refused to follow all the guidelines set by the UNHCR, arguing that some of the guidelines go beyond what is demanded by international conventions (Krekling and Sandvik 2016).

By the end of January, 432 asylum seekers crossing the border by Storskog to Norway, with some form of residence permit in Russia, had been sent out of the country by the PU (NRK 2016a). By early March 2016, the UDI had processed 2000 Storskog cases, and only 67 persons had been granted temporary asylum in Norway, most of them Syrians whose application was processed before the restrictions were introduced. Of the 5500 asylum seekers crossing the border by Storskog, about 4800 cannot be returned to Russia, as they do not hold a residence permit, a multiple entry visa or a dual citizenship in Russia. Norway has claimed that this group of asylum seekers are Russia's responsibility as they have been allowed to travel through the country on a visitor visa, but Russia does not wish to receive this group (Amundsen and Henden 2016). The Foreign Minister of Russia, Sergey Lavrov, has stated that many asylum seekers travelling to Norway from Russia had done so on false pretences by hiding that their ultimate target destination was Norway (Jentoft and Grymer 2016). As such, this situation is a good example of how governments have been preoccupied with being stricter than its neighbour rather than wanting to focus on fair burden-sharing.

Towards the end of March, the UNE had treated 258 appeals from asylum seekers who had crossed the border by Storskog and had their applications denied, and 26 of these had so far been upheld. The UDI explained that the UNE disagreed with their assessment based on a general clarification about the situation which was not yet clear when they first processed the applications after the tightening of the rules on asylum, as it has become clear that Syrians deported to Russia risk being sent back to their home country, meaning that it violates international law. NOAS points out that the case shows the possible ramifications of

politicians interfering in a complex matter which is normally handled by the experts in the UDI and UNE (Arvola et al. 2016).

1.3.1 The FrP's Increasing Popularity

A prominent feature of the political scene in Norway during the refugee crisis has been the increasing support for the FrP. While the party received 9.5% of the votes in the local elections held on 14 September 2015, a poll in the beginning of February 2016 showed it was backed by 18% of voters (Kjernli 2016). The party characterises itself as a liberal party “founded on the Norwegian constitution, Norwegian western tradition and heritage, with basis in Christian belief and humanist values” (FrP 2013a, p. 1) and has had the immigration issue high on its agenda since the mid-1980s. A part of the FrP's policy program is to “heavily restrict the admission of people from outside the western cultural circle” (FrP 2013b, p. 39). Despite this relatively explicit rejection of multicultural values, the FrP is not extremist, nor does it promote the expulsion of immigrants unlike some European far-right parties. Rather, the party demonstrates a commitment to liberal democracy. Akkerman and Hagelund (2007) identify this as a likely factor for the party's success, and explain that the party has “nurtured a respectable image” and focused on issues such as enforced marriages and genital mutilation as part of its anti-immigration stance, condemning these rituals in terms of human rights and women's rights.

Sylvi Listhaug, an FrP politician now working as Norway's Minister of Migration and Integration, who has been the source of much disagreement due the use of provoking rhetoric and policy proposals, has like her party scored highly on popularity polls. In February 2016, 36% expressed that they have either “high” or “very high” confidence in Listhaug, an increase of 13% since her period working as Minister of Agriculture and Food (NRK 2016b). Of the statements that have sparked the greatest reaction is her proclamation that liberalist views on immigration are part of a “goodness tyranny” (Sandvik 2015) and that refugees cannot expect to be “carried on a golden chair” into Norway (Haugan 2015). Also other FrP politicians have caused controversy in relation to the refugee crisis. One was the Minister of Fisheries, Per Sandberg, then deputy leader of the party, showing up at the FrP 2015 annual conference wearing a maritime themed t-shirt with an anchor, waves and the text “Good Journey” and “Sea Adventure” written on it (Hustadnes 2015). Another event which produced reactions was Jan Arild Ellingsen, an FrP member on the Standing Committee on Justice (Justiskomiteen), arguing that the group Odin's Soldiers, a group consisting of partly ex-felons, widely believed to have a right-wing extremist agenda (Mogen 2016), deserved praise

for their willingness to patrol the streets to “provide safety”. His statements were made following the group’s establishment in several Norwegian cities as a response to the increasing number of asylum seekers in Norway (Helljesen and Randen 2016).

1.3.2 Online Abuse of Asylum Seekers

Hateful comments towards asylum seekers have been noticed on many social media platforms in Norway. As we have seen, this prompted the National Criminal Investigation Service (Kripos) to start an online patrol on Facebook to follow up on the many hateful comments in November 2015 (Midtskog et al. 2015). Threats about murder, arson and the castration of asylum seekers, notably directed at Muslims, have caused police districts in Norway to pay a home visit to (Skeie 2016) or call in for questioning (Gomnæs and Strebel 2016) those writing comments of an extremist nature.

Hate speech has often been observed in closed chat groups, but also in the comment sections of mainstream media. For instance, in *Aftenposten*, the third most popular online newspaper in Norway (Alnes 2016), an article about two Muslims who were beaten up in Oslo was responded to with several hateful comments. One comment read: “I don’t like Muslims at all. They are all just criminal rapists” (Torset et al. 2015). Another commenter thought it was good that Muslims were attacked and wrote: “I hope something more happens” (Torset et al. 2015). According to moderation policies, such comments are removed by *Aftenposten*, *VG* and *Dagbladet*, the newspapers chosen for this study. However, examining what flies under the radar is also crucial, as this is the text that remains and by definition is “accepted” language.

1.4 Main Assumptions and Research Questions

The main assumption of the study is that xenophobic and racial language is frequently expressed by commenters responding to articles about the refugee crisis. It expects the language used to be coded if there is xenophobic attitudes expressed and therefore applies a CDA framework, a framework which enables the critical analysis of some of these “hidden” and often out of sights values, positions and perspectives (Paltridge 2006, p. 178). The expectation of finding significant amounts of coded text is based on the fact that in general, overtly racist comments are removed by the moderators of online newspapers’ comment sections, while coded racial language typically remain (Hughey and Daniels 2013, p. 337). Furthermore, refugees are likely perceived as economic threats to “ethnic Norwegians”. Accordingly, discursive elements related to perceived economic threats posed by refugees

will also likely be found. The analysis of the comments is conducted with some central questions in mind: How is the mobility of refugees delegitimised? In which way are perceived threats posed by refugees related to economic concerns? How are Muslims portrayed? To what extent do commenters' views correlate with well-known stereotypes from Islamophobic discourses? To what extent do commenters' views resemble elite discourse, mass media discourse and public discourse in general?

2 Methodology and Methods

The thesis now goes on to outline Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as a methodology. Before explaining its main characteristics, it will situate CDA within the methodological spectre by briefly explaining social constructivism. Then it will link CDA to research on ethnicity, before explaining the choice of newspapers and articles as well as the methods used to read the data. It will be argued that by applying a CDA framework, the thesis has a solid methodological base for explaining the role of discourse in the way refugees are represented.

2.1 Social Constructivism

The thesis is based on a social constructivist approach, meaning it takes the position that reality is produced, constituted or constructed through language (Hughes and Sharrock 1997, p. 145). Social constructivism holds that human agents do not exist independently from their social environment (Risse 2004, p. 145), a contrast to the methodological individualism of rational choice which focuses on individual human actions as the key unit of social life (Elster quoted in Risse 2004, p. 145). Without discourse, there is no social reality, and without understanding discourse, we cannot achieve a comprehensive knowledge of our experiences, ourselves or reality (Phillips and Hardy 2002, p. 2). However, humans also significantly influence the creation and reproduction of discourses. Thus, at the heart of constructivist thinking lies the notion that structure and agency both matter. Accordingly, social constructivism occupies a middle ground between individualism and structuralism (Adler 1997, pp. 324-325).

2.2 Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is an interdisciplinary approach to the study of discourse (Glynos et al. 2009, p. 5) which views language as a form of social practice (Janks 1997, p. 329). The concept “discourse” has varied greatly in meaning over the last century or so, ranging from natural language, speech and writing, to most things that acts as a carrier of meaning, including social and political practices (Glynos et al. 2009, p. 5). In fact, discourse has been described as the whole process of social interaction (Fairclough 1989, p. 24). Laclau (1990) notes that the fact that discourse has become a vital part of research is linked to rapid and ongoing social, economic and political changes since the industrial revolution, whose intensity and scale means that fewer aspects of our lives can be taken for granted. CDA is not

interested in language per se, but rather analyses the linguistic character of social and cultural processes and structures (Titscher et al. 2000, p. 146). Fairclough (2000) explains that CDA tries to unite and determine the relationship between three levels of analysis: (1) the actual text; (2) the discursive practices (that is the process involved in creating, writing, speaking, reading and hearing; and (3) the larger social context that bears upon the text and the discursive practices.

CDA uncovers that discourses are not only expression of social practice, but are also ideological (Moufahim et al. 2007, p. 542), as they can help produce and reproduce unequal power relations between for instance social classes, women and men and ethnic/cultural majorities and minorities through the way they represent things and position people (Wodak 1997, p. 258). Subsequently, CDA primarily studies the way social power abuse, dominance and inequality are enacted, reproduced and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context. With such dissident research, critical discourse analysis takes explicit position, and thus seeks to understand, expose and even resist social inequality (van Dijk 2001, p. 352). Accordingly, CDA is conducted with the acknowledgment that, as a social scientist, one cannot escape being part of the very object one studies, as research holds political implications (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002, p. 64). Fairclough (2013) identifies “denaturalisation” to be the main objective of CDA. When social phenomena are constructed, they are portrayed as non-ideological and common sense. Thus, to be critical of naturalisations is fundamental to CDA and is what separates it from “descriptive” work on discourse (p. 30).

2.2.1 Critical Discourse Analysis and Ethnicity

Traditionally, work on ethnic and “racial” inequality in CDA has focused on ethnocentric and racist representations in the mass media, literature and film. Such representations maintain centuries-old prevalent images of the “Other” in the discourses of European travellers, explorers, merchants, soldiers, philosophers and historians. These discourses have varied between the emphasis on exotic difference, on the one hand, and supremacist derogation emphasising the Other’s intellectual, moral and biological inferiority, on the other hand, and have also influenced public opinion and resulted in widely shared social representations (van Dijk 2001, p. 361).

Later discourse studies have gone beyond the more traditional, content analytical analysis of fantasies of the Others, and examined more thoroughly the linguistic, semiotic and other discursive properties of text and talk to and about minorities, immigrants and other peoples.

Besides the mass media, advertising, film and textbooks have traditionally been the genres most commonly studied. Newer work also focuses on political discourse, scholarly discourse, everyday conversations, service encounters, talk shows (van Dijk 2001, p. 361), online comment sections (Hughes and Daniels 2013, p. 337) and a variety of other genres (van Dijk 2001, p. 361).

The fundamental point of CDA research on race is that racism (including antisemitism, xenophobia and related forms of resentment against racially or ethnically defined Others) is a complex system of social and political inequality that is also reproduced by discourse in general, and by elite discourses in particular (van Dijk 2001, p. 362). For instance, at the end of the 1970s, Margaret Thatcher came to power in Great Britain after expressing her fear that the country would be “rather swamped” by immigrants with a different culture. In the United States, George Bush Sr. played the “fear of black crime” card during his election campaign before becoming president in 1989 (van Dijk 1993, p. 2). More recently, in his bid to become the next president of the USA, Donald Trump has expressed a wish to build a wall on the country’s southern border to keep out Mexicans, the majority of whom crossing the border he characterises as criminals and rapists (Neate 2015), stated that he thinks “Islam hates us” (Schleifer 2016) and has hesitated to disavow former Ku Klux Klan grand wizard David Duke, while at the same time leading the Republican nomination race (Bradner 2016).

Ultimately, by applying the tools developed in CDA, the thesis has a solid methodological base for identifying complex systems of social and political inequality when analysing language used to portray refugees. As explained by Van Dijk (1993), this cannot be done by reading the text on its own, but must be linked to discourse in general and elite discourse, in particular.

2.3 Sampling and Methods

As we have seen, the thesis investigates the comment sections of the three most popular online newspapers in Norway, Verdens Gang (VG) (1.920.000 daily readers in 2015), Dagbladet (1.237.000 daily readers in 2015) and Aftenposten (827.000 daily readers in 2015) (Alnes 2016). The newspapers were chosen because the aim of the study is to analyse the comment sections of mainstream Norwegian news outlets rather than extremist blogs in which the discourse is more predictable. As such, it is possible to evaluate whether prejudice towards the (Muslim) refugee is common in an arena which is not organised as anti-Islamic (Døving 2015, p. 65). The newspapers were also selected because they feature comment

sections which are frequently used by their readers and thus constitute a significant body of collectable data. The articles chosen were published in the period between September 2015 and March 2016 and feature between 83 and 260 readers' comments each. The timeline was preferred as the intention of the study is to understand more recent developments of the refugee crisis. At the same time, it was deemed appropriate to consider some articles published before the terrorist attacks in Paris on 13 November, in order to evaluate if the terrorist attacks prompted any significant discursive changes in relation to how commenters depicted refugees. The content of the articles varied from general facts about the refugee crisis to more specific topics like terrorism's connection to the refugee crisis and Islam's potential future impact on Norway. A total of 971 readers' comments were examined, of which two articles published before 13 November featured 344 comments, and six articles published after this date featured 627 comments.

The readers' comments examined in four of the articles were linked to the blog comment hosting service "Disqus", while the other four sets of comments were linked to Facebook. Without describing these systems in detail, the significance of this difference is that Facebook users (typically) use their full name and have a profile picture, whereas Disqus users tend to use pseudonyms or be anonymous (Disqus 2016). The newspapers chosen have individual moderation policies and take different stances on anonymity. Aftenposten, despite the fact that it uses Disqus, requires that commenters use their full names. VG ensures that commenters use their full names by only allowing Facebook users to comment. Dagbladet does not prohibit anonymity, but points out that "in most circumstances, one who uses his or her full name will be considered more interesting than one who conceals his or her identity" (Dagbladet 2011). When it comes to moderation policies, all the newspapers in focus remove hateful comments. Dagbladet (2011) specifies ten rules for the users of its comment section, including that it does not accept racism, sexism, personal attacks or the encouragement of violence. VG has a more general outline which states that comments with vulgar language, as defined by their moderators, is removed. Comments that are reported as abusive or spam are evaluated by Facebook's moderators (VG 2016b). Aftenposten removes posts "featuring curse words, the harassment of others and severe attacks on individual groups" (Tornes 2016).

Methodologically, the data were read in two different ways. First, I identified the main argument in the individual comments (one comment typically contained several themes such as "woman," "terrorism" and "violence") and evaluated whether the commenter expressed pro-refugee sentiment, anti-refugee, or "neutral" sentiment. Second, I used the "CTRL+F"

feature, which is a keyboard shortcut that lets you search for a specific word in a text, to see how many times relevant terms were used across the different comments. Relevant terms checked were “Islam,” “Muslim,” “terrorism,” “Islamism,” “sharia,” “rape,” “violence,” “murder,” “bombing,” (their/our) “culture,” (their/our) “values,” (their/our) “attitudes,” “Western,” “woman,” “migrant,” “fortune hunter,” “economy” and “welfare”. All comments were gathered in a document in chronological order, based on the published date of the article they responded to, enabling me to read the data as one unbroken text rather than a set of individual statements (Døving 2015, p. 65). With help from the tools developed in the field of CDA I identified recurring topics and examined the discursive strategies used to present them. I then compared my data to other arenas which tend to be crucial in constructing discourses about refugees and Muslim by evaluating elite discourse and discourse in general. I also considered policy decisions, as also policy can be seen as discourse (Bacchi 2000, p. 45). Discursive elements identified in previous studies on Islamophobia and counter-jihadists were also reviewed closely. Here, Ekman’s (2015) study of counter-jihadist blogs was particularly important and will therefore be described in chapter 3.

3 Literature Review and Relevant Concepts and Theories

This chapter introduces some of the main attentions and challenges linked to conducting research on xenophobic and racist language in the virtual space. It also introduces some analytical concepts that are crucial for understanding the way refugees are portrayed in Western discourse.

3.1 Literature Review

While there is an extensive body of research analysing xenophobic and racist discourse in the media (Van Dijk 2000), typically applying a critical discourse analytical framework (Anderson 2006; Teo 2000; Don and Lee 2014), Hughey and Daniels (2013) find it surprising that more research has not better sought to study readers' comments and the dimension it gives online newspapers, especially in relation to xenophobia. Similarly, Malmqvist (2015) asserts that the comments sphere of online news outlets and social media in general has substantially altered the discursive shape of racism and xenophobia. Awan (2014) even claims that the rise of online anti-Muslim abuse deserves the same attention as street level Islamophobia. Coffey and Woolworth (2004) argue that "the anonymity the internet affords gives prejudiced people license to publicly express racial attitudes", while "communication in the physical presence of others does tend to bring about restraint" (p. 10). This phenomena has been referred to as "online disinhibition" (Lapidot-Lefler and Barak 2012; Suler 2004).

Conversely, Daniels (2009) holds that online racist discursive practices are not always unrestrained. Rather, online commenters tend to communicate racist positions in a subtle manner that uninformed readers might mistake for civil rights discourse. Building on this, Hughey and Daniels (2013) emphasise the need for scholars to become familiar with the slang and language of virtual racial abuse and messaging, and argue that scholarly approaches must outline the grammatical, semantic and pragmatic strategies for constructing racial in- and out-groups based on subtle insinuations of "authentic" belonging, superiority, and/or normality (p. 338). They identify several forms of subtle xenophobic language used by commenters on news sites and online forums: First, coded language is used to convey subtle, yet persuasive, racial meanings in ways that appear well reasoned and focused on the common good. Second, when coded language is not used, "common sense racism" is frequently applied to cover racialised speech in "common sense" appeals to supposedly race-neutral principles and/or by

appealing to historically dominant and racial stereotypes that are collectively shared and often taken for granted. This defence can take three different shapes: (1) abstract arguments that invoke the commenter's right to engage in free speech, (2) accusations of victimhood that appeal to "political correctness" and (3) seemingly matter-of-fact statements that are based on implicit racial stereotypes and myths. They explain that such comments are likely untouched by moderators due to the fact that the newspaper wants to appear "democratic" and "fair and balanced" in an era in which many neoconservative voices attack media for a supposed "left-wing bias" (pp. 340-341).

While the body of research on online xenophobia and racism remains relatively small compared to its societal prevalence (Hughey and Daniels 2013), some enlightening studies have been done which systematically examine the way comments on the online forums or news sites intersect with xenophobia. Hughey (2012) examined how racism and xenophobia, in the particular form of anti-Obama Birtherism, was constrained and enabled by the format of online news commenting in the New York Times and the Wall Street Journal. He discovered that commenters constructed several "narratives of belonging" – shared stories that people socially construct to account for who they are, how the world works, and where different people belong. Similarly, in their study of over 1000 posts related to University of North Dakota's Fighting Sioux nickname and logo used for their athletic team, Steinfeldt et al. (2010) found a substantial mass of online forum comments representing contempt toward American Indians by providing misinformation, propagating stereotypes, and conveying racist attitudes toward Native Americans.

Similarly, Ekman (2015) in his study of online Islamophobia and the counter-jihad network – whose prejudice against Muslims is typically manifested culturally rather than in biological inferiority (Feldman 2013, p. 274), identifies eight discursive strategies applied by actors within the network. First, Muslims are considered to pose a demographic threat to Europe. Second, Muslims are seen to be secretly infiltrating and changing western politics. Third, Muslims are imposing sharia law on Western societies. Fourth, Islam is equated with Islamism (the latter being the common term used for denoting political Islam). Fifth, Muslims are thought to be violent in nature. Sixth, Islamophobic individuals and groups attack the culture of "political correctness". Seventh, left-wing and liberal politicians are seen to accompany the ruling shadow government of Muslims in Europe and constitute an internal political betrayal. Eighth, multiculturalism is considered a malevolent hegemonic force and as the outcome of the "Western surrender to Islam" (Ekman 2015, pp. 1992-1997).

3.2 “The Migrant ‘Other’”

Towards the end of the 1980s and for most of the 1990s, discussion on globalisation emphasised deterritorialisation, the flow of goods, ideas and information (Kirtsoglou and Tsimouris 2015, p. 2) and the growth of interconnectedness (Samiei 2010, p. 1148). However, approximately 2 decades later, profound patterns of power asymmetry are evident within and between nations and regions. Focus on borders and how to control them have intensified in recent years, leading to both novel and increased restrictions on mobility. A notable feature of Western discourse is the difference between the portrayal of the globalised subject – a tourist, a business man, an anthropologist – who feels equally at home in several regions, and her counterpart - the refugee, the migrant or the “illegal alien”. Whereas the globalised subject represents modernity and is considered to possess the praised skill to think and exist beyond national boundaries, the refugee is paradoxically denied the same opportunity. She is considered clandestine, deportable, an excess and a violation of national and international law and order. Public discourse has constructed and continuously reproduces the differences between the global subject and the refugee through a misleading focus on their respective legal statuses. In the case of the global subject, her movement is considered to generate capital, be it directly through consumption or through internationalising production, facilitating local and global entrepreneurship or spreading ideas, images, science and technology (Kirtsoglou and Tsimouris 2015, pp. 2-3). On the other hand, the refugee comes from (what has been constructed as) the undeveloped parts of the world “reduced to a worker without work, that is, deprived of the only activity left to her” (Fassin 2005, p. 372). That is not to say that migrants cannot and do not create economic capital. However, who is granted and who is denied mobility is continuously governed by a constructed “Othering” discourse misrepresenting migrants and refugees (Kirtsoglou and Tsimouris 2015, p. 3).

3.3 Orientalism

The migrant ‘Other’ is closely linked to the theory of Orientalism. Orientalism is a complex concept comprised of different connotations. First, it discusses the 4000 year old historical and cultural relationship between Europe and Asia. Second, it refers to the scientific discipline in the West with roots in the early 1800s where one specialised in the study of various Oriental cultures and traditions. Third, and most relevant to this thesis, it entails the ideological beliefs, images and fantasies about a region called the Orient, an important and politically dynamic region of the world. Orientalism traces the different phases of relationship

between the West and Islam, from the Napoleonic invasion of Egypt, through the colonial period and the rise of modern orientalist scholarship in Britain and France during the 1800s. It continues to the end of European imperialism in the Orient after World War II and on to the rise of US dominance (Samiei 2010, p. 1145). At the core of the theory is the line separating Occident (the Western world) from Orient (the Eastern world) (Said 1985, p. 90). When Edward Said first wrote about Orientalism in his book “Orientalism” (1978) he challenged this separation by arguing that rather than being a fact of nature, the separation between the West and the East is a socially constructed phenomenon (Said 1985, p. 90) which is reproduced through Western discourse (Karim 1997, p. 154). This kind of discourse has typically identified the Western world as superior to the Eastern world and can be recognised by static and binary oppositions in the form of speech acts which function as a way of inclusion and exclusion: While “we” are rational and disciplined, “they” are impulsive and emotional. Whereas “our” methods are modern and flexible, “their” thinking is based on ancient, undeveloped times. Where “we” are honest and compassionate, “they” are unreliable and uncivilised (Gusterson 1999, p. 114).

This does not mean that the Orient is merely an idea or creation. Rather, Said (1985) stresses the importance of acknowledging that ideas, cultures and histories cannot be understood properly without investigating power relations in the international system. He explains that the construction of the East is possible because the relationship between Occident and Orient is inherently asymmetric, a relationship of power, of domination and of different levels of a complex hegemony. Said further stresses that Orientalism should not be considered a façade of lies and myths, where if the truth were told about them, they would simply vanish. Rather, his point is that Orientalism is more than merely a European fantasy about the East. He describes it as a system of knowledge about the Orient, an established theory and practice in which there has been a substantial material investment. This has facilitated the construction of the Orient and serves a crucial purpose in the form that it extends the exclusionary process in which European identity is grounded on, that is, the notion that European identity is superior to all non-European peoples and cultures (Said 1994, p. 175). It is from this that the idea of Europe, a collective notion identifying “us” European against all those non-European, arises. Consequently, the “Oriental world” emerged out of the unchallenged centrality of the sovereign Western consciousness (Clarke 1993, pp. 132-133). Despite the fact that most nations officially were free from Western colonisation by the 1970s, peoples from the “Third World” continue to be described as “uncivilised” and “inferior” to “superior” Europeans

(Varisco 2007, p. 5). To analyse this dualistic language which serves to justify and naturalise structured patterns of domination and exploitation is necessary and Said's research serves just this purpose. The impact of Said's theory is evident in how it inspires peoples from minorities to form their critical work in relation to their own political positioning rather than feel forced to follow the values of the dominant discourse of critics (Varisco 2007, p. 14). One commentator even goes as far as to credit Said's critical analysis of colonial rhetoric as vital for multiculturalism in the United States (Figueira 1994, p. 56).

3.4 Islamophobia

Unlike historical Orientalism, contemporary Islamophobia predominantly situates the "Other" within a Western geographical context. Rather than fixating on the geographic orient, modern Islamophobia emphasises that Muslims pose an inner threat to the "West" (Ekman 2015, p. 1989). Following 9/11, a growing body of research has focused on Islamophobia, which has been widely defined as a fear of Islam and is therefore largely understood to be about religious discrimination. Still, scholars have stressed that the concept should not be confined to describe merely the fear of Islam itself. Describing the concept purely as a fear of religion disregards how discrimination against Muslims has become increasingly common (Selod 2016, p. 120). Therefore, Islamophobia also entails racialised practices by which Muslims are viewed as a bounded group in order to manage the relationship between the idea of the West and its Others or its outsiders (Tyrer 2013, p. 171). An example of this is how non-Muslims are misrecognised as Muslims. For instance, the misrecognition of a Sikh as a Muslim is a result of the image that Muslims are ever present and ready to Islamicise the West (Tyrer 2013, p. 42). Accordingly, Islamophobia can be seen as a newer form of racism whereby Muslims, an ethno-religious group, not a race, are nevertheless, constructed as a race. This kind of racism was noted by several sociologists and cultural analysts during the 1990s, observing a shift from racist ideas based on skin colour to racist ideas based on notions of cultural superiority and otherness (Sajid 2005, p. 35). Thus, Islamophobia can be described concisely as a rejection of Islam, Muslim groups and Muslim individuals on the basis of prejudice and stereotypes (Stolz 2005, p. 548).

Muslims have been profoundly "Othered" over the last few decades. The construction of Muslims and Islam as a threat, ensued the collapse of the Soviet Union. The Western world was long accustomed to a worldview and foreign policy based on superpower rivalry in the form of the U.S.-Soviet conflict during the Cold War, often depicted as a struggle between

good and evil, capitalism and communism. When democracy spread in Eastern Europe, and the Soviet Union collapsed, a threat vacuum appeared. Since the fall of the Soviet empire and the demise of Communism, Islam has filled this role and has been constructed as another “global ideological menace” (Esposito 1999, p. 2). However, even before this, Islam was often deemed a particularly violent religion, an image formed among Europeans and North Americans based on events such as the Iranian revolution and the occupation of the American embassy in Tehran, the Salman Rushdie fatwa and Palestinian suicide bombing in Israel (Helbling 2013, p. 3). Today, Islamophobia heavily marks the Western world (Selod 2016, p. 120).

Ever since the War on Terror was launched by the Bush administration in the aftermath of 9/11, debates on Muslim integration have frequently been linked to questions of public security. The level of discrimination against Muslims has increased in the West following 9/11. One researcher focusing on Muslims in the UK following the 2001 attacks found that implicit discrimination rose by 82.6% and experiences of explicit discrimination by 76.3% (Sheridan 2006, p. 317). When asked what they associate with the words “Islam” and “Muslims” most Americans answer with names like Osama bin Laden, 9/11 and other terrorist attacks, Palestinian suicide bombers and ideas related to oppression, including jihad, veiling, Sharia law, and the like (Gottschalk and Greenberg 2008, p. 3). Likewise, Døving’s (2015) study of Norwegian people’s associations about Muslims show that “terrorism”, “bombing”, “extremism”, “women” “their culture”, “their values”, or “their attitudes” were the most common terms, with terrorism being number one.

Political mobilisation of far-right populist parties is a highly contributing factor to the increasing focus on Muslim issues over the past decades, and worries over Muslim integration have been vital for the success of far-right parties in Western Europe (Spielhaus and Shooman 2010, pp. 203-204). Spielhaus and Shooman (2010) explains that the idea of Islam as a threat has allowed various national populist and far-right parties to establish connections with each other and to cooperate at the European level, thereby arguing that Islam serves as a unifying issue and a common enemy. Related to various genuine or imagined dangers, far-right parties propose scapegoats that are blamed for threatening or actually damaging “our” societies, in Europe and elsewhere (Wodak 2015, p. 1). As we have seen, Muslims have filled the role as scapegoat over the last few decades, heavily marking public discourse (Sajid 2005, p. 32).

3.5 Analytical Approach

The three concepts/theories discussed above, “the migrant Other”, Orientalism and Islamophobia, all serve their specific purpose in identifying discursive elements in analysing readers’ comments discussing refugees.

While the concept of “the migrant ‘Other’” implies that there are power asymmetries in the international system related to one’s national or “racial” identity, it is here mainly used to understand how commenters delegitimise people’s mobility through ways that are not necessarily related to cultural or “racial” concerns. Key words here are “migrant,” “fortune hunter,” “economy” and “welfare.”

Orientalism is used to identify discursive elements related to “narratives of belonging”, in which people from different “races” are considered to be bound to different geographical spaces or to constitute common identities separating them from other groups (Ahmad 2002, p. 107). Key terms here are “Western world,” “Third World,” “culture”, “attitudes” and “values.”

Islamophobia is crucial to identify the xenophobic and “racial” language expressed among commenters considering the fact that Muslims constitute the “group” which has been framed as a scapegoat like no other in Western discourse over the last decades (Wodak 2015, p. 1). Key terms here are “terrorism,” “bombing,” “violence,” “crime,” “rape,” “sharia,” and “woman.”

4 Analysis

This main chapter of the thesis addresses recurring topics found in the comments examined and analyses the discursive aspects involved in representing them, with an overall focus on how refugees' mobility is delegitimised through discourse. First, in order to provide a general overview of the sentiment expressed by commenters towards refugees, the study placed the examined comments into three simplified categories: "pro-refugee", "anti-refugee" and "neutral." Comments that were found to be vague or off-topic could not be classified. Comments categorised as pro-refugee either showed explicit support for refugees and/or migrants by stressing that they deserve to be safe, implicit support by backing immigration-friendly parties or politicians and/or by endorsing a multicultural Norway or Europe. Comments classified as anti-refugee voiced economic and/or cultural threats posed by refugees, expressed concerns over Islam and its perceived link to terrorism and violence, and/or criticised parties taking a liberal stance on immigration. Comments classified as neutral showed elements of both pro-refugee and anti-refugee sentiment and typically explicitly endorsed quota policies to help those most unfortunate, but conveyed a general wish to tighten the rules on asylum. A total of 217 comments were either vague or off-topic. This left 754 comments within the three categories. As I could not find a consistent way to avoid examining several comments written by the same person, the decision was made to consider all comments rather than to fixate on unique commenters. This did not damage the overall aim of identifying recurring topics and critically analysing discursive aspects, but should be considered when reading the quantitative data provided in the following paragraph.

Of the 754 comments that could be classified, 177 (23.4%) comments expressed pro-refugee sentiment, 550 (72.9%) expressed anti-refugee sentiment and 27 (3.6%) comments were classified as neutral. The largest gap between the number of anti-refugee comments and pro-refugee comments was found among the commenters in VG, with 5.6 posts anti-refugee posts for every pro-refugee comment. Aftenposten and Dagbladet commenters expressed noticeably less negativity towards refugees and migrants with ratios of 2.9 and 2.4, respectively. The largest gap between the number of comments expressing pro- and anti-refugee sentiment was also found in response to a VG article. The article's title was "Innstrammingsillusjonen" ("The Restriction Illusion") and was published on 19 November, written by Social Left Party leader, Audun Lysbakken, calling on Norway's politicians to prioritise integration over

restriction. For every pro-refugee comment, 10.8 comments responding to the article expressed anti-refugee sentiment. Some examples of comments expressing an anti-refugee read: “You need to understand that Norwegians do not wish to receive Muslims nor do we need them” (VG 2015a) and “Lysbakken seems to have a grave problem. He thinks with what he sits on. At least lift your butt so that the ‘brain’ can get some air” (VG 2015a).

Undoubtedly, the findings show a clear pattern; those choosing to express their views online are more likely to express anti-refugee sentiment than Norway’s general population. While this study found that 72.9% of comments displayed anti-refugee sentiment towards asylum seekers, a study done in February 2016 showed that a comparatively low share of 38% of Norway’s population wish to receive fewer refugees (Ipsos 2016, p. 17). 72.9% is a particularly high number considering the fact that hateful comments are removed by moderators.

Notably, overall discursive changes were identified following the terrorist attacks in Paris on 13 November. From typically focusing on the economic threat posed by refugees, often accompanied by using terms such as “fortune hunter” and “(economic) migrant”, commenters put an increasing focus on the threat posed by Muslims and Islam following the terrorist attacks. The words Islam and Muslim went from only being used 20 times across the 344 comments written prior to 13 November to being used 334 times across 627 comments after this date. This can partly be explained by that one VG article from March looked at Islam’s future position in Norway in relation to the increasing number asylum seekers coming to Norway, and commenters responding accordingly. However, there was also a significant increase in the use of the words “terrorism,” “violence,” “sharia,” “murder,” “rape,” “crime,” “Islamism” and “woman,” suggesting that xenophobic attitudes were more commonly expressed after 13 November. The only relevant terms that were used more frequently among commenters prior to November 13 were “migrant” and “fortune hunter”. A word search showed that “terrorism” was the individual term most frequently used, with a total of 76 hits, of which only 8 were found in comments written prior to the Paris attacks. Combined with the terms “bombing” and “extremism,” the search obtained 105 hits. Combining the words “rape,” “murder,” “violence” and “crime” gave a total of 95 hits, of which only 4 were found in comments written prior to 13 November. The word “woman” had the second-most hits among relevant terms and was used 61 times across all comments, of which only 9 times were before 13 November.

The change in discursive focus can be further illustrated by some examples. A comment responding to a VG article from September read: "... Not one critical question has been asked about where these generally healthy looking and well-dressed people come from ..." (VG 2015b). Another commenter responding to the same article wrote: "It doesn't feel right that elders in Norway will lose their apartments in order to make room for these people ..." (VG 2015b). Examples of comments written after the terrorist attacks to a larger degree showed a perceived threat posed by Islam and/or Muslims, often accompanied by a perceived betrayal of the media and politicians: "Muslims and Islamists are streaming over the border and naive journalists and politicians are receiving them with open arms and propaganda. The rest of us are awaiting the destruction of society" (VG 2016a). A comment responding to an Aftenposten article from 20 November read:

... We don't wish to receive more Muslims than we can handle, and now there are more than enough of them here. It is just that simple. Why else would we wish to close the borders? Had it been Frenchmen or Englishmen no one would have cared due to cultural similarities. Unfortunately, that is just how it is (Aftenposten 2015).

Before analysing discursive elements specifically aimed at Muslims, discourses focusing on the economic threats posed by refugees will be examined.

4.1 The Refugee as an Economic Threat

Economic concerns related to refugees were presented in different ways and to different degrees. Whereas most commenters focused directly on the refugee as a threat to the Norwegian economy, others saw "misplaced kindness" as the most looming danger, and argued that the need to help in the neighbouring areas of Syria makes helping in Europe a waste of resources. Some also argued that Norway should not use any resources on helping refugees. The following subsections explain these views in more depth.

4.1.1 Portraying Refugees as Fortune Hunters

An important discursive element used by commenters was delegitimising asylum seekers' potential need for protection by reducing them to migrants or "fortune hunters". As such, a deliberate choice not to refer to asylum seekers as refugees, served to lessen them to opportunists. Similar terms used for the same purpose were "economic migrant" and "welfare migrant". Such word choices are similar to previously identified terms used by mass media to separate a refugee from a migrant, like the characterisation of "bogus" asylum seekers, a term first identified by Lynn and Lea (2003) used to distinguish a "deserving" asylum seeker from

one that is “undeserving”. A common way of explaining that most asylum seekers were migrants rather than refugees was emphasising that many had travelled from their country of arrival in Europe. One such comment read:

These people aren't refugees, they are migrants. They have reached a safe country in Europe, but still aren't satisfied. They want to travel to Germany, Great Britain, Sweden or Norway, because that is where they will receive the most money ... They lose their status as refugees once they leave the first European country they arrive in. It is strange that there is not more emphasis on that the vast majority of those coming are men ... And these cowardly and egotistic traitors are we supposed to help? (VG 2015b).

Problematically, this view ignores conditions that asylum seekers have experienced in the country of arrival, of whom the majority arrived in Greece (UNHCR 2016a). As a number of legal rulings and NGO reports have stressed, many of the Greek detention facilities have failed to meet basic standards of care. The prevailing factors that define this form of confinement are arbitrariness, sheer overcrowding and poor conditions. For those who have often travelled great distances and already suffered severe deprivation, these conditions, those within them report, are a “living hell” (Bosworth and Fili 2016, p. 83). In fact, already in 2011, the year the crisis began (Bundy 2016, p.6), the European court of human rights ruled that conditions for refugees in Greek detention centres were so bad they were tantamount to “degrading treatment”, that the absence of any form of reception conditions was tantamount to “humiliating treatment”, and that there were “shortcomings in access to the asylum procedure and in the examination of applications for asylum” (Papageorgiou 2013, p. 88).

Along with Greece which has been a case in extremis, other countries, including Bulgaria, Hungary and Italy have been found to have ill-functioning asylum systems, already before 2015. For instance, the UNCHR recommended that all member states of the EU refrain from sending asylum seekers back to Hungary and Bulgaria in 2012 and 2014, respectively (Trauner 2016, p. 314). The recommendation was based on fears over asylum seekers having a chance for a fair asylum procedure and the bad conditions of the reception facilities. While the suspension of Dublin transfers was lifted by the UNHCR after the respective countries addressed some of these concerns, civil society organisations still have reservations about the extent of these reforms and continue to advocate a ban on transfers of asylum to Bulgaria and Hungary (Amnesty International 2014). Besides, anti-immigrant sentiment has been

expressed by many East-European states (Rovny 2016, p. 1), and as we have seen, several states have closed their borders or reintroduced border control (Traynor 2016). Naturally, many refugees have preferred applying for asylum in countries known for their liberal asylum policies like Germany and Sweden, the states which have agreed to take by far the largest proportion of refugees in the EU (Mike et al. 2015, pp. 5-6). Therefore, to suggest that refugees' secondary movement within the EU automatically means one is not a refugee, seems to serve to maintain power relations rather than to address facts about asylum seekers. Still, several commenters were rather adamant in portraying asylum seekers as fortune hunters. One comment read:

The majority of these are fortune hunters and already rich. 80% of those coming are men who leave their wives and children at home. It costs more than NOK30,000 for a refugee to reach Norway ... Is it not safety they want, but prosperity and money? What does this tell you? Of course they won't be content with the reception conditions. Nothing less than hotel, cleaning service and fast internet is sufficient ... (Dagbladet 2015a).

Such views disregard the fact that 92% as of those arriving by the Mediterranean route since January 2016 come from the world's top 10 refugee producing countries, including Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq (UNHCR 2016a). While the number was 84% in 2015 when the economic migrant discourse was most frequently represented, it is still a clear indicator that most of the people arriving in Europe are fleeing war and persecution, and that this was the case also in 2015 (UNHCR 2015a). Without arguing that it is invalid to assume that some of the people arriving in Europe could have done so with a primary focus on economic opportunity, it is problematic and simply wrong when it extends to a description of a large proportion of asylum seekers.

Also, it should be considered that to get to Europe, regardless of whether you are refugee or an "economic migrant", you typically take great risks. In 2015, 3711 people were either dead or missing after trying to cross the Mediterranean Sea. As of 7 April, the number of deaths/missing persons in 2016 is 711 (UNHCR 2016a). As poet Warsan Shire put it in her poem "Home", "no one puts their children in a boat unless the water is safer than the land" (CBC 2015). Comments like "round them up and send them home" (Dagbladet 2015a) and "remove the possibility to appeal if an application is rejected, start emptying the country" (Dagbladet 2015a) which were found in response to these articles, appear highly insensitive to

the hardships experienced by those crossing the sea to Europe, and “safety hunter” would be likely be a more accurate term than “fortune hunter”.

The framing of the “fortune hunter” and his prevalence among the number of asylum seekers to Europe (the migrant was typically described as an egotistic male), was frequently illustrated by how asylum seekers pose a threat to vulnerable groups in Norway, like the elderly, the ill and the unemployed. In the words of one commenter:

... It is hypocritical that welfare “refugees” should be treated better than Norwegians who have suffered job-related health issues and have paid taxes while working ... Do you want the rights to benefit you or welfare “refugees”? Because it is obvious that they won’t apply to both groups (Äftenposten 2016).

By combining the word welfare with “refugees” in quotation marks, this commenter implies that the majority asylum seekers are “bogus” asylum seekers. This serves to delegitimise asylum seekers’ potential need for protection and portrays a large proportion of asylum seekers as cunning economic migrants who might steal the welfare you are entitled to as a (unemployed, elderly or ill) Norwegian. By stating that the rights of the welfare state only will apply to one “group”, the commenter draws a clear line between “native Norwegians” who deserve welfare benefits, on the one hand, and asylum seekers who do not deserve to enjoy such rights, on the other. Similarly, other commenters framed the “economic migrant” in criminal-like terms by arguing that he is the reason why those most vulnerable in the neighbouring countries are not receiving enough aid. One comment read: “These ungrateful refugees are using the resources we could have provided the neighbouring areas, where small children are starving” (Dagbladet 2015a). While this commenter uses the word refugee rather than migrant, the view expressed towards asylum seekers is clearly negative, illustrated by the descriptions of refugees as ungrateful and egotistic.

4.1.2 Describing Helping in Europe as “Misplaced Kindness”

Other commenters focused their anger on political decisions to accept asylum seekers in Norway and Europe and argued that Norway should only help refugees in the neighbouring areas of Syria. This was typically framed quite paradoxically. On the one hand, commenters expressed that Norway should help in the neighbouring areas. On the other hand, refugees who had made their way to Europe were called “fortune hunters”. As such, it is taken for granted that people are in fact refugees when they are in close proximity to the crisis, but this is doubted when refugees make their way to “our” country. Often, commenters used

exaggeration in order to show why admitting asylum seekers into Europe was equivalent to “misplaced kindness.”

For reference, in 2015, all Norwegian parties represented in parliament, except for the two government parties advocated a motion to receive 10,000 Syrian resettlement refugees (quota refugees) over a two or three year period. The number ended on 8000 over three years after discussions with the Conservative Party, while the Progress Party (Fremmskrittspartiet, FrP) did not participate in the negotiations, protesting against the number which was larger than the 4500 which the government had initially proposed (Skard and Gjerstad 2015). The government parties, particularly the FrP, has maintained that the focus needs to be on helping refugees in the neighbouring areas, similar to many commenters. An example of a comment addressing this debate read:

I just saw an article showing completely malnourished people down in Syria. What do we choose to do? We help those who can afford to get here. It is disgraceful ... We have a bunch of unemployed Norwegians nowadays, people with families and responsibilities. Who will be employed first, dare I ask? Do you intend to steal jobs from ethnic Norwegians and give them to refugees? You won't get away with that, believe me. It would create such chaos, that our country would end up in ruins ... (Dagbladet 2016).

In addition to mentioning some aspects already discussed relating to asylum seekers stealing jobs from ethnic Norwegians (aided by Norwegian politicians), the commenter addressed the difference between helping people in the neighbouring areas and helping refugees in Europe. As shown in this comment, this was typically framed in a way that Norway has to choose between helping only a few in Norway (and Europe) and helping many “where they are”. Undoubtedly helping in the neighbouring area is crucial, but I will explain why it cannot not preclude helping in Europe.

It is a fact that providing aid in the neighbouring areas of the crisis is more cost-efficient. It was estimated by the Ministry of Finance that 8000 resettlement refugees, which the Norwegian parliament has agreed on receiving, will cost NOK1 million (\$123,000) each over the first five years in the country (Gjerstad 2015). In comparison, the cost of hosting a refugee in Jordan's largest refugee camp, Zaatari, is reported to be NOK150,000 (\$18,300) over five years (Obeidat 2013), meaning you can host seven refugees in Jordan for the same price as one in Norway. The Prime Minister of Norway, Erna Solberg (the Conservative Party)

operates with an estimated cost of NOK72,000 (Office of the Prime Minister 2015). In other words, her numbers show you can host 14 refugees in the neighbouring countries for the same price as one refugee in Norway. While both these numbers show that it is more cost-efficient to help refugees in the neighbouring areas, commenters pointing out the difference tended to exaggerate immensely. One commenter wrote: "...What is more humane, helping one person in Norway or 1000 in Syria?" (Aftenposten 2015). Whether such statements were deliberate exaggerations or due to misinformation is a relevant question.

Arguably, the FrP's fixation on helping in the neighbouring areas has facilitated such exaggerations, not because help in these areas is not fundamental, but because it is portrayed as the only reasonable option to helping refugees, and also due to the fact that even the party's numbers seem disingenuous. The FrP has stated that it would "rather help 1 million in the neighbouring areas than receive 8000 Syrians in Norway" and that this is possible for the cost of NOK1 billion (\$123 million) (FrP 2015a). If one assumes that the Prime Minister's numbers are more representative of the actual cost than the numbers from the Zaatari refugee camp, helping 1 million refugees in camps around Syria over five years would still cost NOK72 billion (\$8.8 billion). The Norwegian Refugee Council (Flyktninghjelpen) has clarified that while NOK1 billion would be a valuable contribution, it is not even sufficient to cover shelter, access to healthcare or food (Nesse 2015). Still, the FrP has not moderated its position and consistently used this as an argument to avoid a policy of "misplaced kindness" which for the FrP is the equivalent to admitting asylum seekers into Norway (FrP 2015b).

When the Norwegian Minister of and Integration, Sylvi Listhaug, used the term "goodness tyranny" (Sandvik 2015), she effectively protested against those supporting to help asylum seekers in Norway. Listhaug's concerns about admitting asylum seekers are among other things related to economy. She has for instance stated that "she is worried about the future of her children" due to the "burden the stream of people to Norway will be for the welfare state" (Tjernshaugen 2016]. Listhaug's rhetoric was embraced by several commenters who used it in their criticism of immigration-friendly views. One such comment read:

The goodness tyrants are those who are willing to tear down and destroy all the good values we have established in Norway, for instance by allowing evil people and/or let foreign fortune hunters take off with our welfare (Norwegian people's pension and savings!) ... (Aftenposten 2016).

Ultimately these elements reflect a discourse in which refugees are consistently referred to as an economic burden. One comment read: ...”It is particularly tragic that Europe is invaded by migrants from countries in Africa and Asia who cause European resources to be used on only a few in our costly societies” (Aftenposten 2015). This discourse ignores the potential benefits of asylum seekers as future contributors to the European economy. Whereas the expenditures are bound to be substantial in the coming years, the long-term gains are likely to exceed the costs. Experts researching the future situation in Germany found that asylum seekers could serve to boost the German economy for two reasons: (1) refugees who find work stimulate the economy on the supply side by contributing to corporate production; and (2), the refugee-related expenditures are accompanied by positive economic demand impulses, because higher demand boosts businesses overall (Fratzcher, M. and Simon, J. 2015, p. 614). Conversely, as we have seen, the FrP has legitimised a mind-set in which refugees are nothing more than an (economic) burden to society.

Moreover, the idea that Norway must choose between helping many in the neighbouring areas and a few in Norway does not appear to be the appropriate response to save the most people, as commenters and government politicians typically claim. Undoubtedly, aid handouts are crucial for conditions in the neighbouring areas. However, the scope of the crisis is too large to be handled in only the neighbouring areas. As many as 6.6 million people are internally displaced following due to the devastations of the Syrian civil war (OCHA 2016). More than 4.8 million Syrian refugees are registered in Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey, Egypt and Iraq. The conditions in the refugee camps of these countries have been described as “utterly inhumane” (Lum 2015). Lebanon, a country with 4.4 million people hosts more than 1 million Syrian refugees, less than 200,000 people fewer than the entire number of people crossing the sea to Europe since the beginning of 2015. Jordan hosts 650,000, about 10% of its population, and Turkey hosts more than 2.7 million (UNHCR 2016b). These are in addition to large refugee populations from previous conflicts (Murphy et al. 2016, p. 1).

4.1.3 Arguing that Refugees Are Not Worth Helping

Whereas some commenters focused on that Norway should only help refugees in the neighbouring areas, other commenters argued that Norway should not even help through aid. These comments were blunter, as they expressed a disregard for people’s lives that the comments discussed in the previous subsection did not. Most of these comments were found in the Aftenposten article “Nett-trollene trives i rampelyset, de sprekker ikke!” (“The Trolls Enjoy the Spotlight, They Do Not Crack!”) from 13 March, discussing how trolls on the

internet has spread hate towards refugees and volunteers. A comment addressing the writer of the article read:

It is possible that you are willing to let the welfare state go to hell in order for us to be able to host tens and thousands of refugees. Personally I want to maintain the welfare state ... Even if that means keeping out people who have fled from war and persecuting regimes (Dagbladet 2016).

This commenter acknowledged that asylum seekers may indeed be in need of protection. Yet, the commenter explicitly expressed that Norway should not receive people fleeing war or persecution. The implication seems to be that life of refugees are not as important as “our” lives, and that “we” have certain rights as native Norwegians that refugees who are born elsewhere simply do not. Rejecting to help people fleeing war and persecution is not only clearly ethically condemnable, but breaks with the rights of a refugee as provided by international law. A refugee is a person defined by the United Nations Convention relating to the Status of Refugees of 1951, also called the Refugee Convention, as someone “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 to or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country ...” (UNHCR 2010, p. 2). The Convention builds on Article 14 of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which recognises the right of persons to seek asylum from persecution in other countries. The convention entered into force on 22 April 1954, and it has been subject to only one amendment in the form of a 1967 Protocol, which removed the geographic and temporal limits of the 1951 Convention, as it was originally limited in scope to persons fleeing events occurring before 1 January 1951 and within Europe (UNHCR 2010, p. 2).

According to the laws outlined in the Refugee Convention and its 1967 amendment, a refugee has the right to safe asylum, not just in the form of physical safety, but also at least the same rights and basic help as any other foreigner who is a legal resident, including freedom of thought, of movement and freedom from torture and degrading treatment. Economic and social rights are equally applicable, and refugees should have access to medical care, education and the right to work. Even in the event that asylum seekers do not have the necessary proof of the need for protection, governments are advised by the UNHCR to adopt a rapid, flexible and liberal process, recognising how difficult it often is to document

persecution (UNHCR 2002). Norway, as a party to both the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol (UNHCR 2015b), can therefore not deny people the right to apply for asylum, nor the rights that come with potential refugee status. Still, several commenters did not find international law appropriate as the threat to “our” economy was considered more important than the lives of refugees. Often this was accompanied by implying that there are some fundamental and static differences between the “Western world” and the “Eastern world” and the people within these regions. One such comment read:

My rights are actually the only ones that I care about ... When it comes to migrants I have no interest whatsoever in spending money on them, not here, not there, not anywhere. Do we gain something from the money that we waste on them and our aid programme in general? ... I simply don't consider it my duty to save them from themselves. We managed to crawl our way out of poverty to a functioning society, and that before the oil was found ... If we could do it then the others can too – the third world people aren't children, are they? Nor are they stupider than us ... Leave them to themselves, the migrants, the “refugees”, the Third World countries, and all the others who survive by sponging off the West (Aftenposten 2016).

The views expressed by this commenter is largely based on Orientalist notions as he invokes a sort of “narrative of belonging” in his argument. While writing that “third world people” are not stupider than “us”, the suggestion that the “Third World” countries are sponging off the West implies a clear distinction in the commenter's perception between two poles of the world: on the one hand, the rational West and its people, which has managed to build their own well-functioning society, and, on the other, the “irrational” East, or the “Third World”, consisting of self-destructing people who have only themselves to blame for their grievances. Without considering factors such as colonialism as a source of poverty and political instability, the commenter describes a self-inflicted crisis caused by Third World countries and its people, who do not deserve the help from what is implied to be the “superior” Western world. Obviously, such a view is in clear breach with Norway's international commitments. Still, it is worth mentioning that Norway's government has found itself in a grey area, at best, when it comes to international law during the refugee crisis. Among other points, this is related to the principle of non-refoulement featured in the Refugee Convention, to which no reservations or derogations may be made. It provides that no one can expel or return (“refouler”) a refugee against his or her will, in any manner whatsoever, to a territory where

he or she fears threats to life or freedom (UNHCR 2010, p. 3). Even though the Norwegian government has maintained that Russia is a safe country for asylum seekers, there are records of two Syrians being deported from Norway to Russia who have then been sent back to Syria (Trellevik and Sveen 2016). It was also discovered that two Yemenites were threatened with deportation by Russia after being deported from Norway, but they were allowed back in Norway to apply for asylum when it became clear that they would be sent back to Yemen (Jentoft and Strønen 2016). The UNHCR has also criticised Norway for violating the human rights on two other counts: the government's proposal to require that asylum seekers have four years of work experience or education in Norway until family reunification can be granted, and the fact that Norway stopped treating individual Storskog cases (Johnsen and Mikkelsen 2016).

Now that different discursive aspects related to the perceived economic threat posed by refugees have been discussed, the thesis will move on to the analysis of Islamophobic discourses.

4.2 Islamophobic Discourses

Following the terrorist attacks in Paris on 13 November, Islamophobic discourses were identified continuously across the examined posts. How prejudice and racism can seem as legitimate descriptions about entire groups of people is worth questioning. Several scholars have stressed how prejudice or racism can emerge as a coping mechanism in the face of shared anxieties and perceptions of cultural and/or existential threats in times of societal change (Døving 2015, p. 66). This phenomena seems to apply to the current refugee crisis, at least in the virtual space, as even mainstream newspapers' comment sections entail descriptions strikingly similar to well-known Islamophobic discourses (Ekman 2015, p. 1987). The thesis now looks at five recurring topics, and the discursive strategies used to present them in order to delegitimise the mobility of refugees through xenophobia and racial language.

4.2.1 Describing a Demographic Threat Posed by Muslims

One common topic among commenters was related to the fear of Muslims replacing ethnic Norwegians in Norway, eventually leading to a Muslim majority. The demographic threat was typically framed in two ways: (1) by describing the increased number of asylum seekers as a Muslim invasion of Europe and Norway; and (2) emphasising that Muslims have a higher

birth rate than “us”. Interestingly, counter-jihadist discourses have been noted to use the same arguments (Ekman 2015, p. 1992). One comment combining both these elements read:

... Islam has never brought anything good with it in this world, be it in the West or in their own countries, and there is all kind of evidence to support this. What one is seeing today is a pure invasion, an invasion where the majority have no intention to contribute to anything other than more NAV (Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration) offices and a quicker collapse of the welfare state. They won't do it with violence or guns ... but through their high birth rates ... (VG 2016a).

The description of more asylum seekers crossing the border to Norway as a Muslim invasion depicted “them” (Muslims), as a malicious group coming to take over Norway to replace “us” in “our” society. As such, refugees were reduced to invaders, ignoring the factors behind the increased number of asylum seekers, such as civil wars in Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq.

Normally, only a limited proportion of refugees move onward from states near their countries of origin. Where they do so, it is typically due to the unavailability or low standards of protection in the states to which they flee initially, limited access to assistance or other means of survival, separation from family members or a lack of long-term solutions (Garlick 2016, p. 42), all of which apply to a large proportion of asylum seekers arriving in Europe.

Asylum seekers were frequently seen by commenters to be “flooding” across the border. One comment read: “It’s not long until Norwegians become a minority in their own country. Minorities are usually not treated so well. The first tsunami wave has already arrived” (VG 2015b). Other commenters used the phrases “pouring in” and “streaming in”. By linking such phrases to the perceived Muslim invasion of Norway, commenters underlined the alleged threat Norway faces from Muslim asylum seekers. Metaphors such as “flood” and “stream” in this connection are explained by Van Dijk (2000) as images used to negatively describe the arrival of foreigners, in this case Muslims, by comparing them to threatening water. The use of these phrases are not new. As we have seen, Margaret Thatcher used such rhetoric in 1979, when she said she understood ordinary British people being “rather swamped” by people with an alien culture (Van Dijk 2000, p. 44). In 2015, 31,145 people asylum seekers came to Norway, a relatively high number for Norway, considering the previous record was less than 18,000. Yet, to describe the situation as a flood of refugees across the border seems inappropriate when 13.5 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance following the Syrian Civil War (UNOCHA 2016). Still, Norwegian politicians and media have consistently

referred to a “stream of asylum seekers” (Halvorsen 2015), discourse that inevitably gives the impression of a threatening amount of people coming to the country.

Besides the argument that Muslims are invading Norway and Europe through immigration, several comments expressed fear regarding the high birth rates of Muslims, and argued that “Muslim birth rates” would lead to a Muslim majority in Norway within a few decades. One such comment read: Loving the welfare system makes them able to get 7-8 children and that is not the same as loving the country. This might as well be an invasion, that is, a Trojan horse in which the West is paying for its own downfall ... (VG 2016a).

This commenter combines a perceived economic threat of Muslims exploiting the welfare system by having many children, with the more long-term effect of Muslim birth rates leading to a Muslim majority in Norway. By comparing Muslims in Norway to a Trojan horse, this particular commenter seems to illustrate an image of Muslims as secret infiltrators of Norway. The same argument is used as a discursive strategy by Islamophobic blogs like the US-based Jihad Watch and the pan-European Gates of Vienna (Ekman 2015, p. 1991). By using the exaggerated number of 7-8 children, this commenter either seeks to deliberately deceive in order for people to sympathise with his concerns, or is a result of the commenter being ill-informed. From the four countries Norway received the most asylum seekers in 2015, the number of births per woman is significantly less than 7 or 8. The average birth rate per woman is 2.8 in Syria, 4.9 in Afghanistan, 4.2 in Iraq and 4.4 in Eritrea (PRB 2015). Furthermore, research shows that the number of years one has lived in Norway has a substantial impact on fertility rates. Non-European women who have lived in Norway for more than twelve years have about 50% fewer children than non-European women who have lived in Norway for six years. If one considers the fertility of Pakistani immigrants in Norway, research shows that the birth rate between Pakistani immigrants has adapted substantially to the average Norwegian birth rate. Second generation Norwegian-Pakistani women have identical birth rates to other young women in Norway (Brunborg and Østby 2011).

The demographic threat perceived by commenters culminated in claims over that the continent will eventually decline, a discursive element also seen among counter-jihadist actors (Ekman 2015, p. 1992). This is typically illustrated by how Europe will lose its core Western values and then be destroyed when Muslims comprise a large part of the population. In the words of one reader: “It is only Europe that receives this many pretend refugees. Why? Because we are idiots who wish to eradicate ourselves, our culture, our way of living and our

children.” (Dagbladet 2015b). This statement implies that the “West” is perceived as a relatively Muslim-free space, an image which would be distorted by an increasing numbers of Muslims in Europe, be it through immigration, Muslim birth rates or both.

4.2.2 Framing Islam as a Political Ideology

The fear of Muslims becoming a larger part of the Norwegian population seems to be based on some manifested fears about Islam. A recurring topic among commenters was describing Islam as a political ideology in the same line as Nazism. The frequent theme of equating Islam to Islamism (the latter being the common term for denoting political Islam) is important here. Islam (as an entity) is considered to have a political agenda and operate as a single political actor, suggesting that all Muslims, directly or indirectly, advocate a unified totalitarian ideology (Ekman 2015, p. 1994). One comment, probably the most blatantly racist post examined read:

How long can we listen to these so-called leaders say: “remain calm”, “don’t generalise, “we will find a solution”, etc.? ... You need to realise that Muslims, Islam and ISIS are the same type of “rats”, only dressed in different “outfits”. We who love our country need to take the power from our weak leaders and forbid everything related to Islam. We need to tear down all mosques in our beautiful country, and never ever let this plague into our country again ... We Norwegians were a great people once. We were Vikings! Now we are about to become a nation of scared sofa pigs that the Muslims laugh at ... When the inevitable happens in our country, those who have led us to this misery should know that hiding won’t help you. We will find you and judge you like traitors were judged after the Second World War, and I will be the first one to sign up as executioner (VG 2016a).

This commenter sees Muslims and ISIS members to be no different, only separated by their “outfits”, suggesting that all Muslims advocate a unified totalitarian ideology built on violence. As such, the commenter is not only opposed to receiving more Muslims, but also endorses the deportation of Muslims who are already Norwegian citizens. The commenter is in opposition to contemporary Norwegian society seemingly because it lacks nationalism, referring to how Norway once was by pointing to the Viking era. Accordingly, his views resemble Norwegian right-wing activist rhetoric, who often glorify the Viking era because they admire Vikings for how “they based their action on honour and loyalty to their own people” (Fangen 1998, p. 213). Furthermore, the commenter expects there to come a day when all those involved in accepting that Muslims have become a part of Norwegian society

will be sentenced as traitors, like Nazi sympathisers were after the Second World War. As such, Islam is considered as an evil political ideology in the lines of Nazism. The implication seems to be that the Norway or the West is currently at war with Islam and Muslim sympathisers, and that when the war is won, he wants to murder those he considers guilty. It is worth noting that the fact that this comment has not been removed by moderators, even though it contains unconcealed racist language and encourages violence and even murder, suggests that text in the virtual space is difficult to moderate and deserves more attention.

The equating of Islam with a political ideology was typically accompanied by descriptions of all Muslims as likely undertakers of Jihad. Islam was also frequently depicted as the absolute opposite to “Western values”, either explicitly or implicitly. Individuals who practice Islam were considered incapable of becoming “enlightened” and thus unsuited to live in the democratic and “civilised” Western world. Typically, any historical change and the development in relation to modernity was ignored (Ekman 2015, p. 1994). A comment focusing on Islam’s incompatibility with the Western world read:

Islam is a primitive form for Nazism and should be forbidden in all civilised countries. Islam is an inhumane and destructive religion ... That Islam is incompatible with the democratic values and principles we have in Western society is obvious. For instance, we don’t accept Nazism as a political ideology in our Western democracies. Islam should suffer the same fate! (VG 2016a).

The interpretation of Islam as a totalitarian ideology obviously has major ramifications for one’s view of Muslim and marked a large proportion of comments. The ensuing subsection discusses this in more depth.

4.2.3 Portraying Muslims as Inherently Violent

The description of Islam as a totalitarian ideology is closely linked to the idea that Muslims are inherently violent. Since there is no distinction between Islam and Islamism, between non-violent and violent Islamism, and so forth, “moderate Islam” is only presented as violent Islamism (Ekman 2015, p. 1995). Commenters expressed concerns about “violent Islam” and “violent Muslims” in several ways. Most commonly, the image of violent Muslims were portrayed by commenters through a focus on topics of terrorism, sharia or violent acts connected to Muslims, using the nature of Islam as the explanatory framework. One commenter using rhetorical questions when engaging in “common sense racism” (Hughey and Daniels 2013, p. 340) read:

... Is it wrong that Islam thinks murdering gay people is okay? ... Is it wrong that Islam endorses the murder of non-believers? Is it wrong that people who leave Islam are to be killed? Is it wrong that half of all Muslims want sharia laws rather than the country's own laws? (VG 2016a).

Ekman's (2015) study of the counter-jihad network finds that this argument is often accompanied by selected quotes from the Quran. While no quotes from the Quran were used by commenters in this study, each commenter referring to the Quran expressed xenophobic attitudes towards Muslims. References were also made to the life of the Prophet Muhammed to illustrate the Islamic framework which makes Muslims inherently violent. The main point of this argument is that Muslims, as followers of Islam, are considered to support the killings of people which go against what is perceived as core Islamic values. As such, what is seen as "genuine Islam" is linked with the most extreme interpretations of the Quran. Accordingly, several commenters claimed that there is a widespread support for sharia laws among Muslims.

Moreover, commenters consistently focused on the "Muslim situation" in the Middle East, for instance by pointing to prevalent Shia-Sunni conflicts and wars in the region. In reality, more Muslims live east of Afghanistan than west of it, rendering the Middle East a demographically minor place in "the Muslim world" relative to South and Southeast Asia. The nations with the most Muslims are, in order, Indonesia, Pakistan, India and Bangladesh (Gottschalk and Greenberg 2008, p. 4). Around 1.7 billion people identify themselves as Muslims globally – in other words, nearly one in four people (Shariff and Rahman 2016, p. 2). The majority of these Muslims live under civil laws fashioned after Western models and relatively few seek to replace these with sharia. If the case was not so, the world would be immensely more shocked than it is. Still, media outlets in the Western world have consistently overlooked voices of moderation that come from the majority of Muslims. For instance, when violence flared in 2006 over the controversial Danish cartoons of Muhammed, most of America's frontline newspapers hesitated to report the condemnation of the violence issued immediately by the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), one of many Islamic organisations that criticised the attacks (Gottschalk and Greenberg 2008, pp. 4-8).

During the refugee crisis, elite discourse has on several occasions contributed to panic and fuelled xenophobia related to Muslims' supposed violent nature. President of the Czech Republic, Milos Zeman, has warned that Muslim refugees would not respect Czech customs

and would bring the country sharia law (BBC 2015b). Hungary's Prime Minister has described the refugees entering Europe as "looking like an army" (France-Press 2015) and stated that "all the terrorists are basically migrants" in response to the Paris terrorist attacks (Mortime 2015). Similarly, the threat from the so-called "Islamic State" (IS)/ISIL/ISIS/Daesh was frequently linked with refugees seeking asylum in Europe across the comments examined. One such comment read:

... Nothing negative is reported about the stream of migrants, even if ISIS-terrorists show up among them all over Europe right now ... The majority in Norway now looks at this endless invasion of people with a destructive culture and radical religion who have ruined their own countries completely ... (Aftenposten 2015).

By representing Islam as a radical religion, commenters frequently blamed Islam for wars in the Middle East. Moreover, refugees were considered guilty rather than victims of civil wars in their home countries, as they were seen responsible for "their own wars". Moreover, Muslims were considered to pose a security threat due to the radical nature of the religion they adhere to, even if they were indeed "genuine refugees". Problematically, it is this kind of rhetoric which is beneficial for ISIS in its pursuit of a polarised world, which serves to drive people toward radicalisation (Singh et al. 2015, p. 9). The fundamental objective of the organisation's terrorism has been described as not to kill Westerners per se, but to provoke certain political and social reactions. For instance by claiming that they have plans of sending 500,000 of its sympathisers into Europe as a "psychological weapon" (Husebø-Evensen 2015), the organisation has sought to spread fears about Muslims refugees among European citizens (Funk and Parkes 2016, p. 2), and European leaders have used this as an argument to justify closing its borders to refugees (Aftenposten 2015).

In addition to using Islam as an explanatory framework for Muslims' perceived violent nature, commenters pointed to the (violent) sexist character of Islam. The subordination of women in society is framed as a "Muslim problem", hence reducing questions of historical patriarchal structures and social gender systems to matters of culture (Ekman 2015, p. 1995). Such representations have deep historical roots, embedded in historical European depictions of the Islamic world that extensively used images of barbarism and sexuality in the context of a Christian (Western)/heathen dichotomy (Miles and Brown 2003, p. 52). The violent sexist discursive focus of commenters based their arguments on concerns for both Muslim and non-Muslim women as victims of the supposed inherently misogynistic religion Islam. Some

commenters merely focused on the threat posed by Muslim men to Norwegian or European women, whereas others emphasised that the veiled Muslim woman was someone “in need of rescue” (Brah 2004, p. 83). One commenter voiced concerns for both Muslims and non-Muslims:

Everywhere in the world where Muslims comprise the majority there is violence, hatred towards women and sharia ... We in Norway have opened our doors to strangers who have barged in, assaulted women and then cast us out and called us infidels ... while the suppressed women get 5-10 children each, whether they want it or not! (VG 2016a).

The discourse of defending women’s rights arose in the context of the global war on terror and has been described as a paternalistic, anti-Muslim nationalism. The “oppression” of Muslim women by their menfolk is used to portray Islam as misogynistic and oppressive, while cases of Muslim men harassing and sexually assaulting non-Muslim women have caused a nationalistic response founded on the protection of “our women”. The success of this logic relies on obscuring misogynistic aspects of mainstream Western culture, enabling a distinction between the “egalitarian West” and the “oppressive Islam” (Ho 2007, p. 290). President of the Czech Republic, Milos Zeman, whom I have already referred to in relation to his statement about Muslims bringing with them sharia law to the country, also invoked the discourse of speaking for women’s interests: “The beauty of our women will be hidden, as they’ll be forced to wear burkas, though I can think of some for whom this would be an improvement” (BBC 2015b). Paradoxically, by adding the last part of this sentence, he affirmed that Western societies are not necessarily free from misogyny either, not even at the top.

As we have seen, the perceived violent nature of Muslims is a central trait of Islamophobic discourse. Furthermore, several commenters expressing such views argued that a “climate of political correctness” (Ekman 2015, p. 1997) is censoring debate on Muslims and immigration, and this will be considered in the following subsection.

4.2.4 Protesting against a “Climate of Political Correctness”

A recurring topic identified across the examined comments is how people expressing anti-refugee attitude or racist attitudes towards Muslims described themselves as victims of the culture of “political correctness”. Political correctness is seen by several commenters to cover up certain facts about Muslims and Islam and must therefore be protested against. Some

commenters even foresaw a situation where they in the future would have to live in hiding after having expressed opinions that break with the alleged culture of political correctness. Arguments protesting against political correctness more often than not were accompanied by racial language rather than legitimate critique of aspects of Islam, i.e., there is a difference between valid critique of religion and negative descriptions of the majority of Muslims.

Previous research shows that protesting against political correctness has been a prevalent strategy used in the virtual space to communicate racist positions in a subtle manner that might be mistaken for civil rights discourse, both by white supremacists (Daniels 2009, p. 669) and counter-jihadists (Ekman 2015, p. 1997). Subsequently, it is thought-provoking that it is also used by commenters in mainstream online newspapers. One commenter responding to a pro-refugee comment wrote:

I have lived in Norway for 25 years and kept my Polish citizenship and passport. I love Norway and I have many Norwegian friends and a good job. It makes me truly sad to see this beautiful country being swamped by foreigners with a different culture. Everyone that is politically correct write the same thing you do and criticise Eastern Europe for its scepticism towards immigration. Are there no patriots in Norway who wish to protect their own nation? Do you wish to become a minority in your own country? ... (Aftenposten 2015).

The media and political parties with liberal views on immigration were consistently depicted as actors that conceal the “facts” and thereby maintain a societal climate of political correctness (Ekman 2015, p. 1996). Consequently, those opposing the media and mainstream political parties define themselves as brave anti-establishment protesters, speaking truth in the face of a politically correct elite that is denying the facts (Zemini 2011, p. 38). In previous studies of the counter-jihad network, the articulation against a societal “climate of political correctness” is found to interlink Islamophobia with a larger populist radical right and therefore conveys xenophobia and racism at the centre of populist discourse. Islamophobic actors illustrate the prevalence of political correctness by referring to statements from the political centre right that involve criticism or blunt xenophobic standpoints on Islam and Muslims. By referring to certain mainstream actors that are considered to be “truth tellers”, Islamophobic actors argue that most journalists and politicians are “self-censoring” due to the climate of political correctness (Ekman 2015, p. 1996). Conversely, across the comments examined in relation to this thesis, there was an overwhelming focus on the failure of the

media and Leftist politicians to see the “facts” rather than an emphasis on “truth tellers”. However, some comments included both aspects. Politicians who were considered to tell the “truth” were mainly seen to be far-right politicians in Eastern European countries. One commenter disagreeing with an Aftenposten article that criticised Eastern European responses to the Paris terrorist attacks read:

Is it possible? Are you talking about ‘conservative forces’ today? Is it not about time that reason prevailed? “Poland uses the Paris attacks as an excuse ..., Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Oban claims that jihadists are exploiting the refugee crisis to hide among asylum seekers ...” You need to listen to them! If Northern Europe doesn’t know anything about Islamic history and nature, ask Eastern Europe and the Balkans what it means to live under 500 years of Islamic slavery! ... (Aftenposten 2015).

This discourse is similar to promoters of what has been termed “new realism” (Prins quoted in Zemini 2011, p. 38). Whereas the failure of integration of Muslims is attributed to Islam’s supposed rejection of, or resistance to modernity, well-documented findings are overlooked, such as the fact that ethnicity is a key factor considered by employers within the EU to determine the suitability of a job seeker (EUMC 2006, p. 32). The new realists are convinced that several problems are caused because a corrupt Leftist group, having the wrong views on racism and intolerance, is censoring public debate and free speech. They claim to speak on behalf of the “common people” against the arrogance of the elite that does not take the complaints of the people seriously enough (Zemini 2011, p. 38). Similarly, this study found that commenters expressed that being branded a racist was what they had to do in order to save the people of Norway from the threat posed by Muslims. One commenter, branding himself as one such “hero” wrote:

I love Norway, my country and my people. It is completely impossible for me to consider Muslims a part of this. I find that they are a contrast to what we are ... They won’t be allowed to ruin Norway. We who oppose their negative influence are branded as racists and must suffer, but this has often happened throughout history; those who have fought for what is right has had to die and suffered hate, just think about Nelson Mandela and resistance fighters during the war... (Dagbladet 2016).

4.2.5 Representing Multiculturalism as the Abandonment of “Western values”

The idea that a societal climate of political correctness is censoring debate was closely linked to attitudes towards multiculturalism. Previous studies on counter-jihadist discourse show that Islamophobic actors frame (Islamic) multiculturalism as a hegemonic force defined as the outcome of a dominant “cultural Marxist” ideology (that ultimately seeks to destroy the west). Subsequently, multiculturalism is used to explain a variety of factors in contemporary society, but it essentially signifies the abandoning of Western values (Ekman 2015, p. 1997). The analysis of online comments in Norwegian mainstream newspapers did not reveal direct references to a cultural Marxist ideology, but certainly displayed concerns about a multiculturalist ideology. The betrayal of the political liberal/left or the culture of political correctness were represented as destructive factors spreading multiculturalism, typically linked to how Norway is “caving in to Muslim demands”. One comment protesting against the “culture of political correctness” read:

... Look at all the things we used to be able to do that we can no longer do on the basis that it offends Islam ... Our culture and values have been washed out because we need to be politically correct and adapt to immigrants ... It is Muslims that have offended Norway and its population, by demanding that we adapt to their values and culture (Dagbladet 2016).

Another comment more specifically criticising political parties spreading multiculturalist ideology read:

Sadly, ‘most people’ are brainwashed by the radical left’s multicultural ideology, and have no geopolitical or economic understanding of the immigration crisis we are currently facing. This is actually about the survival of Western European society and culture. Fortunately, it seems like more and more people are waking up, but we have limited time. Political parties like the Liberal Party, the Social Left Party and the Christian Democratic Party are actively contributing to destroying Norway’s social and economic structures, and the people who vote for these parties need to think hard about what kind of society they want for their children and grandchildren (Aftenposten 2015).

Such representations of multiculturalism reflects the Huntingtonian (Huntington 1993) clash of civilisations theory, as imagined boundaries are constructed between the Islamic culture and what Huntington, along with other intellectuals, call “the Western civilisation”. The fear

is essentially that Islam will transform what Europe is today (or maybe wants to be in the future). As we have seen, it is typically not the stereotyping of physical characteristics that characterises Islamophobia, but images such as those of Muslim men as violent and patriarchal and of Muslim women as submissive and oppressed. Inevitably, some people may then feel the need to defend “Western civilisation” against this “enemy” (Marranci 2004, pp. 106-107), as there has been evidence of in the examined online comments analysed in this study. Such standpoints are legitimated by far-right and populist politicians (Marranci 2004, p. 105). Czech President Milos Zeman stated in January that integrating Muslims into Europe is “impossible” and that Muslims should keep their culture in “their countries” (France-Presse 2016). In the aftermath of 9/11 former Italian Prime Minister, Silvio Berlusconi proclaimed:

We are proud bearers, conscious of the supremacy of our [Western] civilisation, of its discoveries and inventions, which have brought us democratic institutions, respect for the human, civil, religious and political rights of our citizens, openness to diversity and tolerance of everything ... Europe must revive on the basis of common Christian roots (The Guardian 2001).

In other words, embedded in this discourse, there is an expressed anxiety related to the fear of a real multicultural society, in which Islam may become a recognised and meaningful part of Norway or Europe. More specifically, many commenters and far-right politicians dread that Islam may change the culture, traditions and civilisation of the perceived “us” (the non-Muslim majority), which should be based on “Western values” (Marranci 2004, p. 112).

5 Suggested Approach to the Refugee Crisis

As we have seen, economic and cultural anxieties have been stressed by both ordinary people participating in online debates and by prominent politicians around Europe in relation to the refugee crisis. Such fears inevitably delegitimises the mobility of refugees and means increasingly overwhelmed neighbouring states. Furthermore, such discourses reflect an environment where “we” are seen as the victims. This is well illustrated by how Muslims are portrayed as invaders of Europe, as we saw in subsection 4.2.1, and by the fact that although it has been framed as mainly a European crisis, 80% of the world’s refugees and internally displaced persons in the world are located outside of Europe (Bundy 2016, p. 6). Sadly, factors like xenophobia, populism and egotism have prevailed among most policy makers since the crisis intensified. I argue that Europe’s previous handling of refugee crises should inspire current procedure.

To facilitate the mobility of refugees in a similar way to the one pioneered by Fridtjof Nansen in 1922 is likely the right way to go. Following World War I, a violent nation-state building process left many stateless. After initially resisting the systematic rise of passport making, the League of Nations (LN), the precursor of the UN, realised the need to find a solution to the so-called “Russian refugee crisis” in early 1922. A major problem was that the majority of refugees lacked documented proof of identity or nationality. As they by law were illegal in their country of refuge, their lack of identification meant they were unable to go anywhere else (Keshavarz 2016, p. 6). Fridtjof Nansen, serving as the LN High Commissioner for Refugees (HCR), secured an official international recognition of the “Nansen passport”, an international travel document which allowed “stateless persons” to travel and settle. The passport greatly improved the HCR’s ability to provide assistance, education and employment for refugees (Marklund 2016, p. 5), and by the end of the 1920s, more than 50 governments had joined the agreement. While the passport was initially made and issued to give limited access rights to Russian refugees, it expanded its protection to Armenians, Assyrians and other stateless populations (Torpey quoted in Keshavarz 2016, p. 6).

Today’s refugees do in theory have access to Convention Travel Documents (CTD), which are intended to serve the same purpose as that of the Nansen passport. However, limited numbers are printed and costs are prohibitive for many refugees. The application process is opaque and many CTDs are not accepted by international standards requiring machine-readable travel documents. Also, many states have refused to admit refugees travelling on

CTDs, fearing that they will not return back to their state of first asylum. Nansen would have acknowledged these problems. In 1926, he complained to an international conference that refugees faced “serious discrimination” in attempting to travel “in pursuit of their livelihood” (Long 2015). Still, the impact of the system was extraordinary, and the Nansen passports were eventually used by 450,000 refugees (Marklund 2016, p. 5). As states were hesitant to provide funds, Nansen issued passport stamps, and by the 1930s, the stamp fund was large enough to directly help refugees become self-supporting, for instance by assisting with loans intended to help support businesses – from restaurants to doll factories (Long 2015). At that time, a centralised migration bureau, the International Labour Office (ILO), matched receiving states’ employment deficiencies with refugee quotas. For instance, in 1926, thousands of European refugees were employed as agricultural labourers, and 10,000 Ukrainians were placed on Canadian farms. In August 1928, the director of the ILO reported that the number of unemployed refugees had dropped from 400,000 to 200,000 since the office had become involved in refugee work (Long 2015).

Had the international community decided to reissue Nansen passports, the identification could be used by refugees to travel on regular airlines and ferries, eliminating the influence of smugglers (Long 2015). It would challenge the idea of “the migrant ‘other’” as a clandestine and criminalised object, as travelling to a safe country would then be legal. An international employment service could serve to make refugees contributors to society, rather than burdens, as they would be matched with places they are needed. In addition to saving many lives, such an approach could give some humanity back to people who have had their homes destroyed and suffered immense loss.

6 Conclusion

In conclusion, this study of readers' comments responding to articles about the refugee crisis has found that refugees are consistently portrayed as threats, both related to economic and cultural anxieties. Commenters varied in how they framed their concerns, as some described refugees as "fortune hunters" and "criminalised" their mobility in the EU, whereas others criticised decisions made by European politicians to admit asylum seekers into Europe and framed it as a policy of misplaced kindness. Others argued that helping refugees was a waste of money, basing their arguments on orientalist ideas about a "rational West" worthy of its wealth, and an "irrational Third World" which is to blame for "its own wars". The terrorist attacks in Paris on 13 November prompted changes in commenters' discursive focus as Muslims and Islam were seen to pose a greater threat, and terms like "terrorism," "violence," "murder," "sharia" and "woman" went from being barely mentioned, to being used regularly. Accordingly, even though a mainstream arena was in focus, anti-Islamic attitudes were frequently expressed by commenters. The main topics identified in this respect were the demographic threat posed by Muslims, Islam as a political ideology, Muslims as inherently violent persons, opposition to the "culture of political correctness" and multiculturalism as the abandonment of "Western values". Recurring themes discussed by commenters were typically inspired by elite discourse (and other forms of discourse), and reflect the production and preservation of xenophobic and egotistic discourses at the top. Consequently, the discursive elements used to portray refugees during the crisis has served to delegitimise the mobility of refugees, as Orientalism, Islamophobia and the idea of the migrant/refugee as the "Other" has prevailed. The last chapter thus suggested an alternative to today's situation in the form of the so-called Nansen passports, a system that saw freedom of movement as a form of burden-sharing and unfortunately stand as a contrast to the handling of the contemporary crisis. Even if such a system likely cannot solve the Syrian refugee crisis, it certainly offers some opportunities to refugees that the current system has largely ruled out. The international community should acknowledge such alternatives, rather than take for granted that borders must be closed in the name of national interests.

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