

# The Paradox of Protection

*A discourse analysis of Norwegian parliamentary debates on  
refugee and asylum policy*

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## **Abstract**

During the last decades, the number of immigrants and refugees has increased worldwide. Simultaneously, immigration policy has become one of the most contested and controversial policy fields. This became especially apparent in 2015, when an unprecedented situation unfolded, known as the Syrian ‘refugee crisis’, widely considered to be the worst refugee crisis since the Second World War. In the wake of this development, my thesis examines how members of the Norwegian parliament have ascribed meaning to the field of refugee and asylum policy in an eight-year period between 2008 and 2016. In addition, the analysis focuses on whether the Syrian refugee crisis of 2015 had an impact on the collective meaning-making, and in what ways this shaped political outcome in the period of analysis. Contradicting imperatives placed on the governments of modern liberal states make the governance of immigration policy difficult, controversial and contested. The so-called liberal paradox of migration constitutes the theoretical perspective in this thesis, suggesting underlying reasons for the contestation in the parliamentary debate on refugee and asylum policy. The period of analysis encompasses two large influxes of immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers in 2008 and in 2015, the latter being unprecedented in terms of magnitude and impact. Through a discourse analytical approach, collective meaning-making is uncovered, revealing what discourses were dominant in the Norwegian parliament. The analysis shows that a ‘humanitarian’ discourse, focusing on legal considerations and moral responsibilities, was hegemonic up until the emergence of the ‘refugee crisis’. The drastic increase of refugees and immigrants shifted the discursive hierarchy – placing a discourse focusing on the rights of ‘real refugees’ on top. The findings suggest that a discursive change took place in the wake of the refugee crisis of 2015, which was followed by several restrictions in Norwegian asylum policy. Finally, as discourse analysis offers a useful vantage point for hypothesis-generation, reflections on the main findings provide implications for further research.



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Any mistakes or misconceptions in this thesis are my own.





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## List of abbreviations

CDA	Critical Discourse Analysis
IFA	Internal Flight Alternative
NOAS	Norwegian Organisation for Asylum Seekers (Norsk organisasjon for asylsøkere)
UDI	Directorate of Immigration (Utlendingsdirektoratet)
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

### **Political parties**

A	The Labour Party (Arbeiderpartiet)
FrP	The Progress Party (Fremskrittspartiet)
H	The Conservatives (Høyre)
KrF	The Christian Democrats (Kristelig Folkeparti)
SV	The Socialist Left Party (Sosialistisk Venstreparti)
V	The Liberals (Venstre)



# 1 Introduction

The United Nations 1951 Refugee Convention was established to protect displaced persons in the wake of World War II. At this time, immigration was considered a technocratic policy problem, and did not represent a challenging issue for the governments of liberal states (Hampshire, 2013, p. 1). During the course of the following decades, however, the number of refugees and migrants increased. In 2018, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR, 2018a) reported that the total number of forcibly displaced persons in 2017 had reached the record high of 68,5 million people. Simultaneously, politics of immigration, especially refugee and asylum policy, has become one of the most contested, controversial and intractable policy fields (Hampshire, 2013, p. 1).

Western liberal democracies are often desired destination countries for people in search of protection and an improved way of life. Modern liberal states are sovereign nation-states with an inherent duty to protect its members, while they simultaneously are signatories to international agreements and conventions related to human rights and protection of refugees (Hampshire, 2013, pp. 4-5). The characteristics of modern liberal states place contradicting demands on their governments when it comes to dealing with immigration policy, creating something that has been dubbed the liberal paradox of migration (Hollifield, 1992, pp. 3-41). Governance of immigration has therefore become a dilemma for liberal states. These states have a duty to protect their citizens, while they also have obligations to international law, including the protection of refugees. Hence, liberal states are placed in a dilemma, or paradox, when dealing with immigration policy.

An illustrative example of how immigration and forced displacements affect the governments of modern liberal states unfolded in the autumn of 2015. An unprecedented refugee and migrant crisis hit Europe, with over one million immigrants reaching the continent's borders. A majority of these were refugees escaping the Syrian civil war, in addition to refugees and migrants arriving from countries such as Afghanistan, Eritrea and Somalia. While many of them were fleeing war and persecution, there was also a substantial number of so-called *economic migrants* who had left a life in poverty in search of better opportunities (World Economic Forum, 2015). The crisis affected and put pressure on reception capacity in European countries, especially border states such as Greece and Italy, as many of the migrants and refugees arrived by crossing the Mediterranean Sea.

Norway was also affected by the large influx of refugees, receiving over 30 000 asylum applications in 2015, which is the highest yearly number to date. In the wake of this large influx, several restrictions were implemented in Norwegian refugee and asylum policy, generating criticism from the UNHCR as well as the Norwegian Organisation for Asylum Seekers (NOAS). Simultaneously, the crisis sparked debate about what Norway's role should be – in the refugee and asylum policy generally, and in the 'crisis' specifically.

In Norway, asylum and refugee policy is contested among the political parties that are elected to represent the population, and it is contested among the population at large. But how do large influxes of refugees affect how representatives of the legislature talk about the situation? To explore this question, it is necessary to uncover how representatives of the Norwegian parliament understand and talk about refugee and asylum policy, or what perceptions of reality that create preconditions for political decisions during a given period in time. This provides important insights in how collective meaning-making, or discourses, can influence how certain political actions are made possible.

## **1.2 Research Question**

Norwegian refugee and asylum policy was made more restrictive in the wake of large influxes of refugees in 2008 and in 2015 (Brekke, Aarset, Lidén, & Andenæs, 2010, p. 16). Was this simply a consequence of increased numbers – or was there a change in how refugee protection was understood? Generally, there seems to be broad compliance in the Norwegian parliament with regards to immigration policy, bills are often passed with parliamentary majorities. Yet, the debate regarding immigration, especially asylum and refugee policy, seems polarised and intractable. An illustrative example of how the debate on refugee and asylum policy was perceived in the Norwegian parliament is provided by a representative in 2016: “What strikes me, is that we read the situation so similarly in most parties, but we describe it so differently” (G.S. Toskedal (KrF), p. 4101). Thus, it is important to investigate and interpret what lies *behind* political decisions made in parliament. As such, the goal of this thesis is to analyse the parliamentary debate on the subject of asylum and refugee policy from 2008 to 2016 to uncover the most prevalent perceptions and collective meaning-making, in other words, the dominant discourses. Additionally, as the 'refugee crisis' of 2015 was unprecedented in terms of magnitude and impact, I investigate whether parliamentary discourse was influenced by this large influx. The research question addressed in this thesis is therefore as follows:



*What are the dominant discourses in the Norwegian parliament regarding refugee and asylum policy from 2008 to 2016? How has the ‘refugee crisis’ of 2015 impacted the discourses, and in what way have they shaped refugee and asylum policy?*

I will address this research question by focusing on three aspects; first, I will describe how the Norwegian parliamentary representatives ascribe meaning to refugee and asylum policy in an eight-year-period. Second, I evaluate how the ‘refugee crisis’ impacted these perceptions of reality. Finally, the third aspect involves considerations on how collective meaning-making has influenced political outcome in this field of policy. Moreover, the theoretical perspective of the liberal paradox of migration is applied in the discussion of the main findings.

### **1.2.1 Scope**

Certain limitations in terms of scope had to be made in this thesis project. Scope limitations are necessary because discourse analysis, like any textual analytical approach, is time-consuming. The type of sources and statements that together constitute discourse are virtually limitless. This also applies to discourse on the matter of asylum and refugee policy. Thus, I chose to delimit the source material to statements made in the Norwegian parliament – the institution with the responsibility of passing bills into law. This is an advantage when the goal is to explore the relationship between discourse, understood as preconditions for social action, and political outcome. The scope is also limited in time. The period of analysis is set between 2008 and 2016. This period captures two large influxes of immigrants and refugees with subsequent restrictions in asylum policy. This enables comparison over time. Moreover, as I am especially interested in the impact of the ‘refugee crisis’ of 2015, it is necessary to compare the discursive field before and after this incident.

I have limited the source material to four parliamentary debates, which enables me to go in depth in each of them, as opposed to a superficial assessment of more sources. Thus, I am choosing depth over breadth in the analysis. Additionally, three of the chosen debates revolve around amendments in the Norwegian Immigration Act (*Utlendingsloven*), containing fundamental views on asylum and refugee policy. I deem these to be the most relevant debates when the aim is to identify dominant discourses on the matter. The fourth debate, from 2014, contains the more concrete issue of whether to receive more Syrian refugees, which is directly connected to how the Syrian refugee situation was perceived in the parliament before the influx of refugees and immigrants hit its peak in 2015.

### **1.2.2 Contribution to the field**

Immigration, especially refugee and asylum policy, is a contentious issue in modern liberal states, including Norway. In this thesis, the aim is to uncover how refugee and asylum policy is viewed in the Norwegian legislature, which is important for understanding the development of immigration policy, and the relationship between political language and political action. The application of the theoretical perspective of the liberal paradox of migration provides important insights into what the polarised debate is grounded in, and what constitutes the basis of the contention. This is essential in the understanding of important democratic processes in a modern liberal state. As such, this thesis is a contribution to both discourse analytical studies as well as politics of migration, by investigating how parliamentary debates and decision-making processes are connected. Furthermore, it is important to look into the implications of the Syrian ‘refugee crisis’ because it can be assumed that such an impactful incident has altered the dominant views on refugee and asylum policy in the Norwegian parliament.

In this thesis, I have chosen to apply the research methodology of discourse analysis combined with a theoretical perspective of the liberal paradox of migration. This perspective assumes that contention within immigration policy emerges from contradicting imperatives placed on modern liberal states. The theoretical perspective is intended as an underlying assumption which suggests why the debate on immigration, specifically refugee and asylum policy, is polarised. Discourse analysis is an advantageous choice of method for the study of political language and parliamentary debate, as it allows the researcher to obtain a deeper understanding of what the statements and arguments are grounded in. Examples of previous studies include Gaskarth (2006), with the analysis of ethics in foreign policy in the British parliament, and van Dijk (1997) on the notion of racism in Western parliaments. In the Norwegian context, Hagelund (2004) conducted a discourse analysis of Norwegian parliamentary debates over three decades to uncover how the notion of racism has been used and understood, and how this has affected the debate. Together, these studies have aimed at showing how political language has implications for social action.

An empirical study of Norwegian parliamentary debates regarding asylum and refugee policy before and after the ‘refugee crisis’ of 2015 has, to my knowledge, not been done before. In addition, the application of a theoretical perspective of the liberal paradox provides an innovative way of viewing the underlying reasons for the contentious debate. Thus, this thesis provides a contribution to existing literature, while also adding new perspectives to the study of parliamentary debate on refugee and asylum policy.

### **1.3 Analytical approach and main findings**

The research methodology used in this thesis is discourse analysis, which can be defined as “the close examination of language in use” (Taylor, 2001, p. 5). In the parliamentary debate on refugee and asylum policy, discourses compete to be the most dominant. In turn, the dominant discourse has a tendency to be reflected in the political outcomes. As such, discourse analysis can provide a fruitful insight in how the constructive role of language affects social reality. This type of study is in tune with the so-called ‘linguistic turn’ of the 1990s. This turn prompted more focus on interpretive science based on interpretation of actors, ideas and meaning, as opposed to more positivist-inspired research, which aims to find law-like causality, previously characterising the social sciences (Bratberg, 2017, p. 18). Discourse analysis is a widely encompassing social constructivist approach, and there is no single way of conducting it. In this thesis, I have applied the textual mechanisms of predicate analysis, presupposition and intertextuality. This yields an eclectic approach to discourse analysis, employing analytical tools from two influential strands of research, namely critical discourse analysis (CDA) and poststructuralism. Such a multiperspectival approach is considered an advantage in discourse analytical work, as it provides a broader understanding by combining perspectives that produce different forms of knowledge (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 4).

Through the analysis of the chosen debates, I was able to identify four prevalent discourses that characterise the discursive field in the Norwegian parliament between 2008 and 2016. These are the ‘humanitarian’ discourse, the ‘national interests’ discourse, the ‘regional aid’ discourse and the ‘real refugees’ discourse. The ‘humanitarian’ discourse was arguably the most dominant, even hegemonic, at the start of the period. The ‘national interests’ discourse is the most explicit opponent to the ‘humanitarian’ discourse. At the start of the period, the dominating discourse was not reflected in the type of policy that was implemented, while there was a clearer relationship between discourse and action in the later debates. Towards the later part of the period, the ‘regional aid’ and the ‘real refugees’ discourses gained more traction, shifting the hierarchy in the discursive field. The shift seems to have happened in the wake of the ‘refugee crisis’ of 2015, indicating that it had a substantial impact on the parliamentary discourse. Furthermore, I found that these discourses to various extents resonate with the liberal paradox of migration.

## **1.4 Structure of the thesis**

After this introductory section, chapter 2 addresses the liberal paradox of migration, and provides the theoretical perspective for the thesis. This is intended as a starting point that ascertains why immigration policy is a particularly complicated issue for the governments and legislatures of modern liberal states, such as Norway. Furthermore, the second chapter contains a section on clarifications of terms used. Chapter 3 provides a contextualisation of the situation regarding refugee and asylum policy in Norway, including a brief presentation of the Refugee Convention, the development in the field of immigration, and recent asylum policy changes. Chapter 4 starts by presenting the research methodology I have chosen as the basis for analysis, including the social constructivist premises that discourse analysis is founded upon, as discourse analysis is both a theory and a method. Next, possible strengths and weaknesses are addressed. Finally, the selection of data material and subsequent coding is accounted for. Chapter 5 contains the analysis, including representative statements from the debates and the application of the selected analytical tools. A discussion of the findings is presented in chapter 6. The findings include the dominant discourses and the discursive hierarchy, which are assessed related to the liberal paradox of migration, political implications and an evaluation of the impact of the 'refugee crisis' of 2015. Finally, the last chapter contains concluding remarks on the main findings of the analysis, as well as implications for further research.

## 2 The Liberal Paradox of Migration

Politics of immigration, especially the issue of refugee protection, has gone from being a mostly technocratic issue, to becoming a contested and controversial policy area for the governments of liberal democracies. This policy area creates polarised debates in immigrant-receiving countries in Europe, North-America and Oceania. As such, politics of immigration have also inspired a large body of scholarly work, including articles and studies on causes of immigration, management of immigration, immigration control and theories of migration policy (see for example: Boswell, 2007; Gilligan, 2015; Papademetriou, 2003). The main focus in the theoretical perspective that will be presented in this section revolves around the question of *why* the political field of immigration has become such an intractable policy area in liberal states. One explanation suggests that it is caused by a liberal paradox of migration, a paradox that only afflicts modern liberal states.

### 2.1 What is the Liberal Paradox?

According to James Hollifield (1992, pp. 3-41), the liberal paradox of migration occurs when contradicting demands are placed on modern liberal states. The political and economic dimensions in international and domestic politics create a dilemma for governments of liberal states when dealing with migration. With increasing globalisation and economic interdependence, migration – specifically labour migration – has become an integral part of the world economy. Simultaneously, the expansion of social and civil rights for both citizens and non-citizens has contributed to the increase of migration. Paired with the challenge to state autonomy that immigration represents, this creates a dilemma for governments in liberal states. The political and economic dimensions make the area of migration difficult to regulate, because while there are international regimes in place to govern areas such as trade and finance between states, no such regime exists in the area of migration.

James Hampshire has elaborated further on this claim in his book *The Politics of Immigration* (2013). Here, he identified four facets that characterise modern liberal states, which in turn create the basis for a liberal paradox of migration. According to Hampshire, “the intractable nature of immigration policy is not a failure of governance, but rather a reflection of contradictory imperatives of the liberal state” (2013, p. 2). The contradictory imperatives mentioned here, on the one hand, arise from the core characteristics of modern statehood. This entails sovereign state entities with clearly identified borders and a perception of commonality through such things as language, nationality and religion. The attribution of rights is based on

people's place of birth or their parentage through citizenship. On the other hand, the increasing acknowledgement of universal human rights in modern liberal states places a contradiction on the sovereignty of nation-states in the case of immigration policy. This aligns with Hollifield's argument of a liberal paradox of migration.

Hampshire illustrated the contradictory imperatives as four facets of modern liberal states. These facets are: representative democracy, nationhood, capitalism and constitutionalism. The two former facets represent inclinations towards restricting immigration, while the two latter represent more openness. The facet of representative democracy embodies an imperative placed on the governments of liberal states to restrict immigration because of the sentiments of the public. Nationhood places demands of restricting immigration based on a need to protect the nation-state. The facet of capitalism demands openness to immigration – specifically labour immigration. Liberal states are capitalist states that are dependent on labour immigration to sustain economic growth. Similarly, the facet of constitutionalism demands openness as well, as liberal states are obligated by international law to accept and protect refugees (Hampshire, 2013, p. 7).

Not all of the facets are equally relevant for this thesis. The topic in question is refugee and asylum policy, not labour immigration. Hence, the facet of capitalism is not relevant in this context. I have also chosen to exclude the facet of representative democracy, involving the sentiments of the public. While this is an interesting aspect of parliamentary debates, it is too encompassing and beyond the scope of this thesis. Thus, the most relevant facets for the purpose of this thesis is constitutionalism and nationhood, which involve the contradicting demands of protecting and sustaining the nation-state and its welfare benefits, versus abiding by international law, and following moral and legal liberal norms. These two facets will be explained in detail below.

It is necessary to point out that Hampshire does not present these facets and the following liberal paradox as neither a definition of a modern liberal state, nor as a theory to be proven. I do not intend to prove or disprove the theory of a liberal paradox of migration in the case of parliamentary debate in the Norwegian setting. Instead, the concept of a liberal paradox of migration is intended as a theoretical perspective that can explain why the area of immigration policy is so difficult for the governments of liberal states to regulate, and subsequently, why the debate on refugee and asylum policy seems so polarised.

## 2.2 Nationhood and Constitutionalism

### 2.2.1 Nationhood

The facet of nationhood is fundamental in the more restrictive demands placed on liberal states when handling immigration politics. According to David Miller (1995, pp. 22-27), nationhood has five key aspects: First, nations are built on an idea that the nation exists because its members believe they share relevant characteristics. Second, national identity is based on a common background, a historical continuity. In a nation, there is a perception that today's members have something in common with the people who built the nation, and thus have an obligation to continue building and protecting it. It is both about recognising the past, while also stretching towards future generations. Third, national identity is an active identity in that it involves making decisions and achieving things together, whether it be through cheering on the national team in sports or through political means. Fourth, national identity connects a group of people to a particular territory, hence the term *nation-state*. Finally, the members of a nation have something in common, often in the form of shared language, religion and/or culture.

Nationhood represents an issue for immigration policy because the recognition of the state as a nation entails exclusion of some people, while granting advantages to others based on their ancestry, language, culture or other aspects (Kymlicka, 1995, p. 46). It implies a demand to protect those within the nation-state, and the sustainability of the welfare-state, which means that immigration has to be regulated and restricted to some extent.

Demands to restrict the level of immigration is based on two levels of nationhood. On one hand, immigrants, particularly refugees and asylum seekers, can be perceived as an economic burden for the welfare-state. Desirable immigrant destination countries are often welfare-states in some shape or form. A welfare-state implies an idea of working together to achieve common goods. Immigrants, especially refugees, can be viewed as a large expense rather than a contribution to the common welfare. Simultaneously, immigrants, specifically those with different cultures and backgrounds than the citizens of the receiving country, can be seen as a threat to the nation-state's common cultural values and national identity, which is often a main argument among right-wing parties and anti-immigration actors in general.

The idea that immigrants pose a threat to receiving countries did not arise with increased migration in recent decades. The history of migration to Western countries show that both the public and political elites have been sceptical of welcoming immigrants, even before migration numbers increased in the 1990s (Hampshire, 2013, p. 20). In the late 1800s and early 1900s,

traditional immigrant-receiving countries, such as the United States and Australia, commonly discriminated between European and non-European immigrants. This was based on the idea of keeping these countries “white”, to protect their national culture (Hampshire, 2013, pp. 16-20). Today, this type of explicit discrimination is unthinkable in these countries, as well as in the immigrant-receiving countries of Europe. If Western European, Australian or North American politicians discriminate based on ethnicity or race today, they place themselves well beyond the limits of the acceptable discourse, according to Hansen & Koehler (2005, p. 626).

According to the features outlined above, Norway is a nation-state. The population is largely homogeneous, with a common historical background and a shared language and cultural traditions, even if it has become more multicultural over the past decades. Norway has also been a sovereign and independent state for over 100 years, with a clearly identified territory. In the post-war period, Norway built a strong welfare state, which is largely founded on trust between the citizens and the government. Demands are placed on the government to protect the nation-state and maintain a sustainable welfare-state. The need for restrictions in immigration policy is often discussed in relation to sustainability for the municipalities who receive immigrants, the effects it has on the welfare state and the level of trust in society (see: NOU 2017: 2, 2017).

### **2.2.2 Constitutionalism**

While the previous facet places demands on *restricting* immigration policy in liberal states, the constitutionalism-facet involves demands of *openness*. Following Hampshire’s argument, modern liberal states are constitutional, which means that the state follows the rule of law and derives its authority and legitimacy from law, as well as its limitations. Hampshire uses the term constitutionalism for this facet based on a claim that liberal states are built on codified constitutions that defines the limits of the power of the state. The facet also includes norms and principles that liberal states abide by, such a freedom, equality and universalistic human rights – meaning that rights are to apply not only to citizens of that state, but to all individuals. That is what makes this facet especially crucial in relation to immigration policy. Hampshire argued that all four of the facets that characterise a liberal state are important, but the constitutionalism-facet is “the essence of liberal statehood” (Hampshire, 2013, p. 44).

The constitutionalism-facet can be seen in relation to Christian Joppke’s argument in his article “Why liberal states accept unwanted immigration”(1998). In this article, Joppke investigated why liberal states accept immigration that is essentially ‘unwanted’, such as refugees, asylum seekers and family reunification. He found that this is due to a ‘self-limited sovereignty’ in



liberal states, based in part on recognition of and adherence to international human rights and other humanitarian commitments. Liberal states place moral and legal constraints on their right to self-determination as sovereign entities. Meanwhile, wealthy oil countries in the Middle-East, many of which are under authoritarian rule, have no problem keeping unwanted immigrants out, or sending them back where they came from. Indeed, Joppke argued that “unwanted immigration is inherent in the liberalness of liberal states” and that “liberalism has become the dominant Western idiom in the post-war period, indicating a respect for human rights and the rule of law” (1998, p. 293). This means that even if liberal states wish to restrict immigration and implement strict immigration policy, they have placed moral and legal restraints on themselves to do so by signing and following international law, such as the Refugee Convention and the Declaration of Human Rights.

Contrary to claims by some scholars that global constraints are conducive to limiting states’ ability to control migration (see: Sassen, 1996, ch. 3), Hampshire and Joppke shares the argument that it is not globalisation or other exogenous factors that undermine liberal states’ capacity to control migration. Instead, it is caused by self-imposed constraints and inherent characteristics in these states, such as liberal norms and principles (Hampshire, 2013, p. 37; Joppke, 1998, p. 268). Liberal norms are important both in the public discourse, and the political institutions of liberal states, and constitute the basis of what it means to be a liberal state, according to Hampshire (2013, p. 46).

While liberal norms are given great importance in liberal states, Matthew Gibney (2004) pointed to the fact that although the principle of asylum is highly valued in liberal states, much effort is put in place to deter asylum seekers and other ‘unwanted’ immigrants from ever reaching their borders, through such means as visa regimes and carrier sanctions. Gibney (2004, p. 2) called this a kind of ‘schizophrenia’ in Western responses to refugees and asylum seekers. The ‘schizophrenia’ of Western liberal states’ responses to refugees and asylum seekers can be seen as another expression of a liberal paradox of migration, a contradiction within the liberal state when it comes to handling immigration.

## **2.3 Clarification of terms**

Before proceeding with a contextualisation of the liberal paradox in the Norwegian parliament, it is useful to clarify the use of certain terms and concepts. A clarification of the terms used to describe immigrant groups is necessary because they are frequently used in discourse about refugee and asylum policy. As such, it is useful to be aware what each term entails, and how different immigrant groups places different demands on the governments of liberal states.

### **2.3.1 The Liberal State**

One term that is continuously used throughout this chapter is *the liberal state*. Liberalism, liberal states and liberal parties can have distinct meanings in different contexts, and it is thus necessary to specify what is meant by the term liberal state in this particular context. As Hampshire emphasised, his identification of the four facets that characterise a liberal state is not intended as a definition of a liberal state, because the presence of these facets vary considerably across states. However, some aspects of the facets described above can be helpful in showing what is meant with a liberal state in the context of this thesis.

The term liberal state is closely connected to the term liberal democracy, which can be defined as: “A democratic system of government in which individual rights and freedoms are officially recognized and protected, and the exercise of political power is limited by the rule of law.” (Oxford Dictionary, 2019). A liberal state is thus a state that is governed by a liberal democratic system, entailing a system of universal suffrage and free and fair elections, often through representative democracy. Moreover, the exercise of political authority is limited by the rule of law. Codified law limits what the government of a state can and cannot do, and there are protections against discrimination based on sex, religion, ethnicity or other features for a state to be called liberal. Furthermore, individual rights and freedoms are recognised and protected. In this thesis, the term *liberal state* should be understood in a similar way as *liberal democracy*. For the theoretical perspective of a liberal paradox to be applicable, it has to be used in the context of a liberal state.

### **2.3.2 Immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers**

It is useful to clarify what is meant by terms like immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers. Said in broad strokes, a migrant is a person who moves from one place to another. An emigrant leaves their original territory to reside in another, while an immigrant enters and resides within a country they were not originally a resident of. Thus, an immigrant is someone who moves

from one country to another, regardless of the reason for migrating or legal status of that person. Within the larger term of immigration lies terms such as refugees and asylum seekers.

The typical definition of a refugee derives from article 1 in the UN's Refugee Convention from 1951. Here, a person can be given the status of refugee if he or she:

[...] owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it (UNHCR, 2010, p. 14).

According to Matthew Gibney (2004, p. 7), this definition limits a refugee to mean a person who is outside their country of origin and is at the risk of persecution, which can exclude large groups of people who are forced to flee their homes, both within their own country and across international borders. Thus, many liberal democracies have expanded the definition to include all people who are forced to leave their homes even if they are not individually targeted, but have to flee due to more generalised violence, such as civil war or natural disasters. Thus, in his book *The Ethics and Politics of Asylum* (2004, p. 7), Gibney defined refugees as:

[...] people in need of a new state of residence, either temporarily or permanently, because if forced to return home or remain where they are they would – as a result of either the brutality or inadequacy of their state – be persecuted *or* seriously jeopardise their physical security or vital subsistence needs (original emphasis)

Gibney's definition is wider than the original definition derived from the Refugee Convention. Defining persons as refugees is different from defining them as immigrants, as the status of refugee entails specific rights. As such, it also demands more from the state that takes on the responsibility to protect them.

Asylum seekers make the same moral claims as refugees, but the implications of asylum seekers for the governments of liberal states are more complicated, both practically and morally (Gibney, 2004, p. 9). Asylum seekers are people who arrive at the borders of a state, making a claim that their lives are in danger should they be rejected or returned to their country of origin. The right to seek asylum is declared in article 14 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which states that "everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution" (Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948). Issues arise for governments of liberal states when processing asylum applications. First, it is the question of whether the state has a responsibility to prioritise people who have managed to arrive at the state's border over those who are in danger far away. Second, there is the question of determining whether the

asylum seekers have legitimate claims and should be granted asylum. To be an asylum seeker, a person simply has to claim that he or she is a refugee. This raises challenges for governments of liberal states, who wish to avoid allowing entrance to asylum seekers who do not have legitimate claims. The concern is that people will try to enter the state on false refugee claims, when they are in fact not refugees, but rather what is sometimes called *economic migrants*. While refugees seek asylum in need of protection from persecution or other life-threatening situations, economic migrants seek entrance based on a desire or need to improve their standard of living (Gibney, 2004, p. 10). It is important to note that there are large variations between economic migrants, where some are trying to avoid serious economic deprivation in their home country, while others are migrating from one affluent country to another due to lucrative job opportunities. One simplified way of distinguishing between refugees and economic migrants, is that economic migrants have a choice in whether they move or not, while refugees do not. While this is a way of distinguishing between the two on paper, it is not an easy task to determine the difference in practice. Escaping famine and extreme poverty are economic reasons for migration, but can be just as life threatening as political persecution (Gibney, 2004, p. 12). This creates another moral issue for the governments of liberal states, as some economic migrants have strong claims, even though they are not legally defined as refugees.

## **2.4 Contextualising the Liberal Paradox**

The theoretical perspective outlined in this chapter provides a possible explanation for why liberal states struggle when governing immigration policy. Furthermore, it provides an assumption about what parliamentary representatives perceive as challenging when debating and implementing refugee and asylum policy, namely that it is caused by the contradicting demands of constitutionalism and nationhood. The assumption is applicable to the Norwegian context as Norway is a liberal state according to the characteristics presented above. Norway is a representative democracy, with free and fair elections where all citizens over the age of 18 have the right to vote. The state follows the rule of law, and is a signatory to several humanitarian international agreements, such as the Declaration of Human Rights and the Refugee Convention. Norway is thus both a nation-state and a constitutional state. In other words, Norway ticks all the boxes in Hampshire's facets characterising modern liberal states, specifically the two facets that are the most relevant within the field of refugee and asylum policy. Thus, the liberal paradox of migration should apply to Norway, moreover, it should apply to the parliamentary representatives in this state. The role of the liberal paradox of migration in the Norwegian parliament will be addressed in chapter 6, contextualised in the

discussion of findings in the analysis. In the next chapter, I present a brief overview on recent developments in Norwegian refugee and asylum policy.

## **3 Refugee and asylum policy in Norway**

A presentation of the recent historical background of refugee and asylum policy in Norway is necessary to contextualise the situation, before proceeding with research methodology and the analysis. In this chapter, I start by presenting the UN Refugee Convention, arguably the most important international agreement within the field of asylum and refugee policy. It stipulates definitions of a refugee as well as the corresponding rights. This is followed by a brief presentation of the development on asylum and refugee policy in Norway, including recent restrictions and amendments in the Immigration Act.

According to the liberal paradox of migration, immigration policy is a contentious area because of inherent tensions in liberal states, placing contradicting demands on their governments. Liberal democracies have specific commitments to people who have fled their country of origin in search of protection, more so than towards regular migrants. People who are forced to flee their country of origin are called refugees, but problems often arise when it comes to assessing who can be given the status of refugee. The typical way of evaluating this is by referring to the UN Refugee Convention.

### **3.1 The Refugee Convention**

The Convention relating to the Status of Refugees was signed in Geneva in 1951, two years after the United Nations established the High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). This came as a consequence of the need for protection of the millions of people who were displaced by the Second World War. As mentioned in the previous chapter, article 1 in the Refugee Convention defines a refugee as a person who has a well-founded fear of being persecuted due to their race, religion, nationality, membership in a social group or political opinion. Furthermore, the person is outside of their country of origin, and is unwilling to return due to this fear of persecution (UNHCR, 2010, p. 14). Originally, the convention only applied to events occurring before 1951, and only within Europe. The 1967 Protocol removed these temporal and geographical limitations.

For several years after the end of the Second World War, the subject of refugees was uncontroversial, and even often celebrated by liberal states who were ready to take them in (Hampshire, 2013, p. 70). This changed, however, when the number of refugees increased as the decades passed. Liberal states are bound by their obligations, such as the Refugee Convention, to provide asylum to people in need of protection. Nevertheless, as mentioned in

the previous chapter, most liberal states have during the last decades taken substantial measures to prevent asylum seekers from arriving at their borders. This includes visa requirements, border control, information campaigns and restrictions to welfare and housing (Brochmann, 1999, p. 8).

An important section of the Refugee Convention is article 33. It contains the principle of non-refoulement which ascertains that no state can return a person to a country where his or her life or freedom would be at stake (UNHCR, 2010, p. 30). However, many liberal states operate with so-called 'safe third-countries'. Here, an asylum seeker can be returned to a potential third country he or she has travelled through, if that country is deemed to be safe (Hampshire, 2013, p. 70). This particular principle is often understood and interpreted differently from state to state. Furthermore, according to the internal flight alternative (IFA), an asylum seeker can be returned to their country of origin if he or she is in danger of prosecution only in certain areas of the country. The IFA grants the state a right to return refugees to their country of origin if they can be safe in another area of the country than they originally came from. This is not a part of the 1951 convention, but is practiced by several countries – including Norway (Schultz, 2017, p. 2).

There are few conventions that are interpreted and applied on such a regular basis as the Refugee Convention. There is, however, no international oversight of the convention, and no clear and common interpretation of it. The UNHCR plays a coordinating role but does not have the power to sanction potential breaches or to decide how the articles in the Convention are meant to be understood (Hathaway, North, & Pobjoy, 2013, p. 324). It can thus be interpreted differently from state to state. Even though the convention gives the immigrant a right to apply for asylum, it is up to each state to assess whether the applicant can be granted asylum or not.

### **3.2 Development of Norwegian refugee and asylum policy**

Norway ratified the Refugee Convention in 1952 (Arbeids- og sosialdepartementet, 2017, p. 67). At that point, there were almost no immigrants in Norway. This changed towards the end of the 1960s, and 1967 marked the first year where Norway had more immigrants than emigrants (Vassenden, 2012). This period was mostly characterised by labour immigration. In the 1980s, there was a change in the immigration pattern in Norway. The field of immigration was enlarging, and individual refugees and asylum seekers became more common. Before 1980, refugees were rarely addressed in immigration politics. As more and more asylum seekers arrived, there was need for a more coherent, comprehensive immigration governance. In 1988,

the Norwegian Directorate of Immigration (UDI) was established, with the task of implementing immigration policies. This included handling worker's permits, residency, political asylum, family reunification and citizenship. In addition, the directorate was also responsible for the resettling of refugees in Norwegian municipalities, information, interpretation and long-term integration. Refugee policy went from being mainly a humanitarian concern to becoming a case for regular control governance (Brochmann, 2003a, pp. 166-168). In the early 1990s, war broke out in Europe. The Yugoslav wars created large waves of refugees and displaced persons all over the continent, with approximately 700 000 refugees in Western Europe (Young, 2001, p. 783). 14 000 fled from Bosnia Hercegovina to Norway during the war, with 6 000 people arriving in 1993 (Dzamarija, 2016). In the 1980s, the interpretation of the Refugee Convention, stating that a person is to be given the status of refugee if he or she is outside their origin country, and is individually prosecuted by his or her state's government, was deemed to be insufficient. This became especially apparent during the Yugoslav wars when several people were targeted as a group, not as individuals, through civil war. It thus became more and more common to grant people residence on humanitarian grounds rather than political asylum, both in Norway and in the rest of Europe. The Norwegian government wanted to limit the granting of residence based on humanitarian grounds, and implemented measures to restrict illegitimate asylum seekers. Such measures included more visa requirements, fining of transport companies, and limited access to visitation visas (Brochmann, 2003b, p. 298).

During this time, several Western democracies realised that they needed to work more on the prevention of refugee – and humanitarian crises to decrease the number of arriving immigrants. Prevention included more aid, conflict resolution, international cooperation and support of democracy and human rights. Norway was one of the countries who quickly developed this type of international policy (Brochmann, 2003b, p. 299).

### **3.3 Restrictions in asylum policies 2008-2016**

The Yugoslav wars in the 1990s marked a time when many refugees and asylum seekers arrived in Norway, while another large increase happened in 2008-2009. In 2008 the number of asylum applications was approximately 14 400 (Utlendingsdirektoratet, 2008, p. 19). This was a much larger influx of refugees and asylum seekers than what Norwegian authorities had estimated. In late 2007, the estimated number of predicted arrivals in 2008 was 5 500. However, during the spring, the number of arrivals increased. The estimated number was adjusted to 10 500 in May, and again to 15 000 in June of 2008 (Brekke & Aarset, 2009, p. 51). As a reaction to this, the



then current red-green government, consisting of centre, centre-left and left-wing political parties, the Centre Party, the Labour Party, and the Socialist Left Party, implemented a series of restrictions in the asylum policy, a 13-point plan to limit the influx of asylum seekers (NRK, 2008). The reasoning behind these restrictions was to limit the amount of asylum seekers without legitimate claims, an issue that becomes salient in the parliamentary debates of the analysis, as will be shown in chapter 5. The restrictions also included amendments in the laws that decide what is to be perceived as a legitimate claim. The granting of residency based on humanitarian grounds was to be individually assessed, rather than group-based. Furthermore, it was stated in the 13 points that Norwegian refugee and asylum policy should be decided by Norwegian authorities, a possible indication that self-determination was to be prioritised over international commitments.

The 13-point plan resulted in conflict within the red-green government as the Socialist Left Party chose to take dissidence on one of the 13 points in the plan, while stating political disagreement in seven of the other points (NRK, 2008). In 2009, there was a large increase in the number of unaccompanied minors seeking asylum, mainly coming from Afghanistan (Arbeids- og inkluderingsdepartementet, 2009, pp. 26-27). As of May 1<sup>st</sup>, 2009, there was an amendment to the Immigration Act, based on one of the 13 points, which allowed for unaccompanied minors between the ages 16 and 18 to be granted temporary residence up until the age of 18, if there were no other grounds for granting residency than the fact that the minor was without a proper caregiver in their country of origin. This permit was not renewable, and did not constitute grounds for family reunification (Justis- og beredskapsdepartementet, 2016, p. 55).

In 2015, there was a massive increase in the number of refugees and immigrants arriving in Europe. This was largely a result of the devastating consequences of the Syrian civil war. In 2011, pro-democracy protests in the wake of the Arab spring were violently repressed in Syria, causing an insurgency. This insurgency soon developed into full-fledged civil war. In 2015, the number of internally displaced people in Syria reached over 6,6 million people (Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, 2016, p. 37). In addition to internally displacing millions of people, the war also caused a large influx of refugees crossing international borders. Many of these fled to neighbouring countries, such as Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan, putting immense pressure on their reception apparatuses (UNHCR, 2018b). In 2015, over one million refugees and migrants fled to Europe by crossing the Mediterranean Sea, around half of them were Syrian. This year marked the highest number of refugees displaced by war and conflict in

Europe since the Yugoslav wars (Clayton & Holland, 2015). This has become known as the ‘refugee crisis’, or the ‘Syrian refugee crisis’, which is widely considered to be the largest humanitarian crisis since the Second World War (World Economic Forum, 2015).

The ‘refugee crisis’ also affected Norway. The state received 31 145 asylum applications in 2015, which is the highest yearly number to date. In comparison, the number for the previous year was 11 480 (Utlendingsdirektoratet, 2015). As a response to this, the government again implemented several restrictions in their asylum policies. Since the last large increase of arriving refugees in 2008, the government constellation in Norway had changed. In the 2013 national elections, a new government was elected, shifting power from the centre-left to the right. The new minority coalition government consisted of the Progress Party and The Conservatives, with the Christian Democrats and The Liberals as supporting parties. The Progress party often sparks debate, both in the public sphere and in parliament, due to their explicit restrictive view on immigration politics. In spite of a seemingly polarised view in the parliament regarding this subject, a majority of all the parliament parties came to an agreement which has become known as the ‘asylum settlement’ (*asylforliket*) in late 2015. Among several points, the settlement included decisions to prioritise quick returns of rejected asylum seekers, increased demands placed on asylum seekers, and strengthening of the Directorate of Immigration (UDI). Moreover, the settlement included suggestions to the government of imposing more restrictions on family reunification and increasing the level of aid to Southern European reception sites (Verdens Gang, 2015). The settlement involved six of the eight political parties represented in parliament at the time: the Labour Party, the Liberals, the Progress party, the Christian Democrats, the Centre Party and the Conservatives (Stortinget, 2016). The most significant decision following the large influx of refugees in 2015 was perhaps the removal of the so-called reasonableness criterion (*rimelighetsvilkåret*), which will be further detailed below.

### **3.3.1 The Storskog case**

Following the ‘refugee crisis’ in 2015, an unexpected case unfolded on the Norwegian-Russian border. A large number of asylum seekers started to enter Norway from Russia at the border station of Storskog in Norway’s northernmost county, Finnmark. The situation was not predicted by the government, and the reception capacity at this station was low. Before 2015, there were on average ten asylum seekers coming through this station each year. By the end of 2015, over 5 000 people had arrived in Norway through Storskog (Justis- og beredskapsdepartementet, 2015a). This prompted the government to make quick decisions,

based on an expressed need to restrict the number of illegitimate asylum applications. The Directorate of Immigration was instructed by the Justice Department to assess whether applications made by those arriving at Storskog could be exempt from being processed, i.e., if they could be rejected. The Directorate was also instructed to prioritise illegitimate applications, and temporary amendments in the Immigration Act were made. Prior to these amendments, the state could only refuse to consider an asylum application if the person came from a country where he or she would not be prosecuted, and only if the person could apply for asylum in that country. In the amendments, the requirement of the person being able to apply for asylum in the country they travelled from, was removed. Thus, the government could send people back to Russia without assessing whether the person could apply for asylum there. The Justice Department was also granted the right to instruct the Immigration Appeals Board (*Utlendingsnemnda*) the same way they could instruct the Directorate of Immigration, a right they used to instruct the board not to process asylum applications from people arriving from Russia (Justis- og beredskapsdepartementet, 2015b, p. 6).

### **3.3.2 Removal of the reasonableness criterion and ‘the October Children’**

In a consultation paper (*høringsnotat*) from the Department of Justice of December 2015, it was suggested to revoke a part of paragraph 28 in the Immigration Act, the reasonableness criterion. Originally, the paragraph stated that asylum seekers could not be returned to their country of origin if it was ‘unreasonable’ to do so, even if “he or she can have ‘effective protection’ in another part of the country than the area he or she travelled from” (Justis- og beredskapsdepartementet, 2015c, p. 60 (my translation)). The consultation paper was based on a claim that the reasonableness criterion had led to more people being given the status as refugees than what international law requires (Justis- og beredskapsdepartementet, 2015c, pp. 60-61).

The removal of the reasonableness criterion had large consequences in 2017 based on the restrictions made in 2009, regarding temporary residence permits for unaccompanied minors seeking asylum. Before the criterion was removed, unaccompanied minor asylum seekers were not returned to internal flight in their home country because this was seen as “unreasonable”. When the criterion was removed, several unaccompanied minors could be returned to Afghanistan upon turning 18 years old, as parts of Afghanistan were deemed to be safe by the Norwegian government. These instances have been called the case of the ‘October children’ in the media. For many of the unaccompanied minors arriving in Norway in the fall of 2015, it was not possible to determine identity and age. Thus, everyone who were around the age of 16

upon arrival in October, were given a “birth date” at the time of arrival. These children therefore turned 18 in October of 2017 – and are called the ‘October children’, even though some arrived before and after this month (Aftenposten, 2017).

A letter from UNHCRs Regional Representation for Northern Europe provided observations and recommendations on the proposed amendments to the Immigration Act in 2015. Here, the Norwegian government was to a great extent criticised for violating the Refugee Convention on several points, the case of removal of the reasonableness criterion. They recommended not to remove the reasonableness criterion from the Immigration Act, as an evaluation of reasonableness is needed for return to internal flight to be in accordance with the Refugee Convention of 1951 (UNHCR, 2016, p. 27). The Norwegian Organisation for Asylum Seekers (NOAS) was also critical of the amendments made, arguing that a removal of the reasonableness criterion was in violation of obligations the Norwegian government has to the Refugee Convention (Møkkelgjerd, 2017). Both NOAS and the UNHCRs Regional Representation for Northern Europe were also critical of the measures taken in relation to the Storskog case (NOAS, 2016, pp. 7-8; UNHCR, 2016, p. 10).

The measures that were implemented in the autumn of 2015 were followed up in 2016, when several of the restrictions were passed as permanent amendments in the Immigration Act through a parliamentary majority. These restrictions included permanent removal of the reasonableness criterion in the internal flight alternative (IFA), shorter deadlines for asylum applications that were perceived as clearly illegitimate, integration demands for permanent residency permits and stricter evidence demands for asylum claims. A parliamentary representative stated that this would be the strictest policy that Norway ever has had within this field (NRK, 2016).

The development in the field of immigration politics in Norway has changed substantially over a relatively short period. The Refugee Convention was ratified in 1952, a time when refugees and asylum seekers was not a large challenge in Europe, and their arrival was celebrated. As time went on, immigrants started to outnumber emigrants in Norway in the late 1960s. Since then, war, conflict and poor development in third-world countries has kept forcing people to flee their homelands, paired with the fact that an ever more globalising world has made it easier to communicate and cross international borders. This, in turn, has led to more and more migration, especially to wealthy Western liberal democratic states, including Norway. Large influxes in both 2008 and 2015 resulted in changes and restrictions in the Immigration Act. In this period, rapid decisions and amendments in the legal framework of refugee and asylum

policy were made. The Norwegian authorities were heavily criticised by both the UNHCR and other organisations for violating their commitments to international law, especially in the aftermath of the Syrian ‘refugee crisis’. This constitutes the contextual background for the period of analysis in this thesis. In the following chapter I will present the research methodology I have chosen to conduct the analysis, namely discourse analysis.

## 4 Methodology

The research question I seek to answer in this thesis revolves around what discourses that are prevalent or dominant in the Norwegian parliament, and potential political implications that follow. The wording of the research question implies what type of research method I have intended to use to answer this question, namely discourse analysis. As discourse analysis is a qualitative research method that is based in social constructivism, or theories of how the world is socially constructed, I present the theoretical foundations of this method in this chapter, including epistemological and ontological premises. Next, I go through definitions of discourse and discourse analysis, as well as various approaches to the methodology. Then, I will discuss the strengths and weaknesses of this method, including thoughts on reliability and validity. From there I will present how I have conducted the analysis, with data selection and choices of methodological tools.

Before elaborating on what this method entails, I will briefly discuss potential alternative methods that could have been used in this context. Possible research methods that come to mind are idea analysis, rhetorical analysis or quantitative content analysis. Idea analysis is the qualitative, systematic study of ideas in text, ideas that can be connected to actors as well as movements. As such, idea analysis could have been used to look into what type of ideas the parliamentary representatives attach themselves to when debating asylum and refugee policy. Rhetorical analysis could have been used to see what argumentative techniques and modes of persuasion the representatives use to promote their views and arguments (see Bratberg, 2017, pp. 67-97, 126-154). Quantitative content analysis could also have been employed. This method entails measuring the occurrence of certain elements in text. These measurements are in turn the object of statistical analysis (Bratberg, 2017, p. 101). This type of analysis could for example have been used to look into the salience of the issue of refugee and asylum policy over time in the Norwegian parliament.

Despite these potential alternatives to textual analysis, I have chosen discourse analysis as the methodology for this thesis. Idea analysis arguably has a more actor-oriented focus, and rhetorical analysis focuses on the study of convincing language which is also largely actor-oriented. Quantitative content analysis, on the other hand, which can be fruitful in analysing the volatile salience of an issue such as refugee policy, does not involve analysing the deeper meaning of the statements made. The goal of this thesis is to uncover how parliamentary politicians *collectively* attach meaning and direction to the field of asylum and refugee policy,

without placing too much focus on the actors who voice these statements. Instead, more focus will be placed on the structure of collective meaning-making, which in turn constitutes the basis for social action. Discourse analysis also makes it possible to explore what lies behind the statements made, by uncovering naturalised facts and truth claims. Before proceeding with sections on how I selected and coded the data material, it is necessary to clarify and elaborate on what discourse and discourse analysis is, as it is both a research method *and* a methodology, not just a method that can be used detached from its theoretical basis (Phillips & Hardy, 2002, p. 5).

Discourse analysis is part of the interpretive social sciences and can be viewed as a product of the so-called ‘linguistic turn’ of the 1990s. In this period, the social sciences started to move towards more interpretive science, in contrast to the more positivist-based science that strives to achieve objectivity and law-like causality within social science research (Bratberg, 2017, p. 18). It is necessary to clarify certain assumptions that lie behind discourse analysis, ontologically and epistemologically, before commencing the actual analysis of parliamentary debates regarding refugee and asylum policy. It is important to note that while discourse analysis can be applied to a wide array of research, it is both a theory and a method, and it should not be applied without acknowledging certain underlying premises (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 4). Discourse analysis does not just include a set of techniques for conducting structured qualitative analysis; it also involves certain assumptions and premises about the constructive role of language.

#### **4.1 Social Constructivism**

Discourse analysis is one of several approaches based in social constructivism – theories about culture and society. Although there is a range of different approaches within social constructivism, certain premises are shared by all of them. These premises include the assumption that there is no such thing as an objective social reality that can be grasped at any point in time. Furthermore, our worldviews change over time. What was fixed meaning in a given point of time, might not be the same years later. The word *democracy* serves as an example. When talking about the origins of democracy, ancient Greece is often mentioned. However, the ancient Greek democracy was hardly democratic by modern standards (Dunn & Neumann, 2016, p. 119). Thus, the basic assumptions of what constitutes a democratic polity changed over time. Finally, there is a link between knowledge and social action. In some worldviews, certain actions are accepted and reasonable, whereas others are unthinkable.

Different understandings of the world lead to different actions (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, pp. 4-5, 21). These are premises that are shared by all social constructivist approaches.

## **4.2 What is discourse?**

The term discourse is used in different contexts. It is therefore necessary to clarify what is meant by the term in this particular thesis. Marianne Jørgensen and Louise Phillips (2002, p. 1) suggest a preliminary definition as “a particular way of talking about and understanding the world (or an aspect of the world)”. Øivind Bratberg provides another explanation: “Discourse is both the concrete things that are being said, and the framework for what is reasonable to think and believe in a given community” (2017, p. 34 (my translation)). Kevin Dunn and Iver Neumann define the term discourse as “systems of meaning-production that fix meaning, however temporarily, and enable us to make sense of the world and to act within it” (2016, p. 2). This last definition underscores one of the premises of social constructivism, that our worldviews change over time so that fixation of meaning is only temporary. Thus, the term discourse should be understood in this thesis as collective meaning-making in a particular context – which in this case is refugee and asylum policy in the Norwegian parliament within a given time span. Discourses construct social reality through the use of language, and because language is not stable, meaning can never be fixed permanently (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 6). That is why it is interesting to analyse discourses over time, even a shorter time span like in this thesis, to see if the dominating discourses on asylum and refugee policy change due to an altered worldview, or if what is deemed reasonable and acceptable to say is changed.

## **4.3 What is discourse analysis?**

As mentioned above, assumptions of ontology and epistemology are important for discourse analysis. As discourse analysis has been defined as ‘systems of meaning-production’, epistemology is the most crucial element for this type of analysis – the theory and study of knowledge. It refers to how we obtain knowledge of the social world. Ontology, on the other hand, is the philosophical study of what the world is made up of. Within discourse analysis, it is presumed that the social world is in continuous flux, that it is constantly changing (Dunn & Neumann, 2016, p. 19). It is presumed that language constructs the world, and so it is through language that knowledge about the world can be obtained. The social reality can only be grasped through discourses, so discourses have to be the object of analysis. The goal is not to uncover what people mean when they express themselves – it is impossible to find out what people actually think and mean through discourse analysis or any other research method for that matter. The purpose is rather to highlight statements that are naturalised and presented as common



knowledge or common sense, through looking at the construction of arguments and the choice of words and terminology (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 21). To avoid politically sensitive specifications, politicians often use the word *semantics* when confronted with criticism related to how certain statements are phrased – because it is “just semantics”. However, semantics is crucial in politics, because it is the study of meaning in language, and clarification of meaning is essential for discourse analysis (Chilton, 2004, p. 7). Thus, discourse analysis is a close examination of language in use. It is about examining how social reality is constructed, thereby also showing how particular actions are made possible (Dunn & Neumann, 2016, p. 4).

While discourses can provide a framework for *understanding* the world, causality, or *explanation*, is not a goal in discourse analysis in the same way as in more positivist-inspired social scientific research. However, discursive struggles are a part of changing and reproducing the social world. According to Hansen and Koehler (2005, p. 625), politics of immigration is a battle of discourses, in which policy outcome reflects the ‘triumphant’ discourse. A discourse analyst investigates the dominating or hegemonic discourses to highlight their structure of meaning, but also how it is connected to implementing practices and actions. This makes it particularly suitable when analysing parliamentary debate, as the parliament is responsible for passing laws for implementation. Discourses establish preconditions for the possibility of certain actions, rather than trying to explain why certain actions are made (Dunn & Neumann, 2016, p. 51; Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 9).

#### **4.3.1 Approaches to discourse analysis**

There are several approaches to discourse analysis, and each of them are limited in terms of clear-cut guidelines for how it should be done. One way of labelling two influential strands of research is critical discourse analysis, or CDA, as presented by Norman Fairclough (see: Fairclough, 1992, 2003), and poststructuralism or discourse theory, often represented by Laclau and Mouffe’s theories (see: Laclau & Mouffe, 2001). Although these two versions of discourse analysis share the underlying premises of social constructivism and the role of language in the social world, they diverge on certain aspects in the approach to discourse analysis. A main difference between CDA and poststructuralism is the view on discursive dimensions in the social world. In poststructuralism, there is no distinction between the discursive and the non-discursive dimensions. Discourse permeates life; it frames the world by attaching meaning to it. In CDA on the other hand, it is assumed that there is a distinction between the discursive and the extra-discursive or non-discursive world. Fairclough, for example, keeps the concept of discourse, which includes text, talk and gestures, separated from other types of social practice.

In CDA, discourses are seen as both constitutive and constituted of the social world. In poststructuralism, or discourse theory, discourse itself completely constitutes the world (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, pp. 19-20).

Another important difference between these two approaches to discourse analysis, is the perspective on what can be accomplished through the analysis, more specifically whether it is feasible to make causal inferences. In CDA, due to the distinction between the discursive and the non-discursive dimension, there is a perception that empirical claims of causality are achievable. Given that the non-discursive dimension exists, meaning is constant and identifiable through discourse. Thus, discourses can have causal effects, and they can be analysed through the study of language. This perception is rejected by poststructuralists (Dunn & Neumann, 2016, pp. 35-36). However, even though the notion of the possibility of making causal inferences is rejected by poststructuralists, it is still possible to assess the implications of discourses because the hegemonic or dominant discourses can establish the preconditions for certain actions (Bratberg, 2017, p. 59). Even though I am not explicitly conducting the analysis in Fairclough's critical discourse analytical approach, the analysis is still critical in the way that it questions knowledge that is taken for granted, and specifically seeks to shed light on these types of knowledge or truth claims. However, as I do not consider elements of the non-discursive or extra-discursive dimension that characterises the CDA-approach, the method applied in this analysis is arguably situated closer to the poststructuralist approach.

Although there are certain distinctions between these two approaches to discourse analysis, the relationship between them is not mutually exclusive. Not only is it possible to work across the approaches, it is even encouraged. Discourse theory, for example, is comprehensive and does not entail many specific methodological tools. Hence, it is useful to supplement it with methods from other approaches. The analyst can combine elements from different discourse analytical approaches so that it is the best fit for the particular research question (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, pp. 4, 24). In this thesis, I will be using the methodological tools I find the most suitable for my research question, which enables an eclectic form of analysis. These tools will be further elaborated below. I will be taking in elements from different approaches, rather than explicitly stating that I adhere to any of them.

## **4.4 Challenges and strengths**

When using an interpretive research method such as discourse analysis, it is important that I am aware of both the limitations and strengths it implies. Measures of scientific rigour, such as reliability and validity, are obvious challenges, as it is with all forms of interpretive social science. These concepts have to be viewed in a broader context in this thesis – and not by positivist standards. However, there are other challenges related to the use of discourse analysis as a method. My choices of empirical material, theoretical framework and analytical focus all affect the scientific outcome. Thus, the conclusions based on these choices should reflect limitations caused by them. In spite of these challenges, there are also important strengths related to the use of discourse analysis as a research method. Most important is perhaps the potential for hypothesis-generation that discourse analysis provides. ‘Cultural competence’ is also an essential prerequisite, that involves both a strength and a weakness. All of these challenges and advantages will be presented in the following sections. The choice of research method when performing a scientific study always involves trade-offs between advantages and disadvantages. Nevertheless, I believe that the strengths of my choice of method justify its application in this thesis.

### **4.4.1 Reliability and validity – impossible standards for discourse analysis?**

Measures of scientific rigour such as reliability and validity are a challenge for discourse analysis as a method, as these measures have primarily been devised for research strategies where operationalisation, causality and generalisation are more tangible. According to King, Keohane and Verba (1994, p. 25), validity refers to whether the research is measuring what it is supposed to measure. The conclusions need to be based on valid data. In positivist research, validity is achieved through clearly defined causal relationships. This is a challenge for discourse analysis because this type of analysis is based on the researcher’s subjective interpretations of the data material – objective observations of data are not possible due to the social constructivist underlying premises. Identifying clear causal relationships is not the goal; it is about interpretation rather than explanation. Reliability can be understood as a type of replicability. A research project is reliable if it can be repeated by another researcher and yield the same results (King et al., 1994, p. 25). It is about the consistency of measurement. Since discourse analysis is based on subjective interpretations of data, reliability is hard to achieve. The ontological and epistemological assumptions that underlie discourse analysis are different from positivist approaches to scientific research. These assumptions imply that data cannot be neutrally observed, the social world is in constant flux, and the researcher is a part of this social

world. Thus, discourse analysis can never be reliable or valid by stringent positivist standards. As such, it is often criticised from a positivist perspective (Bratberg, 2017, pp. 62-63).

None of this is to say that discourse analysis as a method is not scientific. Rather, it is not scientific by strict positivist standards. If, however, the concept of validity is understood in a broader sense, it applies to discourse analysis as well. One way of achieving a form of validity is through the creation of an analytical pattern, a way of presenting the empirical data that the reader perceives as reliable and credible, or valid. In the analysis, I have done this by identifying discourses and showing the interaction between them throughout the period. According to Rosalind Gill (2000, p. 187), a way of ensuring strengthened validity in the analysis is through “deviant case analysis”; understood here as a detailed investigation of observations that do not match the identified patterns in the analysis, which can either disconfirm or improve the pattern. During the coding process, I have thus been conscious about possible examples that do not match my initial patterns, to remain unbiased and inductive. Transparency, coherency and clarity in the analysis are essential to achieve validity. It should be clarified how interpretations of the data are made, and what these interpretations are based on. These interpretations should then be sufficiently documented and illustrated by using relevant quotes and examples from the text. Furthermore, analytical claims made in the text should be coherent to be perceived as valid for the reader (Bratberg, 2017, p. 63; Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 125). Transparency and clarity are also essential in the selection of texts used as data material. In this thesis, it is imperative that I as a researcher am clear and transparent in my interpretation of the statements made in the chosen parliamentary debates.

#### **4.4.2 Lost in translation?**

Since discourse analysis can be described as the close study of language, it could be seen as a limitation that my data material is in Norwegian, while this thesis is written in English. As such, all quotes and excerpts are translated by me. This involves running a risk of losing certain linguistic nuances. It is not always possible to directly translate all the quotes, and some of them have to be slightly modified to make sense in English. This particular limitation of translation is addressed by being explicit about this issue so that the reader is aware that translations are made and interpreted by me. Furthermore, I have included precise references and citations throughout the text, as well as in the bibliography, so that the reader has easy access to the original material to see if they find the translations accurate and appropriate. In some cases, I have also included the original wording in parentheses, to remain clear about the intention of the translation throughout the analysis.

#### **4.4.3 Potential for hypothesis-generation**

An important strength of using discourse analysis as a research method is its hypothesis-generating potential. Nelson Phillips and Cynthia Hardy (2002, p. 16) argue that discourse analysis provides important contributions by increasing plurality in social scientific research and incorporating the linguistic turn that shifted focus more to the constructive role of language in the social world. As such, discourse analysis is an important part of applying the increased focus on the constructive role of language in social scientific research. Concerning this particular thesis, the underlying premises of the constructive role of language and its implications for social action provides an assumption that discourses on refugee and asylum policy have an impact on political action in this field. Parliamentary discourses are especially relevant, as the parliament is the institution where law and policy are suggested, debated and approved or dismissed. Investigating and revealing possible links between the use of language through discourses and the following implications in the form of social action can yield fruitful findings of how language, in this case political discourse, can shape political action. As such, a strength of discourse analysis is its hypothesis-generating potential. By challenging and revealing naturalised knowledge and truth claims, subsequent implications can be deduced. However, it is important to repeat the fact that the goal of discourse analysis is not to explain social phenomena through causal relationships. Nevertheless, discourse analytical studies can provide useful hypotheses to build from (Bratberg, 2017, p. 59).

#### **4.4.4 Cultural competence**

According to Neumann (2008, p. 63), a helpful prerequisite when conducting discourse analysis is ‘cultural competence’, which is provided through existing knowledge about the topic at hand. Being Norwegian, I have existing knowledge about the Norwegian parliament, how it functions as an institution, and what the political landscape looks like in terms of what the represented parties typically stand for in their policies. The more knowledge I have about the topic before starting the analysis, the more specific the research can be. However, there is a trade-off to the benefit of cultural competence. Since discourse analysis is about uncovering naturalised knowledge and truth in collective meaning-making, I run the risk of not seeing these naturalised facts as I am myself a part of the culture. I need to keep myself distanced from the discourses to avoid missing out on naturalised facts that I otherwise would take for granted. In order to mitigate this challenge, I have chosen textual tools for the analysis that are particularly useful for uncovering knowledge that is taken for granted, as well as how the arguments in the

statements are constructed through the use of certain adjectives and adverbs connected to nouns. These textual mechanisms will be further elaborated in section 4.7.

#### **4.5 Data selection**

Large amounts of data material could be considered relevant for a textual analysis of discourses on refugee and asylum policy. Material such as political speeches, media statements and party programmes immediately come to mind. It is virtually impossible to ascertain where the limits of the data material for this type of analysis is. However, as my research question revolves around the dominant discourses of the Norwegian *parliament*, the first step of the data selection delimits itself. While the data material could have included other parliamentary sources, such as hearing notes or government proposals, I have chosen to delimit the scope to parliamentary debates regarding asylum and refugee policy exclusively. Parliamentary debates are distinct from textual sources such as media statements, in that the representatives usually are well-prepared. The representatives know in advance what they want to front in the debate, and how to represent their party's view. It is only in direct interactions, such as in remarks or replies following main speeches in the debate (*replikkordskifte*), more spontaneous exchanges can occur (van Dijk, 1997, pp. 35-36). Thus, parliamentary debates can give interesting insights both in terms of prepared statements and more spontaneous reactions to main speeches. Parliamentary representatives are also aware of the fact that everything they say in the debates is written down, the minutes from the debates are approximately verbatim. These minutes are in turn published online. Hence, the statements should be well-formulated and solidly grounded. In terms of discourses, defined as what is reasonable and acceptable to say in a given context, the arguments made the statements show where the limits of the discourses go. Furthermore, there are strict rules within the Norwegian parliament regarding the use of language. In paragraph 55 in the order of business of the parliament, it is stated that "Inappropriate or humiliating behaviour or speech is not permitted. Such behaviour or speech shall be addressed by the president" (Stortinget, 2017 (my translation)). Thus, there are certain rules about what is allowed to say about political opponents and their policies. This enables the statements in the debates to remain civil and to the point, which arguably creates a good basis for discourse analysis of fundamental views on asylum and refugee policy.

As the Norwegian parliamentary debates are meticulously transcribed and published online on the parliament's websites, the problem is not gaining access to the debates. Instead, the challenge is selecting which ones to analyse. Due to constraints in terms of both time and length of this thesis, certain delimitations had to be made. A part of the research question revolves

around whether the Syrian ‘refugee crisis’ of 2015 had an impact on parliamentary discourses in Norway, as well as looking at what discourses are dominant. Thus, I needed to look at debates regarding asylum and refugee policies both before and after the ‘refugee crisis’ of the autumn of 2015 to be able to make comparisons. As previously mentioned, transcribed minutes from plenary debates are published continuously on the parliament’s websites in pdf-format. These minutes are easily accessible through the website’s search engine. As I wanted debates regarding asylum and refugee policy specifically, and not immigration policy generally, I used keywords such as ‘asylum’ and ‘refugee(s)’ when searching through the debates. Immigration is a large policy field, which includes such things as labour immigration and integration, as well as refugee policy. These aspects of immigration policy are not relevant to the research question, and is as such not part of the selected data material. By filtering the search on relevant keywords, I was able to decrease the amount of data quickly. I also filtered the results based on the delimitations made in time, by looking at debates from the years 2008-2016. Subsequently, I read through all of the relevant debates from this period. I wanted to include debates of a certain length, as well as sufficient representation from political parties to avoid determining dominating discourses based on statements made by a small number of representatives. Furthermore, I tried to find debates that revolved around matters where it could be assumed that the representatives made statements about their general and fundamental views on refugee and asylum policy, as opposed to statements related to specific cases or aspects of these policies. Following this process, I argue that the selected texts are sufficiently representative for discourses on refugee and asylum policy in this particular period.

In the years 2008, 2013 and 2016, the Norwegian Immigration Act was debated. I find this to be a relevant matter when the purpose is to analyse collective meaning-making on refugee and asylum policy. Going back to the background chapter, I elaborated on how restrictions were implemented in refugee and asylum policies both in 2008/2009 and in 2015/2016. As such, it can be assumed that fundamental views on these matters are expressed in debates regarding the Immigration Act during this period. This incorporates coherence within the data material, which in turn heightens the validity of the analysis. In addition, a debate from 2014 addressed the matter of receiving more Syrian refugees due to the humanitarian crisis that was unfolding. I chose to add this to include views on the situation before the influx hit its peak the following year. I chose not to include any texts from 2015, both because I wanted to see how the discourses were shaped *before* and *after* the impact of the ‘refugee crisis’, not during, and also because there simply were not many relevant debates regarding these issues that year. Measures

and restrictions were to a large extent implemented by the government without being processed in parliamentary committees or debates during the peak of the ‘refugee crisis’ in the autumn of 2015 (NRK, 2015).

#### 4.5.1 Overview of selected debates

An overview of the selected debates is presented in table 1. All excerpts and quotations referred to in the analysis are gathered from these four debates. Links to each full debate are provided in the bibliography.

*Table 1.* Selected debates for analysis

<b>Date</b>	<b>Topic of debate</b>	<b>Case number</b>	<b>Pages</b>
08.04.2008	1. New Immigration Act 2. Amendments in the Immigration Act. 3. Representative proposal about amendments in the Immigration Act.	1-3	291 - 321
17.06.2013	Immigration policy aims and amendments in the Immigration Act	17	4415 - 4425
10.06.2014	Representative proposal to receive more Syrian refugees.	9	3036 - 4042
10.06.2016	1. Changes in the Immigration Act (restrictions II) 2. Amendments in the Immigration Act	1-2	4072 - 4103

*Source: Stortingstidene, 2008, 2013, 2014, 2016.*

#### 4.6 Coding the data material

Discourse analysis, or the close study of language in use, involves a substantial amount of reading texts. When I finished delimiting the data material and selected the debates to analyse, the first step in the analytical process was to read and re-read the texts several times in order to familiarise myself with the data. This was a crucial step before I started the actual coding. Initially, the coding was to a large extent determined by my research question. As I wanted to find statements showing how parliamentary representatives collectively understand and interpret asylum and refugee policy, I tried to look specifically for examples in the text that addressed this. Examples of this are words such as ‘international commitments’, ‘moral’, ‘responsibility’, ‘sustainability’ and ‘control’. During the first rounds of coding, I included all statements involving such examples. The coding involved large pieces of text, so I used the qualitative analysis software NVivo12 to keep the work systematic and clear during the process. When I finished the initial ‘rough’ coding, I coded the material once more to extract the most representative and interesting statements. From there, the actual analysis could start, which I



did by identifying seemingly dominant discourses based on patterns in the coded material. It is important to note that the discourses I describe in this analysis are not pre-existing categories ready to be grasped, as much as they are analytical categories developed by me to create a pattern of the collective meaning-making in the debates, through an inductive approach to the material.

#### **4.7 Analytical tools**

As previously stated, there is no such thing as a single way to conduct discourse analysis, nor a set ‘recipe’ for how it should be conducted. There is a wide array of possibilities to do this through different textual mechanisms, and the analyst can select tools that are preferred for the particular research question. Before starting the actual analysis on the micro-level, it is common to adopt a particular starting point for the analysis. Researchers often focus on either continuity, change or rupture within discourses, depending on the research question and the purpose of the analysis. These three dominant approaches have been labelled plastic, elastic, and genealogical, where the plastic approach is looking for continuity, the elastic approach focuses on change and genealogical approach is concerned with ruptures in the discourse (Dunn & Neumann, 2016, p. 104). Since the analysis of this thesis is based on a research question that seeks to uncover whether the Syrian ‘refugee crisis’ had an impact on the parliamentary discourses in the Norwegian parliament, the starting point for the analysis is an elastic approach – looking for changes in the dominant discourses. On the other hand, there is a possibility that the discourses do not change, despite my initial guiding assumptions. This would then imply a more plastic approach. Although these three approaches are presented as distinct categories, they are not mutually exclusive, and it is possible to employ the approaches simultaneously. The purpose of this categorisation and the choice of starting point is not intended as a strict approach. Rather, it is conducive to better reflection on what is happening at the meta-level when analysing discourses over a specified time span (Dunn & Neumann, 2016, p. 105).

Any method or approach to discourse analysis requires a close reading of the selected texts. The analysis should then reveal internalised and naturalised facts that other potential readers perhaps would fail to notice. My task in the analysis is to uncover these naturalised statements, which together create collective ways of meaning-making. Based on my research question, and the purpose of this thesis, I have chosen to employ two specific textual mechanisms to uncover naturalised facts, as well as the construction of the arguments that are used in the debates. I have found the mechanisms to be the most appropriate to achieve this to be *presupposition* and

*predicate analysis*. I have also considered the *intertextuality* of the debates, i.e., the connection to other texts, looking at what ideas they are grounded in, both explicitly and implicitly.

#### **4.7.1 Presupposition and predicate analysis**

According to Jennifer Milliken (1999, p. 231), studying “structures of signification” is fundamental to all approaches within discourse analysis. Discourses involve background knowledge that persons differentiate and identify, giving them taken-for-granted or *presupposed* qualities. Thus, discourses are viewed as structures that are realised through regular use. As such, discourse analysts must empirically analyse practices of language to draw out the more general structure of discourses.

The textual mechanism of presupposition involves examining background knowledge that is taken for granted. Discourses are perhaps at their absolute strongest when constructed understandings about the social world are accepted as given truths, and is not questioned. However, the stability of such shared knowledge should never be assumed. Thus, it is necessary to uncover presumed shared knowledge, and possibly also question it. For example, as will be shown in the analysis, the role of international conventions is constructed differently within different parliamentary discourses. By directing attention to presupposed or implied constructions of knowledge, I can make such constructions visible in the discourse, while simultaneously showing potential alternative scenarios (Dunn & Neumann, 2016, pp. 110-111).

A related textual mechanism to presupposition is predicate analysis. This mechanism involves examining what type of verbs, adverbs and adjectives are attached to nouns in a specific context. The purpose of this is to expose how meaning is constructed and established in an argument (Dunn & Neumann, 2016, p. 111). Predications of a noun construct the things named as a specific type of thing, with particular attributes and characteristics (Milliken, 1999, p. 232). An example from the analysis is when the Norwegian economic situation is constructed as ‘unique’, or when the loss of sovereignty is constructed as ‘sad’ and ‘unfortunate’. The purpose of these textual mechanisms is to reveal how knowledge about social reality is constructed in the parliamentary debates regarding asylum and refugee policy.

#### **4.7.2 Intertextuality**

Intertextuality is given much focus in critical discourse analysis, or CDA. However, it is arguably an important aspect of textual analysis generally, and discourse analysis specifically. The concept has its origins in literary science, originally coined by Julia Kristeva (1980). It refers to how all texts make implicit or explicit references to previous texts. Thus, the meaning

of a text is never completely given by the text itself. Rather, it is a product of previous interpretations and understandings (Bratberg, 2017, p. 52; L. Hansen, 2006, p. 49). Meaning in texts never emerges isolated from other texts, the meanings and ideas are grounded in some way in previous ones. Intertextuality can be both explicit and implicit. The process is most easily identified when explicit references are made, which involves referring to concrete documents or influential literary works. In the parliamentary debates that constitute the data material of this thesis, explicit intertextuality is apparent when the representatives refer to such things as statistical reports, research documents, international agreements, and even the Norwegian constitution, in order to legitimise their arguments. Implicit intertextuality, on the other hand, is more complicated to discover and analyse. Here, previous texts are not explicitly referred to, as much as the current text *implies* references by using a certain type of terminology or important ideas or concepts from previous texts. Intertextuality builds legitimacy both for the arguments in the current text, while also increasing the legitimacy of the text that is being referred to (L. Hansen, 2006, p. 51). Focusing on the intertextuality in the debates makes it possible to uncover the reproduction of discourses where no new elements are introduced. This can show a continuation of the discourses. In addition, analysing intertextuality also enables me to uncover discursive change through new combinations of discourse (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 7). As previously mentioned, explicit referral to previous texts is the most apparent type of intertextuality and is easily discovered when the representatives refer to specific texts. This in itself is an interesting object of analysis, because it reveals what type of previous texts the representatives use to construct their arguments. Implicit intertextuality, however, can shed light on how the discourses either remain somewhat stable, or how they change throughout the period I am analysing, which is why I will focus on this as well.

The following chapter covers the analysis I have conducted according to the premises and assumptions I have presented here. The goal is to reveal knowledge and truth claims that are taken for granted, and to expose how the statements in the debates are constructed to legitimise arguments. This is possible through the use of the textual mechanisms of presupposition, predicate analysis and intertextuality. In turn, this enables me to suggest potential implications of the collective meaning-making of refugee and asylum policy in the Norwegian parliament from 2008 to 2016.

## **5 Analysis of parliamentary debates**

Before commencing the actual analysis of the parliamentary debates regarding asylum and refugee policy, I will present statistics over the number of asylum applications and percentage of approved asylum applications in the period analysed. This is done to create a background of the political landscape in this period, as the statistics could be an indication of how the discursive field might look like. The presentation of these statistics are based in the part of the research question, which asks how the ‘refugee crisis’ of 2015 impacted parliamentary discourse. Even though these numbers give me a certain idea of how the discourses might be constructed, I have kept an inductive approach in the analysis, being open to analytical findings that do not correspond to the initial impressions. In the following section, I will present the number of asylum applications and share of approval which can create an indication of how the discursive field might look like in the period I am analysing. From there, I will present the main discourses I have found to be the most dominant in the four debates I have selected for the analysis. Then, I will chronologically go through each debate while highlighting and analysing representative quotes. At the end of each debate-section, I will sum up and highlight the most important elements.

### **5.1. The impact of the Syrian ‘refugee crisis’ of 2015**

As described in the background chapter, the Syrian ‘refugee crisis’ of 2015 put a substantial amount of pressure on the government, the parliament and the asylum system in Norway. The arriving number of asylum applicants hit a record high number of 31 145 in one year, most of which were registered in the autumn of 2015. This number is substantially larger than it had been since 2008, where the number hovered between 10 000 and 15 000 applications – which was also relatively high compared to previous years. These numbers are shown in figure 1.

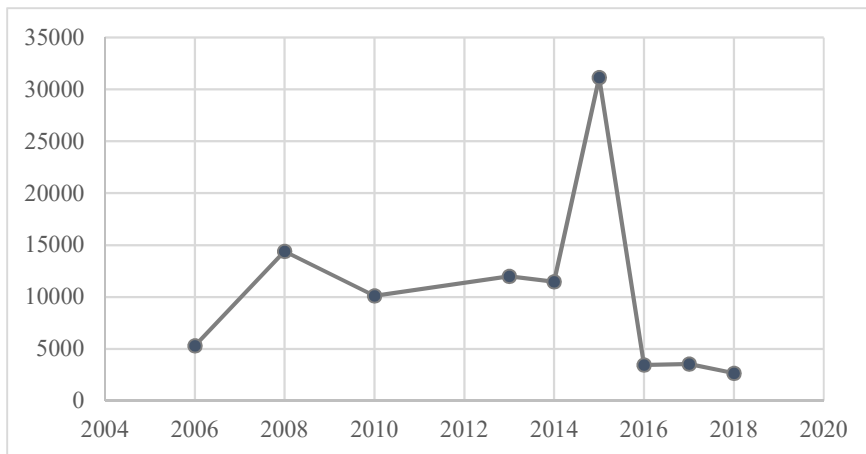


Figure 1. Number of asylum applications, 2006-2018 (UDI, 2006-2018)

The record high number of 2015 seems to have had an impact on asylum policy in Norway, as the numbers went drastically down in the following years. This could indicate that measures were taken in the asylum policy, making it more restrictive. However, these statistics only show how many asylum applications Norwegian authorities received, it does not show how many of them that were approved. The numbers presented in figure 2 show how many asylum applications that were approved. The number of approved applications went up around 2013, hitting a high number of 75 % in 2015, compared to 41% in 2008.

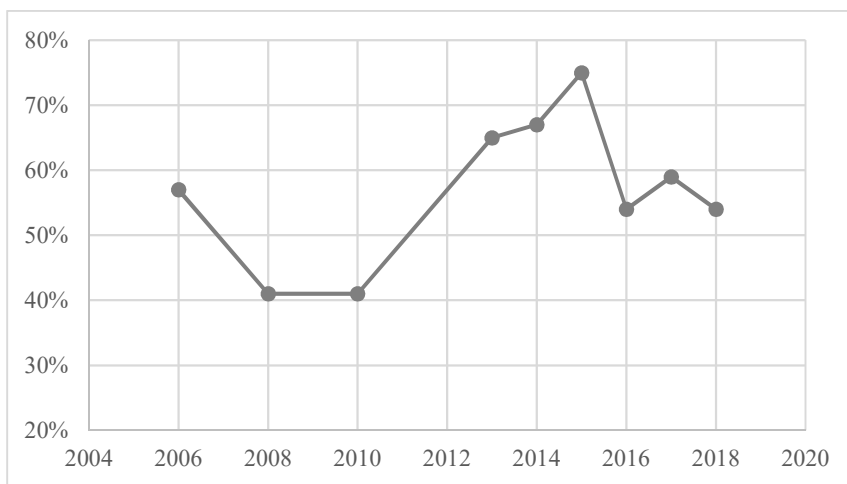


Figure 2. Percentage of approved asylum applications, 2006-2018 (UDI, 2006-2018)

The drastic decrease in the number of applications after 2015 could be interpreted as a sign of more restrictive policies. However, the increase in the number of approved applications could suggest that there have been changes to the policies that have limited the number of applicants that are deemed to be illegitimate. It should be noted that the processing of asylum applications does not necessarily finish in the same year as the application was made. Thus, there may be delays in the approval numbers. This is especially true for the 2015-applications, where there

were so many to process, that many of them were not ready until 2016 (Utlendingsdirektoratet, 2016b). There can be several underlying explanations for the statistics presented in figures 1 and 2, but such explanations are not the aim of this thesis. Rather, these statistics are only meant as a backdrop for what the parliamentary discourses may look like before and after the ‘refugee crisis’. As mentioned in the methodology chapter, discourses shape the manoeuvring space for certain actions – and in this case, it is possible that the discursive field has changed which has enabled different policies that have had implications for both the number of applications and the percentage of approval.

## **5.2 Dominant discourses**

Through extensive reading of the chosen debates, I was able to identify important discourses that seem to be dominating, to various extents, throughout the time period. I have called these the ‘humanitarian’ discourse and the ‘national interests’ discourse. The ‘humanitarian discourse’ is constituted of the importance of humanitarian values, including a strong commitment to international law, conventions, moral and human rights. The ‘national interests’ discourse is influenced by an expressed need to protect the Norwegian nation-state, its’ values and the sustainability of the welfare model, as well as the need for sovereignty and self-determination. In addition, the 2014-debate shows a prominent position of a discourse I have called ‘regional aid’, which revolves around arguments of helping refugees where they are, rather than receiving them in Norway, while also building on economic terminology by referring to cost-efficiency and maximising the use of resources. Moreover, a discourse I have called the ‘real refugees’ discourse gains more traction towards the end of the period I am analysing. This discourse draws upon elements from both the ‘humanitarian’ discourse and arguments of cost-efficiency from the ‘regional aid’ discourse. Although I have constructed these discourses as distinct from each other, there are similarities between some of them. Most striking is the fact that both the ‘real refugees’ and the ‘regional aid’ discourses both draw upon elements from the ‘humanitarian’ discourse. Nevertheless, I have chosen to treat them as separate discourses, showing how the ‘humanitarian’ discourse is modified through the introduction of new discourses towards the end of the period. These discourses compete in a sort of hegemonic struggle, which in turn shapes the field of asylum and refugee policy in the Norwegian parliament.

### **5.3 Debate, April 2008**

#### **We must keep building on Norway's humanitarian position**

The debate from 2008 revolved around the implementation of a new Immigration Act. The former Act dated back to 1988. In the debate, it was described as the largest parliamentary proposition ever at this point. At this point, the Norwegian government consisted of three political parties from the centre-left; the Labour Party (A), the Centre Party (Sp) and the Socialist Left party (SV), forming what has been called the red-green government. This government had a parliamentary majority. It is important to note this fact because the government and parliament constellations affects who are given the most time to speak in the debates, which can shape which discourses that become dominant. Moreover, it is interesting to include the number of asylum applications in 2008, which could also shape the discourse. In 2008, there had been a rise in the number of asylum applications of 120% compared to the previous year, with 14 400 applications. Meanwhile, the percentage of approved applications was 41% (Utlendingsdirektoratet, 2008, pp. 16-18). In this debate, two discourses stand out as especially dominant and are clearly represented. These are the 'humanitarian' and the 'national interests' discourse.

##### **5.3.1 The 'humanitarian' discourse**

The importance of humanitarian values, along with a strong commitment to international law, conventions and human rights are expressed heavily throughout the whole period of analysis and is especially present in this debate. Important moments within this discourse are terms such as international solidarity, humanitarian traditions and moral responsibility and duty. *Responsibility* is a nodal point in this discourse, around which the core arguments are ordered. It is based in a belief that Norway has certain responsibilities and duties, due to moral considerations as well as legal requirements. This belief is grounded in how Norway should be viewed in the international society, and its humanitarian traditions are given substantial importance. Norway is also given a unique position economically, with affluent resources which also requires an obligation to take on responsibilities.

The 'humanitarian discourse' is deeply grounded in Norway's heritage as an important actor within the field of human rights and humanitarian values in 2008. This is seen as essential Norwegian tradition, as illustrated by this statement:

It is a good Norwegian tradition to draw solidarity well beyond Norway's borders. Many Norwegian personalities, not least Fridtjof Nansen, has both through attitude and action been important contributors and given Norway a humanitarian position that we must keep building on (T. Hagebakken (A), 2008, p. 312).

The adjective 'good' is connected to a Norwegian tradition of solidarity beyond its borders, creating a predication. This shows how it is perceived as a 'good' tradition to have solidarity with people in need outside of Norway's borders. It says something about what role Norway should be playing in this context. There is a presupposed notion that having international solidarity beyond the country's borders is a valuable tradition. It simultaneously implies an alternative scenario – if Norway does not show solidarity beyond its borders, it is not in touch with the country's 'good' traditions. Moreover, presenting something as 'good' enables a moral legitimisation of the argument, making it virtually unassailable. In terms of intertextuality, this statement provides an explicit reference to Fridtjof Nansen, the first High Commissioner for Refugees in the League of Nations, who was awarded the Nobel peace prize for his humanitarian work. The reference to people like Nansen shows a perception of Norway as a frontrunner of humanitarian values dating back to the First World War, thus strengthening and legitimising the argument that Norway has particularly important responsibilities towards refugees. Another statement furthers the core argument about how Norway's humanitarian traditions are important:

[...] The Conservatives are very dedicated to continuing the good and liberal tradition that Norway has in these questions. To us, it is not acceptable to make policies that involve having to resign from international conventions, or that undermine international law between countries (B. Høie (H), 2008, p. 297).

Both the adjectives 'good' and 'liberal' are connected to the Norwegian tradition, implying that it should be continued and that a restrictive turn is not desirable. Furthermore, it indicates strong respect for international obligations. To break with these commitments is presented as unacceptable. Refugee policy should never contradict obligations to international conventions.

Solidarity is another crucial moment of the discursive representations in this debate. The term is used in different contexts. It is both used to refer to solidarity with refugees, but also solidarity with the countries that are taking on the heaviest burden of refugees – countries in the regions of conflict. A moral obligation to take responsibility is expressed, both for the sake of refugees, which includes asylum seekers and resettlement refugees, and for the sake of unloading some of the burden for countries that take in a large share of refugees:



Given Norway's unique economic situation, it is important that we in several ways contribute in cases of war and humanitarian disasters, something that often hits people and areas that are already struggling with bad economy and development. The neighbouring countries normally take on a large share of the burden. To show solidarity and at the same time contribute to stabilising the situation in the area of conflict, Norway must in addition to aid, also join and relieve by taking in refugees (T. Hagebakken (A), 2008, p. 312).

Norway's economic situation is constructed as 'unique' in this statement, creating a predication of the relationship between this situation and the requirements of the country in the humanitarian field. There is no 'either or' relationship between helping refugees through aid and receiving refugees into Norway, thus underscoring the double meaning in the use of the word solidarity. However, the limits to this humanitarian solidarity and responsibility are not articulated. This statement would enable a broad and comprehensive asylum and refugee policy, which includes both aid and receiving refugees. It is arguably an idealistic statement. Norway has to contribute with aid in order to stabilise the regions of conflict and share the burden by taking in refugees. Norway's responsibilities are interpreted as dual, through showing solidarity both by donating money and by taking in refugees.

### **5.3.2 The 'national interests' discourse**

The 'national interests' discourse is constituted by arguments in favour of protecting the nation-state, the Norwegian welfare model, values and the cultural fellowship. Important moments in this discourse are terms such as cultural values and sustainability. It constructs a view of the situation where it is imperative that Norway maintains and protects its domestic interests. It is in many ways contrary to the 'humanitarian' discourse, that focuses on helping refugees based on commitments to and respect for human rights and international law. The 'national interests' discourse instead focuses on protecting the Norwegian society and its citizens, as well as the long-term effects of immigration. However, this is not a binary relationship, where support of elements from one discourse automatically excludes the other. Arguing in favour of protecting the nation-state does not entail dismissal of the rights of refugees. None of the parliamentary representatives argue in favour of closing Norwegian borders for refugees and asylum seekers. Rather, it is a question of prioritising. The discourse is grounded in a view of the Norwegian state as a sovereign state that has duties towards its population, rather than an actor in the international society. *Fundamental values* and *sustainability* can be seen as nodal points in the core arguments within this discourse.

Within the ‘national interests’ discourse in this debate, it is stated that it is a concern that the Norwegian society is changing, not because immigrants are adapting to society, but rather because society is adapting to immigrants:

[...] And it is a problem, all the while one is not consistent and decisive with the fundamental values this nation and our cultural fellowship is based on (P.W. Amundsen (FrP), p. 294).

This statement creates a predication where the changes in Norwegian society caused by immigration is connected to the word ‘problem’ when Norwegian cultural values are not ‘consistent’ and ‘decisive’. Immigration is constructed as a threat to the fundamental values of the Norwegian nation and culture. The word ‘nation’ is used, rather than ‘country’. As described in chapter 2, the concept of ‘nation’ is a socially constructed community, which exists because its members believe they share common characteristics. It constructs an image of Norway as a nation-state, composed of a population with a believed common nationality who shares the same cultural values. It is presented as a problem that the Norwegian society is adapting to immigrants, rather than protecting its cultural values.

As mentioned, the ‘national interests’ discourse can be seen as a counterpart to the ‘humanitarian’ discourse. However, they do not necessarily pull in opposite directions. While the importance of international law is heavily emphasised in the ‘humanitarian’ discourse, the importance of such obligations are not rejected within the arguments of this discourse. The difference is that the need to abide by international commitments are weighed more heavily against the need to protect Norway’s national interests:

We obviously have obligations, not only in regard to taking care of people and following international conventions, but also related to Norwegian fundamental interests (P.W. Amundsen (FrP), p. 311).

‘Obviously’ Norway has obligations to both take care of refugees and follow international conventions. This is presented as an undeniable fact, or a presupposition. The statement problematises the difficult task of weighing these two demands against each other. Obligations to international conventions cannot be the only imperative demand to abide by. It is not clarified what is meant by Norwegian fundamental interests, but they are nonetheless seen as a crucial issue that ‘we’ are obligated to protect.

Another statement that draws upon arguments of cultural values can serve as an example of pulling the discourse too far within this context. It cannot be said to belong to the collective way of thinking that constitutes the ‘national interests’ discourse, but I chose to include it to show an example of a statement that pulls the discourse across the acceptable limits.

What if millions of followers of this religion had felt that Western liberal and humanist values lead to decay and an indecent way of life. What if the countries that support this religion would not acknowledge UN's human rights, and that none of the countries would ratify said convention. And what if the parliament majority today passes a law that lays the basis for a greater share of the Norwegian population belonging to such a religion. No, we are not this merciful, inclusive and at the same time culturally self-destructing, surely. And if it turns out that we in fact are, it is certainly not due to a lack of warning (C. Tybring-Gjedde (FrP), p. 313).

In this statement, a specific religion, Islam, is presented as a concrete threat to Norwegian culture. Accepting too many immigrants from this religion is seen as something strongly undesirable, as it collides with UN human rights and Western liberal values. The statement is expressed through repeated 'what if'-scenarios, constructed as a warning, indicating what could happen if the new Immigration Act is passed. It finishes with an ironic remark, that Norway surely is not 'culturally self-destructing' enough to let this happen. Even if this law is passed, the parliament has been warned. It implies a sense of urgency, showing the perceived seriousness of the consequences should the new act be passed. This type of argument is not shared nor accepted by any other parliamentary representatives, including those representing the same political party. A discourse has been defined along the lines of what is reasonable and acceptable to say in a certain context. This serves as an example of use of language that is *not* accepted in this context, and thus also shows where the limits of the 'national interests' discourse go. The example also provides an interesting insight on political manoeuvring space. The fact that the statement does not receive any support inhibits any social action based on these arguments. The statement does not fall into the collective meaning-making of the 'national interests' discourse that facilitates a certain type of political action. If counterfactually, it did, it could have enabled policies that make selections between asylum seekers according to their religious or ethnic background. The fact that this is not the case shows where the limits of the discourse go, simultaneously showing where the limits are for political action in this field.

### **5.3.4 Summary**

The moral responsibilities that Norway has towards refugees are emphasised in the arguments of this debate, grounded in a belief that the country has a certain humanitarian role to play in the international society. This belief is legitimised by referring to important Norwegians within this field, such as Fridtjof Nansen. Another important term is solidarity; both used when speaking about refugees and about countries in the regions of conflict. What is considered 'good' Norwegian traditions is also emphasised heavily throughout the text. The statements reflect an idealistic view of Norway's role in the international society when it comes to helping refugees. The collective meaning-making that constitutes the 'humanitarian' discourse in this debate indicates a possibility to enable expansive asylum and refugee policies. The

'humanitarian' discourse is the most dominant in this debate, it could even be considered hegemonic. It is represented by a substantial share of the parliamentary parties, especially the centre and left parties, but also to a certain extent by the centre-right Conservative Party. In this debate, it is especially represented by the Labour Party who is given substantial speaking time, which is probably due to their position as the largest government party. The Progress Party is given – or claims – a substantial amount of speaking time as well, even though they are an opposition party. This is likely due to the fact that the immigration policy is an important cause for this party.

In this debate, the 'national interests' discourse consists of statements regarding cultural values and fundamental interests for Norway as a nation-state. It challenges the dominating 'humanitarian' discourse, arguing that even though Norway has obligations to international law, it also has obligations to the nation-state and its citizens. This enables a more restrictionist view on asylum policy. Norway has a responsibility to help refugees, but it needs to be limited by, and weighed against, the impact that immigration has on Norwegian society and culture. In 2008, this discourse is almost exclusively represented by the right-wing Progress Party, giving the 'humanitarian' discourse an even stronger hegemonic position as the majority of the parliamentary parties supports it. However, the 'national interests' discourse is also represented and is not completely undermined by the 'humanitarian' discourse. This debate also contains an interesting example of pulling the discourse too far, which was not accepted nor furthered by any political party, indicating the limits of what political action this discourse could implicate.

#### **5.4 Debate, June 2013**

##### **Refugees have a right to protection, whether people like it or not**

The debate in 2013 revolves around changes in the same Immigration Act that was debated in 2008. The government constellation remained the same as in 2008, with the red-green government having a parliamentary majority. The number of asylum applications this year was 11 983, which is less than in 2008 (UDI 2013a). The percentage of approved asylum applications, however, was much higher than in 2008, with 65% (UDI, 2013b).

The same two discourses that were dominating in the 2008 debate are still dominant in 2013: The 'humanitarian' discourse and the 'national interests' discourse. The importance of international conventions is strongly emphasised in the 'humanitarian' discourse in this debate.

In the ‘national interests’ discourse, the importance of sovereignty and self-determination is stressed.

#### 5.4.1 The ‘humanitarian’ discourse

In the ‘humanitarian’ discourse of this debate, the main focus is placed on the importance of international obligations, conventions and international law. In the 2008-debate, the arguments were often grounded in humanitarian values and traditions. In 2013, however, the duty to protect refugees is based more in legal, but also moral, constraints. *International obligations* can thus be seen as a nodal point of the ‘humanitarian discourse’ in 2013. In the following statement, support of international law is grounded in both moral and legal considerations:

[...] I can assure you that we support the international conventions, not just because it is law, but because they are carried by common ways of viewing humanity (M. Tetzchner (H), p. 4423).

This statement constructs an argument that international conventions should be supported for two reasons; because it is the law and because they involve viewing humanity in a certain way, implying that there are also moral considerations to make. Referring to Joppke’s arguments presented in chapter 2, this statement could indicate a perception that there are both moral and legal constraints that limit liberal states, in this case Norway, when dealing with immigration policy, explaining why “unwanted” immigration is accepted. The following statement constructs a view of UN human rights as a bare minimum to follow:

For my own sake I want to say that when it comes to human rights, they are – the way they are formulated in the UN’s human rights – minimum rights. They are rights that have to be in place, at least they must be in place if one is to talk about having some kind of decency around human life. I will strongly warn against placing the asylum policies as close to these minimum rights as possible (G. J. Bekkevold (KrF), p. 4417-18).

This statement shows a clear adherence and commitment to human rights, and even presents UN human rights as the minimum prerequisite. This constructs an argument that merely following UN human rights is the least that could be done, and that even more should be done in this field. The minimum demands are predicated as ‘some kind of decency’. It is indicated that more should be done to ensure *more* than just *some kind of decency*, but rather comprehensive decency around these matters. Sticking to the bare minimum is warned against because it can lead to stepping too close to the edge of what is perceived as acceptable. This statement shows a very comprehensive view of human rights. The language that is used could be seen as enabling for policy-making that goes beyond the minimum demands of the commitments that are made to international agreements, such as the Declaration of Human

Rights or the Refugee Convention. The following statement emphasises the importance of international obligations, and shows how violating these obligations is seen as unacceptable:

Even if the immigration policies to a large extent is about balancing different considerations, there are some considerations that alone are so important that they, in my view, should not be subject to evaluation. As responsible members of the world society, we cannot, in the Centre Party's view, evaluate whether Norway should abide by its international obligations. Persecuted people who apply for asylum in Norway, have a claim for protection and humane and just treatment, whether some people like it or not (H. Greni (Sp) p. 4417).

It is acknowledged that immigration policy is difficult, because different demands are placed on the policymakers, and contradicting considerations are in play. However, some considerations are perceived as so important and unimpeachable that they cannot be undermined or ignored. This statement further constructs an image of Norway's role in the international society, again emphasising the responsibilities the country is bound by. These commitments are unbreachable, the area of asylum policy is so restrained by international conventions and human rights that self-determination is not something that the state is fully entitled to. There is a presupposed notion that asylum seekers that come to Norway have a right and a claim for protection, 'whether people like it or not'. It is acknowledged that immigration and asylum policy is a contentious area, but nonetheless, international obligations cannot be violated in any way. This statement shuts down potential negotiations on this matter, which, in turn, narrows the possibility to implement restrictive asylum policies, as they cannot be in violation of international law.

The two previous statements show compliance with international obligations and humanitarian values. The following statement expresses a similar argument, but it also shows a more substantial acknowledgement of the right to self-determination. While the previous statement emphasises the fact that UN human rights are a minimum demand, this statement is grounded in a belief that Norway has some self-determination, but that it is limited by minimum demands as stipulated by international obligations:

The starting point is that Norwegian immigration policy is decided by Norwegian authorities, but a minimum demand is that we fulfil our international obligations from common international law and the international agreements that we are bound by (L. Christoffersen (A), p. 4415).

This statement is represented by the 'humanitarian' discourse. However, it also challenges the two statements above, which indicates that human rights and international conventions are so important that it inhibits states' right to self-determination. This statement modifies these representations by expressing that 'the starting point' is that immigration policy is decided by Norwegian authorities, while a minimum demand of international obligations limit the

manoeuvring space. The statement can be interpreted as a slight discursive turn within the ‘humanitarian’ discourse. Juxtaposed with the previous statement, where ‘some considerations’, understood as international obligations, are so important that they cannot be negotiated, this statement modifies that argument by constructing a way of looking at the situation where national self-determination comes first, rather than international law. This slight discursive turn is interesting because presenting self-determination as an important aspect of asylum and refugee policy enables different forms of social action. Emphasising self-determination balanced against international law allows for different interpretations of the limitations made by these obligations, whereas in the previous statement, international obligations are seen as non-negotiable.

#### **5.4.2 The ‘national interests’ discourse**

In this debate, the ‘national interests’ discourse is furthered along the same lines as in the 2008-debate. However, *sovereignty* can be seen as a nodal point of the core arguments of this debate, as opposed to cultural values, which were more prominent in the 2008 debate. International conventions are not given the same position as they are in the ‘humanitarian’ discourse, but are rather seen as a challenge to Norwegian sovereignty and right to self-determination. Generally speaking, international conventions and international law is constructed more positively in the ‘humanitarian’ discourse, and more negatively in the ‘national interests’ discourse. Moreover, there is a continued focus on the long-term effects of immigration on the nation. In the following statement, criticism is directed towards those who have a too narrow focus, implying that the rights of ‘foreigners’ is prioritised over the impact of immigration on the Norwegian nation:

There is a great focus on the rights of foreigners and those who come here. Does the secretary ever feel a need to maybe put on bigger glasses and think: What is happening to the Norwegian nation long-term? (C. Tybring-Gjedde (FrP), p. 4420).

This statement implies that focusing on the rights of foreigners and migrants pose a threat to the sustainability of the Norwegian nation in a long-term perspective. Immigration is interpreted as a challenge to the nation. The intuitive solution to this constructed challenge or threat, is more comprehensive restrictions in the asylum policies. Subsequently, this says something about what kind of social action, in the form of policy-making, this type of discourse could implicate. In the ‘humanitarian’ discourse, strong support of international obligations in the form of conventions and agreements are expressed. In the following statement, the role of international conventions is questioned:

[...] it seems to me like Norway has given up large parts of its sovereignty to international conventions, and that we no longer have determination of our own country. I find that

unfortunate and sad, because Norway is in fact its own state and must have the possibility to control its own country and its own people (M. Ørsal Johansen (FrP), p. 4421).

Here, international conventions are presented as a threat to the sovereignty of the state. There are elements of both predication and presupposition in this statement. The loss of sovereignty to international conventions is constructed as ‘unfortunate’ and ‘sad’, as opposed to a strength for the state like it is presented several times in the ‘humanitarian discourse’. Furthermore, Norway ‘must’ have the possibility to control itself, rather than being dictated by international law. This is presented as a self-evident fact, with no further justification. Instead, it is perceived as an imperative right of the state, to be able to have self-determination regarding control of the country and its people. Compared with the last quoted statement in the ‘humanitarian’ discourse of 2013, in terms of implicit intertextuality, there are certain similarities in that both statements prioritise national self-determination over international law. However, this argument is much more explicit in this statement, and the importance of international law is constructed as a negative constraint rather than legal obligation. In the following statement, the importance of international conventions is put up against the importance of the Norwegian Constitution:

I think we have some challenges related to the Constitution actually – actually in terms of the Constitution – that are very much real, given that we have given up too much sovereignty. [...] If international agreements are on a colliding course with the Constitution, it is not difficult for me to choose which side I support. It is the Constitution (P.W. Amundsen (FrP), 4425).

With regards to intertextuality, the representative explicitly refers to the Norwegian Constitution, dating back from 1814. It is an important document that signifies Norwegian independence and sovereignty. When weighed against each other, the Norwegian Constitution is given a more important position than international conventions. Giving up too much sovereignty to international conventions is constructed as a ‘challenge’. It is implied that international conventions are not necessarily in tune with the Constitution, and should they be on ‘colliding course’, the Constitution is preferred. The statement can be seen as a trope for prioritising Norwegian interests before international commitments. Thus, a solution to this challenge could be to implement policies that allow for more self-determination, understood as a way of granting more importance to the Norwegian constitution as opposed to international law.

### **5.4.3 Summary**

Human rights and international conventions are overall presented as unimpeachable in the ‘humanitarian’ discourse. However, there are indications of a slight change within the discourse compared to the 2008-debate. Both legal and moral constraints to self-determination are



emphasised, which underscores Joppke's argument about why liberal states accept unwanted immigration. International conventions have to be followed 'whether people like it or not', thus implying that even though refugees as an immigration group is 'unwanted', moral and legal constraints requires the Norwegian state to contribute. In 2008, the argumentation of responsibility to help refugees was grounded in what was presented as 'good' and 'liberal' Norwegian humanitarian traditions. However, in this debate, the justification of helping refugees is grounded more in legal and moral constraints and limitations. It is acknowledged that immigration policy is difficult, but it does not mean that international obligations can be undermined. The 'humanitarian' discourse in this debate constructs a strong argument for supporting and adhering to international obligations but deemphasises the importance of these obligations as a result of humanitarian values. It is rather a matter of constraints followed by these commitments. The commitments are, however, presented as non-negotiable. The debate also provides an example where a representative argues that Norwegian refugee policy has its starting point in that it is decided by Norwegian authorities, but that it is limited by international commitments, indicating a slight turn away from the unimpeachable status of international conventions. The partisan representation of the humanitarian discourse remains mostly the same as in the 2008-debate, especially by the centre and centre-left parties, but again the Conservatives also briefly draw upon this discourse.

Within the 'national interests' discourse in this debate, the term 'sovereignty' is a nodal point, and international conventions and agreements are constructed as a 'challenge' for this sovereignty. The argumentation explicitly refers to the Norwegian Constitution, which can be seen as a symbol of Norwegian independence, an independence that is presented as challenged by commitments to international law. The 'national interests' discourse of this debate is an interesting counterpart to the 'humanitarian' discourse, where international conventions are given a different status. The meaning of international conventions is constructed differently within the two discourses. In the 'humanitarian' discourse, international commitments are interpreted as something that the state must adhere to, both due to moral and legal considerations. Like in the 2008- debate, the 'national interests' discourse is exclusively represented by representatives from the Progress Party.

## 5.5 Debate, June 2014

### The main effort must be placed where the refugees are

The 2014-debate revolved around a proposal from two Socialist Left Party representatives about receiving more Syrian refugees. At this point, the civil war in Syria had been going on for three years. This was causing an increase in the number of immigrants and refugees in Europe. In Norway, the largest group of asylum seekers this year was from Eritrea, while there was a 134% increase of asylum applications from Syrians compared to the previous year. The total number of asylum applications in 2014 was 11 500 (Utlendingsdirektoratet, 2014b). Meanwhile, the share of approved applications was 67% (Utlendingsdirektoratet, 2014a). Additionally, the government constellation had changed at this point. Following the national elections of 2013, the Conservatives and the Progress Party formed a new minority government, with the Liberals and Christian Democrats as support parties of the government platform.

Since this debate revolved around a more concrete matter, namely a proposal to receive more Syrian refugees, the argumentation that is used is somewhat different from the two previous debates, which revolved around more general views on the Immigration Act. The ‘humanitarian’ discourse is still present but is not dominant to the same extent as in the two previous debates. This debate also introduces a new prevalent discourse, the ‘regional aid’ discourse, which focuses more on arguments of protecting refugees through contributing in their proximate areas. The ‘national interests’ discourse is not very prevalent in this debate, thus only the ‘humanitarian’ and the ‘regional aid’ discourses will be analysed in this section.

#### 5.5.1 The ‘humanitarian’ discourse

This debate marks a point where the ‘humanitarian’ discourse is not as strong as in the two previous debates, although it is still very much present. *Responsibility* can be seen as the nodal point of the core arguments of this discourse, similar to the 2008-debate:

[...] Norway has a moral responsibility too, to receive our share of human beings that flee from war and persecution (H. Pedersen (A), p. 3036).

The presupposed notion that Norway has a moral responsibility to contribute by helping refugees is furthered. This is a continuous characteristic of the ‘humanitarian’ discourse throughout the period of analysis. That Norway has a responsibility to receive ‘our share’ implies that there is a limit to how many refugees Norway can receive, although this limit is not explicitly articulated. This is an interesting aspect compared with statements from the ‘humanitarian’ discourse in 2008, where the limits of Norwegian contribution are not addressed

at all. In this statement, it is acknowledged that there is a limit to Norwegian responsibility, articulated by ‘our share’. Arguments based in moral responsibilities is repeated several times in this debate:

[...] we also have to look at the moral responsibility one has in such areas when this happens.  
[...] The Liberals mean that Norway has a responsibility to help them here at home, and we are willing to receive more refugees (A. Skjelstad, (V), p. 3038).

Earlier in the analysis, I showed how the term *solidarity* was used in two ways, both to express solidarity with refugees, but also to express solidarity with the countries that take on the largest share of the burden that follows with large influxes of refugees. Here, the term solidarity is not used explicitly but rather implied through a notion of responsibility to receive more refugees ‘here at home’. This comes in addition to helping refugees through regional aid. Thus, the statement implicitly refers to the 2008-debate, where it is argued that Norway has to contribute with aid to stabilise the situation in regions of conflict, while also contributing to relieve the situation by taking in more refugees. However, some statements also argue that Norway is not doing enough in the situation, arguing that it is not taking the responsibility it should:

What Norway does now, is not taking its responsibility. The fact that other countries are doing too little, is no excuse for Norway. Population is not relevant because we are the richest [...] We can do much more and be a good example (K. Andersen (SV), p. 3039).

This statement further corroborates the arguments made in the 2008-debate on how Norway has a specific role to play in the international society within the humanitarian field, based on its ‘unique’ position. It is a response to arguments on how Norway is already contributing the most in proportion to population size. According to this statement, population size does not matter. Norway is constructed as a country that has a special economic position which requires more from this country than others. Furthermore, it is argued that Norway should set an example, building on the special position that it has within this field. This kind of interpretation of the situation would imply political action in the form of more liberal and extensive refugee policies.

### **5.5.2 The ‘regional aid’ discourse**

The 2014-debate stands out because it is no longer only the ‘humanitarian’ and the ‘national interests’ discourse that are the most dominating. The debate introduces a new discourse, the ‘regional aid’ discourse. *Efficiency* can be seen as a nodal point in the core arguments in this debate. This discourse draws slightly upon humanitarian values, but not constructed through an international conventions-lens, but rather *where* the refugees can be helped in the best way. It also draws upon arguments about resources, and how Norwegian resources can be maximised:

We in the Progress Party think we have to keep helping, but in a way where we can make the most out of the few resources we have (M. Keshvari (FrP), p. 3038).

This statement constructs an image where Norway has to make the most out of the ‘few resources’ available, as opposed to the statement within the ‘humanitarian’ discourse that stated that Norway is not doing enough because it is ‘the richest’ country. The few available resources should be used in the regions of conflict, rather than taking the refugees into Norway. The statement draws upon economic terminology when saying that help needs to be given where it can be made the most out of, implying a cost-maximising or cost-efficient way of reasoning. The argument of helping through regional aid is repeated several times in this debate:

To us [...] it is important to respond to this catastrophe, and that Norway takes its share of the responsibility for human beings that are fleeing. At the same time, we must ensure that we think integrally and contribute where the help reaches the most and is the most efficient (G.S. Toskedal (Krf), p. 3036).

The presupposed notion that Norway has a responsibility to help refugees is emphasised, thus drawing upon the ‘humanitarian’ discourse. But rather than referring to international law or humanitarian values, contributions have to be made in the most *efficient* way. Hence, it is another representation of cost-efficiency and maximising the resources where they help the most, which is in their proximate areas. The responsibility to help is understood as helping through regional aid, rather than helping by taking refugees into Norway. Furthermore, the notion that Norway has to take ‘its share’ of the responsibility is furthered, indicating that there is a limit to Norway’s contribution, like in the ‘humanitarian’ discourse of this debate. The extent of Norway’s contribution is not limitless. The argument of helping through regional aid is further corroborated several times, like in the following statement:

The main effort from Norway must be placed where the refugees are (H. Greni (Sp), p. 3038).

The ‘main effort’, or the majority of Norway’s contribution has to be ‘where the refugees are’, implying that helping in the regions of conflict is the rational thing to do in this situation. The following statement emphasises that the right thing to do is to use resources to help people in their proximate areas:

When we know that Norway is already taking in the most refugees in Europe, I feel that it is right to spend our money in such a way so that we can help as many as possible in the proximate areas (M. Keshvari (FrP), p. 3037).

Juxtaposed with the statement in the ‘humanitarian’ discourse in this debate regarding how Norway is not doing enough in the situation, it becomes apparent that another argument is constructed here. Rather than arguing that Norway needs to do more because it is ‘the richest’,

this statement argues that Norway is already doing its part when it comes to receiving refugees. It is presupposed that Norway is taking in the most refugees in Europe. Consequently, money should rather be spent in the most efficient way, by increasing regional aid, thus furthering the cost-efficiency line of argumentation as in the other statements. Using economic terminology in the statements enables a justification based on rationalisation, rather than idealism, which is prevalent in the ‘humanitarian’ discourse.

### **5.5.3 Summary**

This debate represents a turn in the discursive field in the Norwegian parliament, with the introduction of the ‘regional aid’ discourse, challenging the two previously dominating discourses. The ‘humanitarian’ discourse is still central, with several statements emphasising the moral responsibility Norway has towards refugees. The debate was based on a proposal by parliamentary representatives of the Socialist Left Party to receive more Syrian refugees, which to a large extent was supported by several representatives. However, the proposal was voted down by all the parties except the Socialist Left. The ‘national interests’ discourse is far less dominant than it was in 2008. Instead, the ‘regional aid’ discourse has become prevalent. This discourse employs economic terminology of cost-efficiency and cost-maximising efforts to help in proximate areas. It draws somewhat upon similar arguments as the ‘humanitarian’ discourse: Norway has an undisputed responsibility to help. However, the argument is now constructed as the responsibility to help through regional aid, rather than referring to this responsibility due to adherence to international law and human rights. The argument of helping refugees through contributing in the regions of conflict enables social action in the form of policy-making that prioritises aid over taking in refugees in Norway. The argument is justified through a sense of rationalisation. Norway can get the most out of its resources in proximate areas; it is the rational thing to do. This could indicate a construction of the situation where humanitarian elements are still present, but handled in a more realistically feasible way – rather than the more idealistic perceptions of reality that are presented in the ‘humanitarian discourse’. Thus, the ‘regional aid’ discourse facilitates a less extensive asylum and refugee policy than what the ‘humanitarian’ discourse could implicate.

The ‘humanitarian’ discourse is most heavily represented by political parties on the left side of the political spectrum, particularly the Socialist Left Party. The Liberals and the Labour Party also stay within this discourse in this debate. Almost all the parliamentary parties are represented by the ‘regional aid’ discourse, except perhaps the Socialist Left Party, who are more explicit about how Norway should receive more refugees *in addition* to helping them

where they are. The Christian Democrats, the Centre Party, the Progress Party and – to a certain extent, the Labour Party all express arguments drawing upon a ‘regional aid’ discourse.

## **5.6 Debate, June 2016**

### **The rules will never apply to those who come because they want a better life**

The debate revolved around changes in the Immigration Act, more specifically the government proposition called Restrictions II (*Innstramminger II*). At the time of this debate, the Syrian ‘refugee crisis’ had hit its peak in the autumn of 2015, causing the parliament to agree on the asylum settlement, as described in the background chapter of this thesis. This included six of the eight political parties represented in the parliament, excluding the Socialist Left Party and the Greens. The amendments in the Immigration Act are described in the debate as a follow-up of the asylum settlement. The number of asylum applications in 2016 was 3 460 (Utlendingsdirektoratet, 2016b), a drastic decrease from the 31 145 applications Norway received in 2015. The share of approved applications this year was 54% (Utlendingsdirektoratet, 2016a), which is not a number that necessarily corresponds to the number of applications submitted in 2016, as many of the applications from 2015 were not processed until this year.

The ‘humanitarian’ discourse is still present in this debate. The ‘national interests’ discourse is again more dominant, as opposed to the 2014-debate. The ‘regional aid’ discourse is less prevalent than in 2014, which is probably because the previous debate revolved around a much more concrete matter based on a proposal to receive more refugees, whereas this debate is more general as it revolves around the Immigration Act. Interestingly, a discourse that focuses on legitimate versus illegitimate asylum seekers, or the rights of ‘real refugees’ has become more dominant. This discourse has been present throughout the whole period of analysis, but has become a much more dominant issue in this debate, arguably taking up more space than both the ‘humanitarian’ and ‘national interests’ discourses. However, these two discourses are still represented to a large extent and will be presented in this section in addition to the ‘real refugees’ discourse.

#### **5.6.1 The ‘humanitarian’ discourse**

The ‘humanitarian’ discourse in 2016 is characterised by arguments grounded in a perception of Norway’s responsibilities in the international society when it comes to contributing and helping refugees. Similar to previous debates, *responsibility* can be seen as a nodal point in this

debate as well. In the following statement, a clarification of the meaning of the ‘refugee crisis’ is presented:

We do not have a crisis here, it is the millions of people who are currently fleeing (*lever på flukt*) who are in a crisis. We have a duty to help in the situation (E. Sund (A), p. 4096).

Instead of viewing the refugee situation as a crisis for Norway or Europe, it is interpreted as a crisis for the refugees, creating a predication of the situation where it is linked to those who are fleeing, rather than to ‘us’. The presupposed notion that ‘we’ have a duty to help, is repeated, drawing on the same arguments as in the earlier debates. Arguments based on a perception that support of international conventions is imperative is furthered:

More than ever it is important to support international legal principles and conventions, take international responsibility and be a positive role model (T. Breivik (V), p. 4094).

Using the expression ‘more than ever’ indicates that the current situation is extraordinary. This, in turn, leads to an even greater need to support international law, and the responsibilities that Norway has. The ‘refugee crisis’ created the background for this need. Furthermore, the statement implicitly refers to a statement made in the 2014-debate, on how Norway should be a ‘good example’ by taking more responsibility in the situation, thereby giving the country a specific role to play in the international society. In the following statement, support of international agreements are legitimised as a way of making the world safer:

If we want to make the world safer, we have to manage to make international agreements that take care of human rights. It might be that we need them ourselves one day (K. Andersen (SV), p. 4103).

‘If we want to make the world safer’ can be seen as a rhetorical question, a question where the answer is already given, or said differently, a presupposition. No one wants to make the world less safe. This starting point legitimises the rest of the statement because no one can argue the fact that they want to make the world safer. It constructs the field of immigration policy in a larger context, where it is a part of making the world safer. The way this statement constructs the situation makes the argument unassailable. The solution to this is constructed as having international agreements that respect human rights, showing continued support for international law and the related obligations. ‘It might be that we need them ourselves one day’, implicitly envisions an alternative scenario where Norwegians are in a similar situation as refugees, where ‘we’ would want the human rights to be respected and to be protected by international agreements. This legitimises political action in the form of continued support of international

obligations, rather than negotiating what role such obligations should play for policy-making on this area.

Referring to Norway's role in the international society within the field of international law and humanitarian values, the following statement acknowledges the fact that the 'refugee crisis' put a large strain on this role:

It has challenged us, who are a superpower when it comes to international law and human rights (S.R. Håheim (A), p. 4088).

This shows a presupposed notion that Norway is, and always has been, a 'superpower' (*stormakt*) within the field of international law and human rights. The term 'superpower' is a concept used for states that have the power to influence other countries. In the traditional sense, superpowers have been states with strong economic, military and political power. It was first used to describe the US and the Soviet Union in the period after the Second World War, where these two states were great influential powers in global politics. Concerning intertextuality, the statement implicitly refers to this type of terminology, and constructs Norway as such a superpower within international law and human rights, an influential power. It implicitly builds on arguments from previous debates regarding how Norway should be a 'good example' or a 'role model' within this field. However, there is a perception that the 'refugee crisis' challenged this powerful position, indicating that Norway did not manage to sustain this status during the impact of the crisis. Based on an interpretation of the situation that Norway is not able to maintain this position when a crisis hits, an implication could be to change current policies. This could either be to improve the reception capacity to avoid strain on the system or to implement restrictions in the asylum policy, and subsequently decrease the number of arriving immigrants.

### **5.6.2 The 'national interests' discourse**

The 'national interests' discourse of this debate draws upon arguments of protecting the Norwegian nation and its interests in a long-term perspective. As such, *sustainability* can be seen as a nodal point in this debate. Arguments from the 2008-debate about how Norway has a duty to protect its interests is continued:

Here at home we fortunately have peaceful conditions, but we are surrounded by a tumultuous (*urolig*) world, and we have a duty to take care of our own interests as well (F. Bakke-Jensen (H), p. 4091).

The state has a duty to take care of its interests, even though there are problems in the rest of the world. The word 'duty' can be used both about something that has to be done because it is



part of the job, or it could be used for a strong sense of obligation to something that feels like the right thing to do. Thus, a strong commitment to taking care of national interests is expressed, as it is part of the government's 'job', as well as it is perceived to be the right thing to do, both morally and legally. In the 'humanitarian' discourse, *responsibility* could be seen as a nodal point, also based in both legal and moral considerations. A sense of responsibility is implied here as well but constructed as a responsibility to take care of Norwegian interests when regulating asylum policy. The long-term effects of immigration and asylum policy are addressed in the following statement:

I hope that the Storting today passes as many restrictions as necessary for our country [...] It is about the future of Norway (H.A. Njåstad (FrP), p. 4077).

Here, the representative appeals to the parliament about measures that need to be taken for 'our country', implying a feeling of fellowship and a common effort to protect 'our country'. This creates a differentiation between 'us' – the Norwegian population, and 'them' – those who pose a potential threat to the future of the country. This categorisation of 'us' versus 'them' constructs an idea that Norway as a common nation has to implement measures to protect itself, creating a strong argument for more restrictive asylum and refugee policy. In an alternative scenario, if restrictions are not passed, the future of Norway will be threatened. Thus, restrictions are necessary. This is an explicit expression of what type of political action is needed; it is not implied. The need for a long-term perspective is also constructed in the following statement:

The government is keeping a steady course in the immigration policies, no matter what the paper headlines and opinion tides (*stemningsbølger*) are, because we have to think long-term and secure a sustainable immigration policy that will take care of the welfare model for our future generations (S. Listhaug (FrP), p. 4086).

'Keeping a steady course' indicates a perception that the policy is going in a certain direction, with a certain end goal; to make long-term decisions in the interests of the generations to come, and protecting and sustaining the welfare state. The policies have to be consistent, independently of what the media says. The representative shows awareness of how the public debate on immigration is given a substantial amount of space in the media, but that it should not affect the parliament's decisions on the matter, explicitly referring to statements and texts from the public debate. This could also reflect a certain perception of the public opinion. 'Opinion tides' indicate that the public opinion on immigration ebbs and flows in waves, but the immigration policy still has to remain consistent. While the situation is acknowledged as being a salient issue in the media and the public opinion, long-term perspectives have to be

applied nevertheless. This type of perception could facilitate policies that might be perceived as unpopular or controversial at first because the long-term effects would eventually benefit the sustainability of the welfare state and ‘future generations’.

### 5.6.3 The ‘real refugees’ discourse

The ‘real refugees’ discourse is grounded in a belief that not all asylum seekers who arrive at Norwegian borders are legitimate refugees with a right to protection. The discourse has gained much more traction in this debate, compared to earlier in the period. It makes a clear definition between ‘real refugees’ with the corresponding rights that come with this status, and those who do not need protection – who are straining and breaking down the credibility of the asylum system. As such, a nodal point of this discourse is *protection*. Looking back to chapter 2, I elaborated on the difference between refugees and asylum seekers. Refugees have a legal status that entails certain rights according to international law, and asylum seekers claim to be refugees in need of protection. It is up to the authorities of the state in question to assess whether or not the asylum seeker has legitimate claims for protection.

The ‘real refugees’ discourse draws upon elements of the ‘humanitarian’ discourse, especially with regards to international commitments. However, it is clarified that these international commitments do not apply to immigrants and asylum seekers who do not have legitimate claims for protection:

Norway’s commitments to international law will be kept. Those who come to Norway and have a right to protection, will have that, and we will give a good offer to the people who are to stay in Norway (I. Schou (H), p. 4072).

The presupposed notion of Norway’s adherence to international law is repeated in this statement, drawing upon an important element from the ‘humanitarian’ discourse. However, it is specified that it only applies to those who ‘have a right to protection’. It also presupposes that those who actually have a legitimate claim for protection will be granted asylum. The people who are to stay will be given a ‘good offer’, creating a predication by connecting ‘good offer’ only with those who are permitted to stay. It is implied that those who come to Norway who do not have legitimate claims for protection, will not be provided with this ‘good offer’ – they will have to return. This legitimises an argument for implementing more restrictive return policies.

When there are so many in this world who need real protection from war and conflict, it is important that we have a system that works so that those who do not need protection, are not straining it (K. Andersen (SV), p. 4074).

This statement argues that people who come to Norway without a real need for protection are straining the asylum system, creating a predication where the word ‘strain’ is connected to

people who are not ‘real’ refugees. Thus, people who come and apply for asylum without legitimate claims are viewed as undesirable. It is implied that legitimate claims for protection are understood as being forced to flee due to war and persecution. Thus, this could refer to both so-called convention refugees, i.e., persons who are defined as refugees by the Refugee Convention, and people who are given the status of refugee based on humanitarian grounds. Those who do not need protection can be understood as economic migrants. People who come to Norway in search of an improved way of life, but are not threatened, are not entitled to protection from the state. The imperative duty to protect those who are actually fleeing from war is continued in the following statement:

We must give protection to children who flee from war and conflict, but it is not desirable that children and young people go on a dangerous journey if they do not have a need for protection (H. Pedersen (A), p. 4075).

Through creating a predication using ‘dangerous’ connected to ‘journey, it enables an argument that trying to enter Norway is unsafe for ‘children’, rather than constructing it as a strain for the Norwegian system. By emphasising that this journey is dangerous for children, the representative invokes a strong moral aspect. It is not morally right to let children go on dangerous journeys if they are not entitled to protection when they arrive. Thus, policies that restrict the opportunities for illegitimate asylum seekers must be implemented. The statement has the same argument as the previous one but uses a different way to legitimise it. Furthermore, the word ‘journey’ is used, as opposed to ‘flight’ – indicating that they are not refugees. This, in turn, justifies prioritising to help only those who flee from war and conflict. In the following statement, the temporary status of the asylum institute is addressed:

We feel that the asylum institute is meant to give temporary protection against crisis, war and persecution. It is therefore natural that one cannot have a renewed residency permit in the cases where the basis of protection no longer is there (H. Greni (Sp), p. 4080).

Rather than presupposing how Norway has a moral or legal responsibility to help refugees, as in the ‘humanitarian’ discourse, it is presupposed that people who no longer have a claim for protection will lose their residence permit - it is ‘natural’. The rights of refugees to claim protection in Norway are only valid as long as there is war or conflict in the asylum seeker’s country of origin. The meaning of the asylum institute is constructed as ‘temporary’. This perception of the asylum institute could enable political action in the form of return policies. In the following statement, a clarification of what restrictions in asylum and refugee policy entails is provided:

[...] the restrictions have never been about helping fewer people. It is about having resources and capacity to help those who have a real need for protection (M. Kapur (H), p. 4089).

This statement draws upon the ‘real refugees’ discourse, but simultaneously also draws upon elements from the ‘regional aid’ discourse. It implies a notion of cost-efficiency, to avoid using resources on people who do not have a legitimate claim for protection. Should the state use resources on those who are not entitled to protection, in an alternative scenario, it will strain the asylum system. It is implied that the restrictions are about using less resources on illegitimate asylum seekers. The same type of argument is used in the next statement:

A tighter grip on who are to be granted residence in Norway is important, not least to be able to take care of those who actually have a claim for our protection and to maintain the credibility of the asylum system (F. Bakke-Jensen (H), p. 4092).

Here, ‘a tighter grip’ can be understood as a trope for more restrictive policies that especially focuses on assessing the legitimacy of asylum seekers. This is necessary both to be able to ‘maintain the credibility of the asylum system’, and to protect those with legitimate claims. Hence, giving protection to illegitimate seekers is both seen as a negative implication for Norwegian authorities as well as legitimate applicants. In the following statement, it is presupposed that many of the people who apply for asylum do not have legitimate claims, thus legitimising restrictions in the asylum policy:

[...] in a time where there are also many people who apply for asylum without needing protection, restrictions are necessary. The rules for protection never have, and never will, apply to those who exclusively come to Norway because they want a better life (S.E. Lauvås (A), p. 4090).

This statement makes another clear distinction between those who have a right to protection and those who do not. It constructs a view of the ‘rules for protection’ or Norwegian asylum policy, as something that applies exclusively to legitimate refugees. Wanting a ‘better life’ in Norway does not meet the requirements for being granted such protection, indicating that economic migrants are undesirable. Similar to the previous statements of this discourse, this would enable political action in the form of more restrictive policies when it comes to the assessment of the legitimacy of the asylum seekers’ claims for protection.

#### **5.6.4 Summary**

This debate was described as a follow-up of the asylum settlement that was made between six of the eight parliamentary parties during the Syrian ‘refugee crisis’ of 2015. It continues the discursive turn that became apparent in the analysis of the debate in 2014. The ‘humanitarian’ discourse is still present, but not nearly as dominating – or even hegemonic, as it was in 2008 and to a certain extent also in 2013. The ‘national interests’ discourse is still present as well, but not to the same extent as it was in the two first debates. The ‘real refugees’ discourse,

however, has become the most dominating discourse in the 2016 debate. It interestingly draws upon elements from both the ‘humanitarian’ discourse and the cost-efficiency arguments from the ‘regional aid’ discourse. Several of the statements within this discourse make clear distinctions between those who have a right to protection and those who do not. This is, however, as described in the clarification of terms in chapter 2, not a simple task. It is not always easy to assess whether an asylum seeker is a legitimate refugee or not. The ‘humanitarian’ discourse is most prominently represented by the centre and left parties, such as the Labour Party, the Liberals and the Socialist Left Party. The national interests-discourse is mostly represented by the Progress Party – like in the previous years, and also to a larger extent the Conservatives this year. The ‘real refugees’ discourse stands out because it is represented by virtually all the parliamentary parties to some extent, from the Progress Party to the Socialist Left Party, making its dominance even more apparent.

Through this analysis, I have shown how there has been a change in the political discourse of the Norwegian parliament from 2008 to 2016. The ‘humanitarian’ discourse had a hegemonic position in 2008, only to a small extent challenged by the ‘national interests’ discourse. The latter, however, did not gain much traction within the parliamentary parties except for one. In 2014, the first signs of a discursive turn became apparent, where the ‘regional aid’ discourse became more prevalent. However, this was most likely due to the concrete issue that was debated, namely the proposal to receive more Syrian refugees. In 2016, however, the ‘real refugees’ discourse gained a much more dominant position, drawing on many important elements from the ‘humanitarian’ discourse, while simultaneously arguing in favour of more restrictive asylum and refugee policy. These findings, seen in relation to the liberal paradox of migration, political implications and the impact of the Syrian ‘refugee crisis’ will be further discussed in the next chapter.

## **6 Discussion of the findings**

In the previous chapter, I identified four prevalent discourses that characterise the parliamentary debate on refugee and asylum policy from 2008-2016: The ‘humanitarian’ discourse, the ‘national interests’ discourse, the ‘regional aid’ discourse and the ‘real refugees’ discourse. Through the use of the textual mechanisms of predicate analysis, presupposition and intertextuality, I uncovered naturalised facts and ‘taken-for-granted’ knowledge in representative statements from each debate. Throughout the analysis, I pointed out what type of political action or policy these discourses intuitively could facilitate or enable. In section 6.2, I elaborate on the relationship between the discourses and political implications. Before this, however, I address the liberal paradox of migration that was presented in chapter 2, and what role it played in the parliamentary debates from the period of analysis. Finally, I assess how the ‘refugee crisis’ of 2015 impacted the parliamentary discourse.

### **6.1 The liberal paradox of parliamentary politicians**

The liberal paradox is presented as an explanation for why immigration politics is so difficult to manage, especially for liberal states. As Hampshire argues; “the intractable nature of immigration policy is not a failure of governance, but rather a reflection of contradictory imperatives of the liberal state” (2013, p. 2). The contradictory imperatives causing the liberal paradox are described as a result of four characteristics, or facets, of modern liberal states; constitutionalism, nationhood, capitalism and representative democracy. Of these four, I deemed the first two to be the most relevant for the purpose of this thesis which focuses on refugee and asylum policy. The facet of constitutionalism entails demands for openness in immigration, built on commitments to international law. The facet ascertains that modern liberal states derive their authority, as well as their limitations, from law. The facet also includes liberal norms and principles, such as freedom, equality and universalistic human rights – rights that not only apply to the states’ citizens, but to all individuals. In contrast to this, the facet of nationhood demands more restrictive immigration policy, built on a need to protect the culture and sustainability of the nation-state.

The analysis shows how tensions emerging from the liberal paradox were reflected in the four parliamentary debates between 2008 and 2016. These tensions were particularly present in the start of the period. The contradicting demands of moral and legal responsibilities to help refugees were constantly weighed against, and challenged by, the demand to protect and sustain the nation-state. As such, the liberal paradox of migration was reflected in the Norwegian

parliament – most palpably through two of the discourses: the ‘humanitarian’ and the ‘national interests’ discourses.

The ‘humanitarian’ discourse draws upon important elements from the constitutionalism-facet, where several of the statements emphasised the importance of helping refugees, grounded in both moral and legal considerations, as well as humanitarian traditions. This also fits Joppke’s (1998) argument on how liberal states place moral and legal constraints on themselves, inhibiting their right to self-determination. It places demands on the liberal state to have openness in their immigration policies. The humanitarian aspect of helping refugees was the most explicit in the start of the period, while legal constraints became more salient in the later debates.

The ‘national interests’ discourse aligns with the nationhood-facet, on both the economic level and the cultural level. This facet places more restrictive demands on liberal states, in order to protect the nation-states’ citizens and the sustainability of the welfare state. Several statements in this discourse emphasised the obligation to protect the nation-state from challenges arising with large influxes of refugees and asylum seekers, both in terms of protecting the national culture and identity, as well as the long-term impact on the welfare-state. Furthermore, obligations to international conventions and agreements are viewed as a challenge to national sovereignty. Sustainability and sovereignty are nodal points in the arguments of the ‘national interests’ discourse. The duty to protect refugees is not rejected, but there is a stronger emphasis on the need to protect Norway’s cultural fellowship, which demands more restrictive immigration policies.

The ‘humanitarian’ discourse and the ‘national interests’ discourse fit neatly into the facets of constitutionalism and nationhood respectively. The two other discourses I identified as prevalent later in the period of analysis, the ‘real refugees’ and the ‘regional aid’ discourses, are not as intuitively aligned with the two facets. However, both the ‘real refugees’ and the ‘regional aid’ discourse are characterised by aspects of the ‘humanitarian’ discourse, and are thus also reflected in the constitutionalism-facet. The ‘regional aid’ discourse is centred around efficiency and cost-maximising efforts, but the arguments to help in proximate areas are grounded in an expressed responsibility to help, and an implied notion of solidarity by contributing in the regions of conflict. Furthermore, several statements in the ‘real refugees’ discourse are explicit about how Norway has a moral and legal responsibility to help, while at the same time emphasising how this applies to ‘real refugees’ exclusively. As such, these two discourses can be viewed as signs of a reconstructed perception of reality, resulting in

discourses that bridge the gap between constitutionalism and nationhood. The liberal paradox affects parliamentary discourse through the way contradicting imperatives enable different ways of understanding social reality. In addition, it shows how discourse potentially emerged based on a need to mitigate the paradox by trying to fulfil the contradicting demands of openness (constitutionalism), and restrictiveness (nationhood), simultaneously, through ‘regional aid’ and ‘real refugees’.

## **6.2 Discourses as preconditions for action**

The analysis shows that the relationship between discourse and policy outcome is at times unclear. Discourse analysis can be understood as the study of *preconditions* for action (Dunn & Neumann, 2016, p. 61), and does not automatically result in corresponding political action. According to Hansen and Koehler (2005, p. 625), politics of immigration is a battle of discourses, in which policy outcome reflects the ‘triumphant’ discourse. However, discourse analysis is a social constructivist, interpretivist approach, and does not aim to make law-like causal inferences. Although discourses can show a *tendency* between collective perceptions of reality and social action, it is not necessarily always this way. Discourses can enable preconditions for action, but the relationship is not automatically causal. The debate in 2008 was characterised by the hegemonic, arguably idealistic ‘humanitarian’ discourse, which should not intuitively create preconditions for substantial restrictions in asylum policy. However, as shown in chapter 3, several restrictions were implemented the same year. The ‘humanitarian’ discourse remained dominant in 2013, which shows that restrictions made in 2008 were not followed by a discursive change. In 2016, the hierarchy between the discourses changed, giving more room to the ‘real refugees’ discourse. This discourse kept important aspects from the ‘humanitarian’ discourse, while simultaneously justifying restrictions in asylum policy. This was followed by permanent amendments in the Immigration Act in 2016, which was described as a framework of the strictest asylum policy Norway has ever had (NRK, 2016). How can the debate on asylum and refugee policy from 2008 to 2016 then be understood?

In the debate of April 2008, the ‘humanitarian’ discourse was dominant, or ‘triumphant’. However, the red-green government implemented several restrictions during 2008. The number of asylum applications in 2008 was, with 14 400 applications, much higher than what Norwegian authorities expected. This resulted in a controversial 13-point plan that sparked conflict within the government coalition. The purpose of the restrictions, as stated by the government, was to reduce the number of arriving asylum seekers (NRK, 2008). The dominant discourse of the debate of 2008, however, does not intuitively correspond with this type of



policy. Instead of using arguments more typical for the ‘real refugees’ discourse, as could be expected, the ‘humanitarian’ discourse, which provides a moral and arguably idealistic view of refugee and asylum policy, was dominant during this time. This discrepancy between discourse and political action can be an example of how collective ways of thinking and understanding refugee policy did not change in tune with implemented policy. From the analysis of the 2008 debate, it seems like the parliament’s collective way of thinking of and talking about refugee policy reflected international solidarity and responsibility, but that political action still went in the direction of restrictions.

Furthermore, the government constellation of 2008 was a majority red-green government. Their first government declaration – Soria Moria – states that the government parties would lead a “humane, solidarity-based (*solidarisk*) and legal protective (*rettssikker*) asylum and refugee-policy”, which would also be anchored in international conventions (Arbeiderpartiet, Sosialistisk Venstreparti, & Senterpartiet, 2005). This first government declaration is in tune with the ‘humanitarian’ discourse. However, when the number of asylum applications surpassed the expectancy in 2008, it seems like political action preceded discursive change. Moreover, the discourse does not seem to have changed drastically in the period between 2008 and 2013. As the analysis has shown, the ‘humanitarian’ discourse was still dominant in 2013, even though it was not as anchored in humanitarian traditions as in 2008, but focused more on legal constraints grounded in international conventions.

The debate in 2014 shows the first signs of a significant discursive change in the parliament. The debates of 2008 and 2013 were dominated by the ‘humanitarian’ discourse, which was only to a certain extent challenged by the ‘national interests’ discourse. The 2014-debate introduced another prevalent perception of the situation – the ‘regional aid’ discourse. At this point in time, parliamentary representatives acknowledged that a crisis was emerging due to the civil war in Syria, which put immense pressure on neighbouring states while also causing large influxes of international refugees and migrants. While the ‘humanitarian’ discourse was still present in the 2014-debate, it was challenged by the ‘regional aid’ discourse, which in this case marginalised the ‘national interests’ discourse. The term *solidarity* has been important throughout all the debates, albeit with slightly different interpretations and understandings. In the ‘regional aid’ discourse, solidarity is understood as contributing in proximate areas to relieve the situation, as opposed to taking in substantial numbers of refugees in Norway. The ‘regional aid’ discourse is characterised by a sense of rationality, with *efficiency* being the nodal point. Helping refugees should be done in the most cost-efficient and resource-maximising way, as opposed to the more

idealistic view of the responsibility to help due to moral values and legal considerations in the humanitarian discourse of 2008 and 2013. The immediate political implication from this debate, was that the proposal to receive more Syrian refugees was downvoted by 98 versus 3 votes. The emergence of a crisis prompted the government to invoke a more rational way of understanding and handling the situation, as opposed to the more idealistic view that characterises the ‘humanitarian’ discourse.

In 2016, the connection between discourse and political action is clearer than it was in the first two debates. The ‘humanitarian’ discourse was weakened even more by the emergence of the ‘real refugees’ discourse. This discourse allowed for implementation of more restrictive measures without abandoning humanitarian aspects and international conventions. As stated in the 2016-debate: “The rules for protection never have, and never will, apply to those who exclusively come to Norway because they want a better life” (S.E. Lauvås (A), p.4090).

As described in chapter 3, the restrictions that were implemented in the wake of the ‘refugee crisis’ included the removal of the reasonableness criterion and the forced return of asylum applicants who arrived at Storskog back to Russia, without assessing whether they could have their asylum application processed there. These measures were heavily criticised by the UNHCR’s regional representation in Northern Europe, as well NOAS (Møkkelgjerd, 2017; UNHCR, 2016). Thus, the ‘real refugees’ discourse enabled restrictions in policy which seems to be built on a narrower interpretation of the Refugee Convention. Through the ‘real refugees’ discourse, the situation was reconstructed in a way that enabled and legitimised restrictive measures aimed at illegitimate asylum seekers. The ‘real refugees’ discourse can thus be seen as a discourse of legitimisation. Restrictions were legitimised by grounding the arguments in the necessity of limiting illegitimate asylum seekers who were straining the system and taking resources away from those who *really* needed help. It seems like parliamentary representatives found this to be an easier transition than stepping into the more nationalistic ‘national interests’ discourse, which argued in favour of restrictions based on a need to protect national identity and the welfare-state.

### **6.3 The impact of the ‘refugee crisis’**

One part of the research question of this thesis asks how the Syrian ‘refugee crisis’ of 2015 had an impact on parliamentary discourse. From the analysis of the period between 2008 and 2016, it seems like the ‘crisis’ did have a substantial impact. The ‘humanitarian’ discourse was dominant in 2008 and 2013. A discursive change started to become apparent in 2014, when debating the then current Syrian refugee situation. In 2016, in the aftermath of the ‘refugee

crisis', this discursive change was consolidated. The 'humanitarian' discourse was no longer dominant, although it was still present. The 'real refugees' discourse had taken over as the most dominant, represented by a majority of the parliamentary parties. The findings of the analysis indicate that the impact of the Syrian 'refugee crisis' forced the most dominant discourse, the idealistic 'humanitarian' discourse, out in favour of a more realistic 'real refugees' discourse. This could be a result of a perceived need to find a point of balance between idealistic and moral aspects of the situation and the realistic political outcome – need that was created by the impact of the drastically increased influx of refugees in the autumn of 2015. As mentioned above, the 'real refugees' discourse can be seen as a modified version of the humanitarian discourse, which allows for justification of restrictions in that it is still based in both legal and moral considerations. In 2008, an increased influx of refugees did not result in discursive change. The 2015 'refugee crisis', however, did result in substantial change by altering the discursive hierarchy. As such, it is apparent that the 'refugee crisis' had a significant impact on parliamentary discourse, which also resulted in political action in the form of restrictive amendments in the Immigration Act.

In the next and final chapter, I present my concluding remarks by answering each of the research questions. In addition, I reflect upon the contributions and limitations of this thesis, as well as implications for further research based on my findings.

## 7 Concluding remarks

### 7.1 Main findings

Western liberal states are often desired destinations for people seeking refuge or an improved way of life. But defining characteristics of such liberal states pose a dilemma when governing the field of immigration, especially within refugee and asylum policy, which in turn makes this field contentious and controversial. The purpose of this thesis was to explore how parliamentary representatives talk about and understand the contentious field of refugee and asylum policy, in order to find out what perceptions of reality together constitute collective meaning-making in the Norwegian legislature. This has been done by conducting discourse analysis.

Discourses take part in a hegemonic struggle that have a tendency to shape political outcome. As the purpose of this thesis was to uncover dominant discourses in the Norwegian parliament and see whether they were affected by an unprecedented crisis, as well as how they are connected to political actions, the research question I sought to answer in this thesis was as follows:

*What are the dominant discourses in the Norwegian parliament regarding refugee and asylum policy from 2008 to 2016? How has the ‘refugee crisis’ of 2015 impacted the discourses, and in what way have they shaped refugee and asylum policy?*

As mentioned in the introductory chapter, the research question contains three aspects: A descriptive assessment of how Norwegian parliamentary representatives ascribe meaning to refugee and asylum policy in an eight-year period, an evaluation of how the ‘refugee crisis’ affected these perceptions of the situation, and considerations on how collective meaning-making has shaped political outcome in this field. I will proceed with concluding remarks on each aspect in the following sections.

#### 7.1.1 Dominant discourses

Through discourse analysis of four selected parliamentary debates from 2008 to 2016, I identified four prevalent discourses by which the parliamentary representatives ascribed meaning to the refugee and asylum policy; the ‘humanitarian’ discourse, the ‘national interests’ discourse, the ‘regional aid’ discourse and the ‘real refugees’ discourse. The ‘humanitarian’ discourse is constituted of arguments grounded in moral and legal responsibilities to help refugees, humanitarian traditions and commitment to international law and conventions. The ‘national interests’ discourse is based on statements arguing in favour of protection of the

nation-state, sustainability of the welfare-state and national sovereignty. The 'regional aid' discourse is constituted of arguments of rationalisation and cost-efficiency, and how Norwegian resources should be maximised. The 'real refugees' discourse is based on arguments grounded in similar values as the 'humanitarian' discourse, while heavily emphasising that moral and legal responsibilities only applied to 'real refugees', which refers to people with a legitimate claim for asylum.

Through the analysis, I found that the 'humanitarian' discourse occupied a hegemonic position in 2008, placing it on top of the discursive hierarchy. Several statements emphasised the importance of humanitarian traditions and moral responsibilities following Norway's unique position within this field. Most of the political parties were represented by the 'humanitarian' discourse. There were several representations of the 'national interests' discourse as well, but as it was exclusively represented by one political party, it did not challenge the hegemonic position of the 'humanitarian' discourse. In the debate from 2013, the discursive hierarchy remained the same. However, there was a slight change in the 'humanitarian' discourse, which shifted focus from the importance of humanitarian traditions and helping refugees based on moral and humanitarian values to an increased focus on the legal constraints caused by international conventions. Meanwhile, statements in the 'national interests' discourse argued in favour of maintaining national sovereignty, still only represented by one political party.

In 2014, the 'national interests' discourse was marginalised by the introduction of a new discourse, 'regional aid'. The 'regional aid' discourse in many ways represented a rationalised reaction to the situation in Syria, with arguments based in cost-efficient and cost-maximising ways of utilising Norwegian resources. This discourse was represented by almost all of the parliamentary parties. Meanwhile, the 'humanitarian' discourse was pushed down from its previously hegemonic position, although it was still represented by several parliamentary representatives.

In 2016, after the peak of the 'refugee crisis' in the autumn of 2015, the change in the discursive hierarchy continued. At this point another discourse had become the most dominant, namely the 'real refugees' discourse. This enabled arguments that maintained the humanitarian values of the responsibility to help people in need. However, it was thoroughly emphasised that this responsibility applied to 'real refugees' exclusively. Although the 'humanitarian' discourse was still present in the 2016-debate, it was in no way as dominant as it was in the start of the period of analysis. In conclusion, the analysis has shown that the discursive hierarchy of the dominant

discourses in the Norwegian parliament has changed during the eight-year period from 2008 to 2016.

### **7.1.2 The ‘refugee crisis’**

The change in the discursive hierarchy that took place between 2008 and 2016 shows that the ‘refugee crisis’ had an impact on parliamentary discourse. The crisis generated a need to find a point of balance between the moral, idealistic considerations that characterised the ‘humanitarian’ discourse – and more realistically feasible policy. As many of the parliamentary parties seemed unwilling to step into the ‘national interests’ discourse, the introduction of a new discourse was enabled – ‘real refugees’. There were increased numbers of immigration and asylum applications in 2008, and restrictive measures were taken in September the same year. The debate I analysed took place in April. This could suggest that a discursive change might have happened during the summer. However, the fact that the ‘humanitarian’ discourse remained dominant in 2013 suggests that discursive change did not happen as a result of increased immigration in 2008. The ‘refugee crisis’ of 2015, however, did induce a discursive change. The comparison between the dominant discourses of the two first and two last debates shows how parliamentary discourse was influenced by the unprecedented crisis.

### **7.1.3 Political implications**

The analysis has shown that the connection between discourses as preconditions for action and political outcome was not clear throughout the period of analysis. In 2008, increased immigration led to restrictive measures taken by the red-green government, measures that were aimed at illegitimate refugees. Intuitively, such a political outcome should have been preceded by discourse focusing on the need to protect refugees, and avoiding the use of resources on illegitimate asylum seekers. However, the ‘real refugees’ discourse did not gain substantial traction until 2016. The 2008-debate was rather characterised by a strong ‘humanitarian’ discourse, based in humanitarian traditions and moral considerations. The ‘humanitarian’ discourse aligns with the red-green government’s first government declaration, but not with the political outcome in 2008. In 2016, the link between discourses and political action was more apparent. The need to restrict asylum policy was acknowledged, and expressed. But rather than stating that the need for restrictions was based in the duty to protect the nation and its fundamental interests, it was based in the moral and legal responsibility to protect *only* those with legitimate claims. Subsequently, many of the restrictive measures that were taken during the crisis were permanently implemented the following year. This included removal of the reasonableness criterion, indicating that a narrower interpretation of the Refugee Convention

was implemented. Thus, the analysis has shown how dominant discourses have a *tendency* to result in political action – like in 2016, but that this is not *always* the case – like in 2008.

## **7.2 Reflections and implications for further research**

As stated in the methodology chapter, discourse analysis has certain limitations, and these limitations are important to reflect upon in my conclusions. My choices of empirical material, analytical focus and scope all affected the scientific outcome. This thesis has addressed four parliamentary debates from an eight-year period. Ideally, to be able to capture stable discourses, more source material or a longer time span could have been employed. However, delimiting the scope to a specific period with a restricted number of texts has enabled me to go in depth in each debate. I believe that this was the most advantageous choice within the time and space limitations of a master's thesis. The choice of analytical focus was based on an intention of uncovering naturalised facts and taken-for-granted background knowledges in order to identify ascription of meaning within refugee and asylum policy. This has enabled me to provide important insights into the relationship between meaning-making and political action, showing how language can be conducive to the shaping of social reality. Furthermore, I have showed how the theoretical perspective of a liberal paradox of migration can suggest why the debate regarding asylum and refugee policy is polarised and controversial. Yet, the findings of the analysis are only applicable to the Norwegian case, as discourse analysis is not suitable for generalisation. However, a strength of discourse analysis is its potential for hypothesis-generation.

This thesis has uncovered how Norwegian parliamentary representatives have ascribed meaning to the field of refugee and asylum policy in four debates taking place between 2008 and 2016. I found that the liberal paradox of migration was reflected in the parliamentary debate, creating a contradicting divide between national and international obligations. Although the findings in this thesis are specific to the Norwegian parliament, and not generalisable, the concept of a liberal paradox of migration causing polarised debate within the issue of refugee protection can be abstracted to other countries. The findings could be a starting point for comparative studies, using the parliament of another liberal state to compare to the Norwegian case. By adding a second case, the implications found in the Norwegian parliament can be cross-checked to test whether they are context-specific or transferable to other cases.

Furthermore, this thesis has also shown how the 'refugee crisis' of 2015 had an impact on parliamentary discourse. The discursive hierarchy changed in the aftermath of the crisis.

However, the period of analysis had its ending point in 2016. As such, future research could explore whether this discursive change was a temporary outcome immediately following the crisis, or if this change is persistent. Finally, in terms of discourses as preconditions for social action, I found that there was a discrepancy between the hegemonic discourse and political outcome in 2008, in contrast to the situation in 2016. In 2008, the hegemonic discourse aligned with the government's declaration, but not the restrictive measures that were implemented. This finding could be the starting point of a study exploring the background for this discrepancy, or why political action preceded discursive change in this instance. Thus, the findings of my analysis has provided several opportunities to build further research through hypothesis-generation.



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