

## Introduction

Summer 2015. While the beaches of Greek islands received boat after boat of refugees, a large part of the space of the central station in Copenhagen was occupied by young Danish volunteers who distributed sandwiches, drinks, blankets, and second-hand clothes to crowds of people on the move, most fleeing wars in Syria and Afghanistan. Locals bought train and bus tickets so the travellers could continue their journey onwards to Sweden and beyond. Across the strait forming the Swedish–Danish border, the Sound (hereafter Öresund), in Malmö, Swedish volunteers were doing the same as their Danish counterparts. Only a few weeks later did Malmö municipality and the local branch of the Swedish Migration Agency send some of their employees to meet those who were on the move. The asylum seekers were slowly registered and accommodated by different authorities. After their encounters with police and border patrol agents, they met case-workers from the Migration Agency, healthcare professionals for medical check-ups, employees and managers from refugee camps, schoolteachers for their children, and many more representatives of the welfare state. Those encounters were to shape and form their experiences from that point onwards.

From the news reports, it became evident that the situation was more or less the same at train stations and border crossings all over Europe. Within a few weeks, however, a refugee crisis had been declared by media outlets and politicians in many countries of Europe. The crowd at the Scandinavian stations was replaced by police officers after the Swedish government implemented border controls. The Danes followed suit. From that point onwards, the trains between Copenhagen and Malmö were stopped twice on their 40-minute journey; first, at the train station next to Copenhagen international airport, and second, at the next train station across the Öresund in Sweden, Malmö Hyllie. Guards met all travellers, asking for passports and ID cards, severely delaying the trains. Fewer and fewer people in line waiting to have their papers checked were asylum seekers. The crowd soon consisted of local commuters and European travellers. Talk of the refugee

crisis almost vanished from public discourse a few months later. What remains, however, are debates about what institutional arrangements are best suited to ‘integrate’ the refugees and maximise their utility for the welfare state they encounter.

Despite the spotlight, whether during the ‘long summer of migration’ in 2015 (Hess et al., 2016; Odugbesan and Schwiertz, 2018), which led to the constructed notion of a refugee crisis, or in the many welfare state interventions that target refugees across Europe, little is known about the experiences of refugees in their countries of settlement. Even less is known about those daily experiences in the established bureaucracies of the Northern European countries where increasing numbers have settled.<sup>1</sup> Through interrogating the phenomenon of the 2015 ‘refugee crisis’, and its foreplay and aftermath in the context of Northern Europe, this edited volume analyses the tensions that emerge when strong welfare states are faced with large migration flows. With an eye to the daily strategies and experiences of newly settled populations, this book tackles the role played by different actors such as state agencies, street-level bureaucrats, media discourses, and welfare policies in shaping those experiences. As we argue later in this introduction, the receiving states encountered those groups of people on the move as largely embodying high levels of risk that had to be mitigated through various mechanisms. The assumption of risk triggered the desire to control the flows of people and control the individuals who embodied the perceived risks. When control and discipline were being challenged, the sense of crisis took over public discourses and policy environments, triggering exaggerated responses that were camouflaged under the term refugee crisis. Writing prior to 2015, Peter Gatrell (2013, p. 17) reminds us that ‘there is a tendency to regard refugee crises as temporary and unique rather than as “recurring phenomena”’. Gatrell’s statement draws attention to crises as recurring phenomena, ones that strengthen governance through risk. As recurring phenomena, governing crises also involves the enactment of violence, which is the argument we put forth in this volume.

Given the significant similarities and differences between the welfare states of Northern Europe and their reactions to the perceived refugee crisis of 2015, the book focuses primarily on the three main cases of Denmark, Sweden, and Germany. Placed in a wider Northern European context – and illustrated by those chapters that discuss refugee experiences also in Norway and the UK – the Danish, Swedish, and German cases are the largest case studies of this edited volume. To focus on these three national contexts is meaningful because they include 1) Denmark, a country with one of the most restrictive asylum policies in Europe; 2) Sweden, having one of the – formerly – most generous asylum systems in the Global North;<sup>2</sup> and 3) Germany, which, since 2015 and of all EU member states, has received the largest number of asylum applications (UNHCR, 2017).

### **The aim of the book: studying refugees and welfare state bureaucracies**

It is difficult to approach the state methodologically and conceptually, to define its boundaries, and to disentangle the power structures within the context of state–society relations. Empirical research can, however, analyse some of the effects that the state’s institutions and its employees have on people’s everyday lives – and vice versa. With regards to the mechanisms that the state applies to govern its population, the analytical significance of studying bureaucratic practices has been highlighted: ‘The ongoing nature of governance requires maintenance and administration. This suggests that scholars interested in the workings and the effects of the state should look, at the very least, to the bureaucracies that keep it running’ (Bernstein and Mertz, 2011, p. 6). One example of such research is the study of refugee asylum and reception, which has been conducted in and across different national contexts (e.g. McKinnon, 2008; Canning, 2017; Maroufi, 2017; Sager and Öberg, 2017; Gateri, 2018).

This is also the subject of the book, which contributes to debates on the governance of non-citizens and the meaning of displacement, mobility, and seeking asylum by providing interdisciplinary analyses of a largely overlooked region of the world, with two specific aims. First, we scrutinise the construction of the 2015 crisis as a response to the large influx of refugees, paying particular attention to the disciplinary discourses and bureaucratic structures that are associated with it. Second, we investigate refugees’ encounters with these bureaucratic structures and how these encounters shape hopes and possibilities for building a new life after displacement. This allows us to show that the mobility of specific segments of the world’s population continues to be seen as a threat and a risk that has to be governed and controlled. Focusing on the Northern European context, the volume interrogates emerging policies and discourses, as well as the lived experiences of bureaucratisation from the perspective of individuals who find themselves the very objects of bureaucracies.

In his classical conception, Max Weber (2009, p. 245) defined a bureaucracy as a ‘permanent structure with a system of rational rules ... fashioned to meet calculable and recurrent needs by means of normal routine’. This definition, while offering an ideal type and not an empirical reality, is taken to reify a vision of a bureaucracy that is impersonal and merit-based, and founded on rational-legal administrative structures, which promises a variety of practical freedoms. While Weber saw the risk of bureaucracies as resulting in an ‘iron cage’ (*stahlhartes Gehäuse* in the German original, see Weber, 2009) governed by mundane, stagnant administrative structures, more contemporary studies highlight the ways these structures reproduce axes of discrimination and inequality. Bureaucracies involve power dynamics that affect the everyday lives of citizens (Herzfeld, 1992; Bernstein and

Mertz, 2011), sometimes with violent outcomes (Graeber, 2015). We address such violent outcomes associated with bureaucracy later in this introductory chapter but, before we do that, we highlight the relevance of focusing on bureaucracies in understanding experiences with forced displacement and important features of the Northern European context.

In his formative book, *The Making of the Modern Refugee*, Peter Gatrell (2013) draws attention to an international refugee regime that constructs refugee migration as a problem which is amenable to a solution, and argues that humanitarianism ‘fashion[s] the modern refugee as a passive and traumatised object of intervention’ (Gatrell, 2013, p. 13). As a legal category, the label refugee ‘seek[s] to “discipline” life and knowledge to realise dominant interests in society’ (Chimni, 2009, p. 12). As Liisa Malkki (1992) convincingly argued, nation state projects include a naturalisation of the links between people and place as well as a sedentary bias. This implies that populations on the move (be they nomads or forced-displaced), both across national borders and within a state’s territory, are seen not only as abnormal but also as a politico-moral problem (Malkki, 1992). ‘Historically, refugees’ loss of bodily connection to their [national] homelands came to be treated as a loss of moral bearings. Rootless, they were no longer trustworthy as “honest citizens”’ (Malkki, 1992, p. 32). Regarding forced-displaced people,<sup>3</sup> the bureaucratic labelling of refugees creates stereotypes and generalisations in the process of registering and providing support to those who have sought international protection (Harrell-Bond, 1986; Zetter, 1991). This process partly averts attempts by refugees to express individual or collective will, although at times it has also been resourcefully used as a basis for political mobilisation (Malkki, 1995; Gren, 2015; Joormann, 2018; Odugbesan and Schwiertz, 2018).

Roger Zetter (1991) highlights explicitly ‘the extreme vulnerability of refugees to imposed labels’ as well as ‘the non-participatory nature and powerlessness of refugees in these processes’ (p. 39; see also chapter 9 below). Yet, Zetter (1991) argues, labelling is not simply imposed but is a dynamic process, negotiated between the forced-displaced and those institutions that attempt to support them. As Lacroix (2004) has shown, the intersection between bureaucratisation and ‘refugeeness’ is not as simple as extending the denial of refugees’ agency, collective will, and, thus, democratic or political participation. There remain possibilities, although limited, for forced-displaced people to act collectively and engage in the politics of the receiving country and/or their countries of origin. Specifically, with regards to the effects of bureaucratisation on refugees’ agency, it is important to note that bureaucratisation is not unique to refugees but marks the lives of most people around the world, not least citizens in Northern Europe. Few people who seek asylum, however, are prepared to handle those bureaucratic interventions which asylum processes and integration programmes demand

(Jackson, 2008; Whyte, 2011). People are subjected to multiple layers of bureaucracies around the world, but those who are labelled refugees or seek such a status are especially so. It is our contention that Northern European welfare state bureaucracies maintain a level of discipline and control over the daily lives of their welfare clients that reproduces axes of exclusion and inclusion through mundane everyday interactions. Such tension between welfare and discipline calls for specific investigations of the encounters between refugees and the welfare states of Northern Europe.

Northern European welfare states are known for their efficiency and the support that their national as well as local institutions of government enjoy among citizens (Fitzgerald and Wolak, 2014).<sup>4</sup> A strong claim to bureaucratic efficiency, either imagined or real, is an important characteristic that sets apart Northern European countries from Europe's South. Asylum systems such as the Greek or the Italian – largely due to their geographical location, and their politically and economically subordinated position within the Dublin system<sup>5</sup> – are struggling to register, process, and accommodate people who seek asylum (Georgoulas, 2017; Mallardo, 2017; see also Herzfeld 1992; Pardo and Prato, 2011; Navaro-Yashin, 2012). At the same time, the bureaucracies of Northern Europe can trap applicants in the bureaucratic iron cage discussed above, which makes steel-hard claims to the rule of law, primarily understood as legal correctness, certainty, and efficiency (Johannesson, 2017; Joormann, 2019). This being noted, it is important to highlight that there are significant differences between the welfare states of Northern Europe. Some provide only a minimum safety net for their citizens; the German system's minimal financial aid to the long-term unemployed (Hartz IV) is a case in point. Others, for instance the Swedish welfare state, are meant to serve all members of society – including, arguably, full citizens and legally residing non-citizens more or less alike.<sup>6</sup>

More importantly, Northern European welfare states have undergone processes of privatisation and marketisation that influence the overall workings of welfare state institutions. Graeber (2015, p. 17) describes the current state of the world as 'the age of total bureaucratisation', in which the private and public sectors seem to have fused. In his view, paradoxically, the privatisation of contemporary welfare states and their services, aiming to reduce government interference in the economy and society, have instead produced 'more regulations, more bureaucrats and more police' (Graeber, 2015, p. 9). This holds true to Northern European welfare states, in which citizens' individual responsibility and activity are increasingly emphasised over the state's responsibility to support citizens (see Pedersen, 2011; Bruun et al., 2015; Rytter, 2018). We believe that this is part and parcel of the neoliberal turn influencing welfare states in Northern Europe and, therefore, of special relevance to the analyses offered in this volume.

### **The context of the book: re-bordering Northern Europe**

Differences in social welfare policies withstanding, the reactions to the long summer of migration in 2015 depict the convergence in Northern European states' approaches to the provision of asylum. We understand this as a process of re-bordering, which entails reverting back to pre-Schengen national border controls within the EU.<sup>7</sup> Sweden's government, at first, prided itself in receiving the highest rate of asylum seekers per capita in the EU (Barker, 2018). In a matter of months, however, this welcoming policy was replaced by the re-emergence of a strict border between the two Nordic countries and EU member states Denmark and Sweden through extensive passport controls targeting asylum seekers. As an immediate response, in order to avoid becoming a bottleneck for unwanted migrants on their way north, Denmark established general passport controls on its border with Germany. Having said this, it should be emphasised that travellers on their way south, i.e. from Sweden through Denmark to Germany, could generally continue to cross these borders without being checked at all.<sup>8</sup> While stricter border controls were implemented and accompanied by a more stringent asylum law (Meier-Braun, 2017), Germany has not started to control its borders in the face of asylum seekers in the same meticulous way as Sweden and Denmark did (see Dietz, 2017; Meier-Braun, 2017; Hoesch, 2018).<sup>9</sup>

We see this process of re-bordering as strongly intertwined with the workings of the welfare state system. For example, as part of the campaign for 2018's national elections (see Figure 1 below), Sweden's Social Democrats linked immigration control to the welfare state (Lindberg, 2017). Below the photograph of two border patrol officers checking passports on one of the trains that cross the Öresund, the claim that 'We protect Sweden's security' is followed by the announcement that 'the Swedish [Welfare] Model will be developed, not dismantled'. Presenting (unwanted) border crossers as a threat to Swedish national and social security, one can identify within this advertisement a discourse that constructs migration control as a policy tool to 'develop' rather than 'diminish' the welfare state. As chapter 7 in this volume shows, the legal restrictions on asylum seeking introduced in Sweden at the end of 2015 were strongly couched in a discourse that was based on the importance of the welfare state and its institutions and less so on engaging in an argument about the moral responsibility of providing asylum to those seeking refuge.

When considering welfare states such as Sweden, immigration policy brings together two fields: immigration control and welfare policy (Myrberg, 2014). Immigration control regulates who is allowed to enter the country and deals with controls that are mostly external to the nation state. Welfare policy regulates the provision of social rights to the inhabitants of the country and, thus, focuses on distributive measures that are internal to the



1 Election campaign poster for the Social Democratic Party (Sweden)

nation state (see [chapter 5](#) below). Following the argument that ‘the idea of distributive justice presupposes a bounded world within which distribution takes place’ (Walzer, 1983, p. 31), Swedish political scientist Karin Borevi (2012, p. 32; see also Öberg, 1994) argues that two general options can be discerned regarding the question of who is allowed to enjoy national welfare: 1) a system where everyone with legal residence in the country has equal access to the welfare policy but with limitations concerning who is allowed to immigrate; or 2) a system of relatively free immigration policy but with a differentiated right to welfare for different categories of inhabitants (for example, limited benefits for certain groups of non-citizens). The latter system resembles the guest-worker model, where migrants are expected to return after some time. Varieties of this second model have been applied in, for instance, Germany and Austria, as well as in the Scandinavian countries in the early decades of labour migration after the Second World War.



Since the 1970s, however, the first model, focusing on equal access and limited immigration, has become the preferred choice for Northern Europe's welfare states, although in different forms.

Over time, our three main cases (Sweden, Denmark, and Germany) have moved away from the first option outlined by Borevi. One example that clearly illustrates this approach is the temporary law in Sweden, which has been in force since July 2016 and will remain (at least) until July 2021. According to this package of temporarily more restrictive regulations, only applicants who receive (full) refugee status via UNHCR's resettlement programme (quota refugees) are granted permanent residence permits (hereafter PRPs). For other protection-seeking people whose applications have been accepted, temporary residence permits (hereafter TRPs) are issued.<sup>10</sup> Refugees who live in Sweden on a TRP, despite the fact that they are legally recognised as 'in need of protection', are granted only limited rights to family reunification. They indeed face increased 'maintenance requirements' for family reunification under the temporary law. This means that people who live in Sweden on a TRP must be able to financially provide for the family members who plan to move to Sweden. Furthermore, the Swedish welfare state has significantly reduced the benefits available for the most vulnerable group of people who seek asylum: rejected applicants (who might often be in the process of appealing their case, see [chapter 2](#) below). This regulation limits assistance for maintaining livelihood and housing from local social services. Those aspects which led to Sweden being a relatively refugee-welcoming destination until recently have been reduced to a 'minimum level' (as the Swedish government used the term in 2015–2016). Indeed, the current situation in Sweden illustrates that the reality of governing welfare and immigration in today's Northern European countries has moved away from both of Borevi's models – 1) full access to welfare but limited immigration, or 2) relatively free immigration policy but with a differentiated right to welfare – as outlined above (for the Danish case, see [chapter 5](#) below). Instead, a third alternative consisting of limited immigration and limited access to welfare has emerged.

Yet it should not be assumed that such restrictive policies are necessarily successful in meeting their goal of deterring people from seeking asylum or establishing permanent residence in their host societies. As empirical research has shown time and again (see Banakar, 2015), the socially practised 'law in action' is strongly dependent on the interpretation that the responsible actors perform when they apply regulations. In other words, those changed norms and rules of refugee reception have to be not only implemented but also discursively interpreted and socially practised at different levels. In the EU context, this administration operates at the national but also at the supra-national and local levels (see e.g. [chapters 9](#) and [12](#), this volume).



In most countries of Northern Europe, the reception of refugees is handled at the local level, and the pressure on municipalities across Europe to find pragmatic solutions has risen (Ireland, 2004, pp. 7–8; Caponio and Borkert, 2010, pp. 9–13). Municipalities and other local political and bureaucratic institutions have increased in importance for the settling and integration of refugees. Simultaneously, bordering mechanisms are being exercised within the borders of the nation state, adding another dimension to the process of re-bordering. In chapter 5 of this volume, Lindberg investigates this internal bordering by focusing on those Danish and Swedish welfare regulations and practices that are currently used to exhaust unwanted migrants in order to make them leave. In chapter 12, Canning takes on the notion of internalised bordering and highlights the micro-level, everyday forms of social control which deliberately encroach on the autonomy of people seeking asylum in the Danish, Swedish, and British contexts. Such encroachment replicates the experiences of borders in daily experiences and practices.

Given examples such as the Danish and Swedish minimum (welfare) rights policies that are currently enforced, the localisation of refugee management makes the encounter between forced-displaced people and state bureaucracies a daily affair, which would be escaped more easily were the state an omnipresent yet abstract actor. In those day-to-day encounters between the state and refugees, street-level bureaucrats (Lipsky, 1980) such as police officers, caseworkers at the Migration Agency, language teachers, and social workers are crucial and often constitute the only direct contact with the state and its policies. In this volume, chapters 4, 5, 9, 10, 11, and 12 highlight the clashes between refugees' assumptions about the relatively welcoming societies of Northern Europe and the local realities of restrictive policies, asylum processing, integration programmes, and unwelcoming or even hostile discourses about forced-displaced people. Chapters 2, 3, 6, 7, and 8 probe the ways in which re-bordering is a process that is legitimised, justified, and also manipulated at the political, legal, and cultural levels. At the centre of these processes of re-bordering and their consequences, we argue, is a perception of risk and a desire to manage refugees through mitigating risks. This process of mitigating risks is characterised by bureaucratic violence, which we discuss in the following sections.

### **Deconstructing the refugee crisis: governing through risk**

A critical approach to Northern Europe's most recent refugee crisis can benefit from applying Ulrich Beck's analysis of Risk Society. There is an abundant literature on ways that people's mobility is seen as dangerous and threatening (e.g. Turner, 2007; Isotalo, 2009), and various strands of

research document the risks associated with migration and displacement, such as health risks (e.g. Kentikelenis et al., 2015), behavioural risks (e.g. Hosper et al., 2007), and security risks (e.g. Faist, 2002). The very decision to migrate is believed to entail a number of risks (see e.g. Heindlmaier and Blauberger, 2017). Security risks associated with migration have legitimised extraordinary policies related to asylum and migrant rights (Hampshire, 2011; see also Bourbeau, 2015). Securitisation withstanding, we believe that the approach to migrants and asylum seekers is part of a larger neoliberal governmentality strategy that is constitutive of Beck's risk society. Moreover, the sedentary bias in viewing migration and displacement (see Malkki, 1995; Bakewell, 2002) constructs and amplifies the problems associated with the mobility of people. When sedentarism is naturalised, mobility, movement, and migration pose a problem and an anomaly, and the mechanisms of control have to ensure that certain cross-border mobility is curtailed (Malkki, 1995) and contained. There is the risk that 'bogus' claims to asylum are presented; government practices and employees have to ensure the credibility of claims. Once granted asylum, there is a risk that people will cluster in ethnic neighbourhoods and establish urban 'ghettos', which is controlled for by ensuring distribution of accepted refugees among the different municipalities to 'share the burden'. Once settled, there continues to be a risk that refugees will roam around the nation state and disappear from the municipalities' purview. Registering refugees and enrolling them in introductory programmes forces their regular interaction with state officials and their continuous surveillance. Introductory programmes perform the added function of mitigating the risks of refugees becoming endlessly unemployed and, thus, long-term recipients of welfare assistance (see e.g. Valenta and Bunar, 2010; Brochmann and Hagelund, 2012; Schmidt, 2013; Myrberg, 2017). The shift to TRPs, as discussed above, is a clear reflection of the risk that refugees may become permanent inhabitants depending on social welfare in a context where many citizens experience their welfare state as threatened due to constant budget cuts, privatisation, and lowered taxes.

Settlement, introductory programmes, and temporary status are different examples of the logic of governmentality and its reliance on disciplinary power. According to Foucault (1979), disciplinary power is that which is exercised through administrative systems and social services, such as prisons, schools, and mental health services. As disciplinary institutions, they rely on mechanisms such as surveillance, assessment, the organisation of space, timetables, and daily routines, which ensure that people behave in certain ways or are being disciplined without having to resort to the use of corporal violence. Disciplinary mechanisms ensure the control of populations and promote norms of human conduct in modern society. In face of migration risks, they become increasingly important and relevant to disciplining the roaming populations and mitigating the risks they pose.

Beyond disciplinary power, the heightened assumption of risk and the exaggerated responses they trigger create certain forms of violence. Adam et al. (2000, p. 215) argue that established risk definitions are a magic wand with which a 'society can terrify itself and thereby activate its political centres and become politicised from within'. In Sweden, the Social Democrats' 2018 election campaign poster (Figure 1) demonstrates such an attempt to mobilise around policing the border. Once risks are established, activated, and politicised, it is then expected that resources will be allocated by governments to regulate and manage such risks. This is also reflected in the construction of the need to strengthen the welfare state in face of the refugee influx. As evident in the Social Democrats' election poster, political discourse aimed at strengthening the welfare state can resort to scapegoating migrants and constructing them as the cause of various problems facing the nation state (see e.g. Wodak, 2019). As historical narratives attest to, scapegoating is often synonymous with violence (Arendt, 1973).

The conceptualisation of risk as mechanisms with which 'society can terrify itself' fits particularly well with Danish asylum policy. While Denmark had a severely restrictive refugee policy already prior to 2015, the risk of becoming a bottleneck for people on their way north to (or through) Sweden was used to further securitise Danish policies (Gammeltoft-Hansen, 2017; see also chapter 4 below). In a risk society, laws like the Danish 'Jewellery Law'<sup>11</sup> (see chapter 2) have become widely uncontested among the domestic public, given the accepted state of emergency brought about in response to an increased number of asylum applications. More akin to a panic attack than a refugee crisis, the book's three countries of focus suddenly perceived themselves as being threatened by a large inflow of unwanted bodies that they were not prepared to receive and manage (see chapter 7 on the absence of a Swedish plan and the anxieties associated with such absence). Re-bordering and the more repressive policies it involved were immediate first reactions to the panic. The measures were considered to be temporary; for example, in Sweden they were presented as bringing about a much needed 'breathing space'. As many of the contributions in this volume point to, however, they are part of a long process of control and exclusion that preceded the declaration of crisis in 2015.<sup>12</sup>

A risk society relies on large bureaucratic structures to deal with and safeguard against perceived risks. Analysing the establishment of risk bureaucracies that emerged following the War on Terror, Heng and McDonagh (2011, p. 1) state that 'the emergence of such risk regulatory regimes however is neither assumed nor predicted. The subjective and constructed nature of risk perceptions suggests that any emergent regulatory framework based on increased risk consciousness can never be considered a foregone conclusion.' In other words, the ambivalent nature of risk dictates the continual construction and negotiation of the meaning of risk. In

the context of the refugee crisis, Abdelhady (2019) demonstrates that media discourses communicated ambivalent and incoherent representations, ultimately leading to a crisis of meaning. Such an ambivalent understanding of risk (see also [chapter 6](#)) constructs risk as a process that can, depending on the perspective, have not only negative but also positive consequences. This conceptualisation of risk is close to how the word is used in the (neoliberal) language of corporate business and the global financial market: a certain action includes risks, but it can lead to considerable gains. Risk management industries, which seek to reduce those risks that public discourse identifies as the most threatening, have increasingly permeated the approach of governments to immigrants in general and refugees specifically (see e.g. Heng and McDonagh, 2011).

Given this understanding of risk, one can argue that public discourses in Northern Europe approach refugee migration as a risk – if in different ways. Refugees were imagined as real or potential terrorists, sexual assailants, unemployed welfare recipients, religious maniacs, and cultural others – basically as risks to the norms and cohesion of the receiving societies (Abdelhady and Malmberg, 2018). As a result, throughout Europe's North, the political will to control the immigration of people who seek asylum contributed to the expansion of bureaucracies that administer refugees through risk management techniques. Such risk management, arguably, is interested in regulating the future. Just as the War on Terror that followed 11 September 2001 benefitted from the lack of an ability to declare the end of the need for war, risk management lacks an ability to declare itself successful in mitigating risks. As a result, both the War on Terror and risk management become infinite strategies that continue to justify the control of certain bodies and the outright exclusion of others.

As noted above, however, risk is subjective and constructed, and therefore cannot be taken as a foregone conclusion. [Chapters 6](#) and [7](#) illustrate the ambivalent understanding of the refugee risk in the case of Sweden. Ambivalence emerges as a result of views stressing that refugees are a much-needed economic resource that can contribute to the welfare state once integrated and turned into, among other things, docile and productive labour (e.g. De Genova, 2009; Holgersson, 2011). Such ambivalence, in this and other contexts, results in the negotiation of its meaning in daily interactions. The chapters in this book provide evidence of the ways risks introduced by the inflow of asylum seekers are defined and negotiated at the point of encounter between the refugees and the risk management industries of Northern Europe's welfare states. The diverse effects that these different yet interconnected bureaucratic interventions, and the ambivalent attitudes towards refugees, have on the lives of people who seek asylum – and vice versa – is a subject matter that is empirically investigated in this volume. These diverse effects, however, share their foundation in risk

management and enactment of bureaucratic violence as we explain in the next section.

## Refugees and bureaucratic violence

We suggest that Weber's iron cage, one that is brought about by bureaucratic institutions in Northern Europe in the experience of refugees, can be better understood in conjunction with the concept of bureaucratic violence. Hannah Arendt (1969) explained the relationship between bureaucracy and violence as follows:

the greater the bureaucratisation of public life, the greater will be the attraction of violence. In a fully developed bureaucracy there is nobody left with whom one could argue, to whom one could present grievances, on whom the pressures of power could be exerted. Bureaucracy is the form of government in which everybody is deprived of political freedom, of the power to act; for the rule by Nobody is not no-rule, and where all are equally powerless we have a tyranny without a tyrant.

While Arendt's essay was written in the context of the 1960s' students' movements and the violence they triggered in the US and France, her remarks draw attention to the universality of the resort to violence whenever revolutionary change is attempted. In Arendt's analysis, violence is not physical but mostly manifests itself in the denial of rights and freedoms, especially the right to appeal and resist the injustices of power. A growing literature on the intersections between bureaucracy and violence points to the 'spaces where state and bureaucratic organizations exert force and social control and engender struggle across multiple scales' (Eldridge and Reinke, 2018, p. 95). David Graeber (2015, pp. 32–33) describes the process of total bureaucratisation and the violence it is ready to perform as follows:

Security cameras, police scooters, issuers of temporary ID cards, and men and women in a variety of uniforms acting in either public or private capacities, trained in tactics of menacing, intimidating, and ultimately deploying physical violence, appear just about everywhere – even in places such as playgrounds, primary schools, college campuses, hospitals, libraries, parks or beach resorts, where fifty years ago their presence would have been considered scandalous, or simply weird.

Graeber's description refers to the readiness to use physical violence in daily surroundings, which is only one aspect of the kind of violence we refer to. A different perspective on bureaucracy is offered by Akhil Gupta (2012), who demonstrates the structural violence (see also chapter 2) embedded in the practices of the postcolonial Indian state even when that very same state wishes to ameliorate suffering. Gupta describes the arbitrariness of decisions taken by bureaucrats, and the widespread corruption embedded in

systems of care. Such contradictory processes, the author shows, systematically reproduce and normalise suffering.

An important element of bureaucratic violence takes the form of waiting. As Pierre Bourdieu explains, waiting demonstrates how the effect of power is experienced (see also Khosravi, 2014). ‘Making people wait ... delaying without destroying hope is part of the domination’ (Bourdieu, 2000, p. 228). Javier Auyero (2012) also takes on the experience of waiting (see chapter 11) that poor people have to go through as they interact with state bureaucracies in Argentina, and argues for the construction of subordinate political subjectivation as an outcome of bureaucracies. In Auyero’s book, poor people wait for identification documents, at the welfare office, or for relocation in a toxic industrial hinterland. This analysis allows us to understand the ways state interventions and bureaucracies regulate the lives of poor people. In the process of waiting, subordination is normalised, and poor people’s citizenship is curtailed. In the end, waiting emerges as one of the punitive methods of state violence. Or, as Shahram Khosravi (2014) writes, ‘waiting generates feelings of “powerlessness and vulnerability”’.

In this volume, we expand the analysis of spaces where the state exerts bureaucratic control engendering struggle, harm, and violence. The outcomes are analysed not only as products of abstract structures, but ones that are administered through processes of decision-making (see chapters 2 and 3), paperwork (see chapters 9 and 10), mass/social media discourses (see chapters 6, 7, and 8), inaction (see chapter 11), and exclusion (see chapters 4, 5, and 12). Thus, the authors in this collection illustrate the ways in which bureaucracies interact with refugees face-to-face, structure their lives outside of these personal interactions, and reproduce different forms of violence that diminish their access to citizenship and human rights.

The concept of bureaucratic violence has its roots in postcolonial studies, which drew our attention to ways bureaucratic violence has historically been used to discipline or even wipe out colonised populations (e.g. Fanon, 2008, 2014, see also Lewis and Mills, 2003; Dwyer and Nettelbeck, 2018). Apart from the most infamous violence of the German Nazi-government of the Second World War, both Sweden and Denmark have ruled and administered indigenous populations like the Sami people and the Greenlanders with colonial methods. Other minority groups, such as the Roma, have also been harshly governed (Arbetsmarknadsdepartementet, 2014). The abduction of children to foster care or compulsory schooling, and forced sterilisations directed against marginalised social groups and indigenous populations are cases in point (see also Broberg and Tydén, 2005; Farver, 2010; Sydow Mölleby et al., 2011; Sköld, 2013). When states govern vulnerable minorities, violent interventions of the state are frequently considered necessary ‘for their own good’. Duran (2006) has defined ‘colonial bureaucratic violence’ as the various mechanisms through which institutions alienate,

isolate, and oppress Native people. In the process, institutions also ignore and deny the importance of indigenous cultures (see also the notion of epistemic violence in Spivak, 1990; Evans, 1997). While Duran writes about Native Americans who endured cultural genocide, the definition provided is useful for our purposes. While we do not wish to equate colonial violence with neoliberal bureaucratic violence, we wish to show that bureaucracy in contemporary Northern Europe, in its interest in being impersonal, efficient, rule-based, and formal, ends up alienating and oppressing newly arrived refugees whose cultures and hopes and dreams are often ignored in multiple interactions and different ways (see especially chapters 9, 10, and 11). These mechanisms are equally believed to be necessary for the clients' own good and should not necessarily be considered any less coercive than those carried out by colonial powers. As Fassin (2015, p. 2) concludes about the French state and its street-level bureaucrats, they 'represent a dual dimension of order and benevolence, of coercion and integration.' The chapters in this volume, in different ways, show that impersonal rules dehumanise and exclude newcomers in ways that end up replicating some of the features of colonial violence.

Based on the analyses we offer in this volume, it is no coincidence that the disciplining bureaucratic practices that intervene in the lives of refugees bring to mind colonial practices. Colonialism and bureaucracy (on which colonialism depended) aim to control every aspect of human life, as is evident in the bureaucratisation of schools, hospitals, municipalities, and social services that were all part of the colonial project. For example, Mitchell (1991) illustrates that the colonisation of Egypt relied on large bureaucracies that institutionalised order, made the colonised legible to colonial power, and maintained discipline over colonised bodies. In European discourses, racialised refugees and other non-European migrants are often conflated with the colonial Other of historical times. It is, indeed, one effect of postcolonialism that many colonised and racialised subjects migrate to the (former) colonial metropolises of Europe. Racial imaginations also influence who is considered to belong to the nation and, indirectly, who is considered worthy of assistance from the welfare state (see e.g. Fox, 2012).<sup>13</sup>

Writing already in the 1980s, Nobel (1988, pp. 29–30) referred to an 'arms race against humanitarianism' coupled with an 'escalation of unilateral measure against refugees'. Nobel's analysis of the phenomenon of forced displacement is as true today as at the time he was writing:

The overwhelming majority of the refugees originate in the Third World. The direct causes of their flight are conflicts kept alive mostly by super-power politics and by weapons forged and manufactured at bargain prices in the rich countries, who export death and destruction, and import the natural and partly processed products of the poor countries. At the same time they refuse to a great extent to receive the refugees who try to escape the suffering and the sorrow generated by super-power politics. (p. 29)



The refusal to receive those escaping suffering is at the core of the analysis provided in this book. When reception is coerced, either through legal resettlement or, as in most cases, by irregular entry, the problem facing the rich countries of Northern Europe (three of which provide the geographic focus of this book) becomes that of bureaucratic management. This serves as the basis for controlling most aspects of refugees' lives, while simultaneously alienating, isolating, and oppressing them. We propose the study of this process of discipline and coercion of refugees in an attempt to mitigate their imminent risk through conceptual tools offered by the framework of regimes of mobility.

### **Regimes of mobility**

The different contributions in this book are theoretically and methodologically influenced by the 'mobility turn' within analyses of migration and mass movements of people. In discussing the contours of the mobility turn, Glick Schiller and Salazar (2013) draw our attention to the need to analyse 'regimes of mobility'. According to the authors, 'the regimes of mobility framework brings attention to the relationships between mobility and immobility, localisation and transnational connection, experiences and imaginaries of migration, and rootedness and cosmopolitan openness' (Glick Schiller and Salazar, 2013, p. 183). From our perspective, refugees' encounters with the welfare state are sites where these relationships can be interrogated and analysed beyond an insistence on those binaries that the regimes of mobility framework refutes. For example, it is within the encounters with bureaucracies that we can examine states' interests in controlling mobile populations, managing their social mobility, and motivating their further mobility (to another country and/or back home). Similarly, it is within these encounters that we can understand the contradictions between cosmopolitan openness in state policies towards the protection of refugees and exclusionary practices of re-bordering (see Benhabib, 2004, 2014). The ongoing encounter between established bureaucracies and mobile subjects is one that is characterised by unequal distributions of power. Such inequality is hard to conceive when the analysis is focused on either the state and its policies/practices or the migrants' narratives of mobility. It is precisely at the encounter between the two that the regimes of mobility framework – and our volume as an extension of it – enables us to specify the inequality and interlinks between state and migrant.

As an integral part of our reading of this framework, the reference to regimes brings attention to ways individual states and international entities regulate and surveil the mobility of individuals, often through bureaucratic measures. At the same time, the attention paid to the notion of regimes reflects the importance of analysing forms of governmentality

and hegemony that shape such mobility (Hall, 1997; Foucault and Ewald, 2003; Glick Schiller and Salazar, 2013, p. 189). In our understanding, practices of bureaucratisation in Northern Europe often aim at handling both governmental policies towards mobile people and street-level bureaucrats' work processes in different institutions. Regimes of mobility are thus affected by practices that have little to do with mobility and more with institutional requirements and bureaucratic logics, including 'audit culture' (see also Strathern, 2000). Audit culture is the process by which the rules and methods of accountancy and financial management are used for the governance of people and organisations, and the social and cultural effects of this process. A focus on accountability colours policy delivery with increased standardisation, documentation, and evaluation. Today, this influences both work units and individual street-level bureaucrats within Northern European welfare states (see also Bruun et al., 2015). In chapters 2, 3, and 5, Joormann, Skodo, and Lindberg analyse recent developments regarding refugee mobility and the ways they have re-configured the governmentality of refugees at the local, national, and regional levels.

Within migration research, the mobility paradigm distinguishes mobility from movement by highlighting its meaningfulness: 'to ignore the way movement is entangled in all sorts of social significance is to simplify and strip out the complexity of reality as well as the importance of those meanings' (Adey, 2009, p. 35). The meanings of mobility can come from an array of sources including the media, government, workplace policies, and legal interpretations, the latter two having ongoing direct material effects on the bodies of the subjects of these discourses and policies (Blomley, 1994). The focus on the specific constructions of and effects on refugee bodies is the approach taken by Abdelhady, Canning, and Jovičić: As chapters 6, 7, and 12 show, albeit in different ways, control over refugees' bodies is associated with institutional practices that legitimise and perform the desire to control.

Furthermore, focusing on meaningfulness underscores a subject-based approach and brings into question the power dynamics shaping these subjective experiences (Rogaly, 2015). A critical approach to mobility (Massey, 1993; Söderström et al., 2013) examines such power dynamics and demonstrates the ways mobility entails a complex relation to places (Waters, 2014), a mixture of freedom and coercion (Gill et al., 2011), and simultaneous experiences of success and stagnation (Abdelhady and Lutz, *under review*) that need to be understood within specific institutional arrangements. In chapters 9, 10, and 11, Gren, Pearlman, and Weiss interrogate the power dynamics integral to bureaucratic interactions that shape individual experiences and the associated imaginaries that influence much of these experiences. The three chapters discuss how meaning-making, aspirations, and mobility strategies are linked to both institutional settings in the receiving country and migrants' cultural and social understandings of what a good

life constitutes. This understanding is key within the regimes of mobility framework that this book extends.

### Chapters in the book

In Part I, ‘Governing refugees’, four chapters portray the political and legal contexts within which the refugee crisis and the accompanying mechanisms to manage mobility risks can be understood. In [chapter 2](#), Joormann provides an introduction to the constructions of refugees in and through political discourses and legal procedures in Sweden, Germany, and Denmark. His analysis underscores the relevance of class as a category of stratification, which plays an important (yet sometimes contradictory) role in the granting of asylum. In [chapter 3](#), Skodo elaborates on the Swedish case by showing how the construction of refugees as a national risk ultimately impeded the ability to respond to the influx of large number of refugees in 2015. Relying on the analysis of a government report, the chapter unearths the official public theories expressed in this report and puts forth two key findings. First, it reveals a fundamental difference between the national and local government. The national government saw 2015 as a threat to sovereignty, while the municipalities saw it as a strain on the bureaucracy that was successfully managed, the lessons and resources of which were lost on the government and the state precisely at the moment when new practices were established that could effectively deal with another mass entry. Second, this difference does not imply an entirely autonomous sphere of action for the local government, since the national government curtailed the autonomy of the local government. Skodo shows that far from threatening Swedish state sovereignty, as the Swedish national government and mainstream media claimed, the ‘refugee crisis’ has justified, asserted, and extended sovereignty by recourse to national and international law, and an associative chain link between asylum seekers, illegal immigration, terrorism, and crisis. In [chapter 4](#) Bak Jørgensen focuses on the framing of crisis in the Danish context, the deterrence policies that this framing created, and some of the reactions these policies triggered among certain segments of civil society. In his analysis, Bak Jørgensen unpacks three interrelated concepts: deterrence policies, institutional uncertainty, and deportable populations. Similar to Skodo’s analysis, Bak Jørgensen shows that the specific framing of crisis legitimised restrictive policy shifts that receive widespread support in Danish public life. These policies also feed into a climate of uncertainty and expand the category of deportable populations, exemplifying a form of bureaucratic violence. In [chapter 5](#), Lindberg illustrates the implementation of the minimum rights approaches adopted by the Swedish and Danish governments in view of making their respective countries less attractive for persons seeking protection. While the discussed policies form part of a wider

European trend whereby welfare regimes are instrumentalised for the purpose of border and migration control, Lindberg argues that restrictions to minimum welfare services assume particular significance in highly bureaucratised welfare states, and should be understood as a particular form of state violence.

Part II, 'Disciplining refugees', is illustrated in three chapters. Jovičić, in [chapter 6](#), examines visual material and associated imageries of refugees and shows that the changing visual discourses can best be illustrated through four visual frames: victimisation – refugee bodies constructed as voiceless victims caught in suffering; securitisation – refugee bodies enmassed and posing threats to destabilise sovereignty of the 'nation state'; reception – images of refugees being welcomed and integrated in Sweden; and humanisation – private portraits of people fleeing depicted as complex individuals and active political subjects. In [chapter 7](#), Abdelhady expands the cultural analysis and shows that the refugee crisis of 2015 was constructed as a crisis facing institutions, as they were unable to cope with the demands of bureaucratically managing and assisting those who came to Sweden seeking help. The author underscores the salience of the institutional crisis rather than moral panic that shaped the public framing of crisis in 2015. The chapter concludes that even though Sweden sees itself as a generous, righteous country, a restrictive turn can still be justified through invocation of notions of order, discipline, control and management, without challenging the nation's self-image. [Chapter 8](#) continues the focus on Sweden and the meaning of asylum from the perspective of social media users who may not have experienced mobility. In the chapter, Sundström and Obenius analyse the debate surrounding a decision to deport an elderly woman, which was later overturned by one of Sweden's Migration Courts. The analysis highlights the dichotomy of inclusion/exclusion as a form of discursive violence that is exercised bottom-up, bringing new insight into an important aspect of the dehumanisation of asylum seekers and refugees.

In Part III, focusing on 'The meaning of refugeeeness', the counterproductive consequences of the refugee regime are further illustrated. In [chapter 9](#), Gren interrogates the Swedish introductory programme that is expected to aid in integrating refugees. Instead of focusing on integration, Gren illustrates experiences of frustration, loss, and dependence, which often thwart the hopes and dreams of mobile youth who arrive in Sweden. Despite policy-makers' attempts to individualise the programme and to offer extensive support, institutional requirements and the disciplining of refugees have immobilising effects, not least when it comes to social mobility and higher education. Following the same interest in uncovering the perception of bureaucratic interventions from the perspective of the refugees themselves, in [chapter 10](#), Pearlman brings the focus to the context of Germany. Pearlman's findings echo Gren's as they illustrate the mismatch between mobility

and hopes on the one hand, and frustrations and dependence on the other. The entrapment in different bureaucratic regulations and institutional procedures are experienced as hinderances to establishing oneself in the new society. In [chapter 11](#), Weiss turns to Norway and tackles one specific form of frustration, that of waiting. In illustrating the ways in which the welfare state exerts violence on refugees, Weiss depicts the ways bureaucracies negatively impact lived experiences, despite attempts at empathy and care by individual street-level bureaucrats, of those waiting to be resettled in a municipality and to start a new life. Even though Weiss' interlocutors have received permanent residency, lack of willingness and coordination between different welfare state institutions prolong the waiting and create a situation of bureaucratic violence. In [chapter 12](#), Canning turns attention to the ways the externalisation of controls through physical barriers – walls, wires, and border policing – is increasingly supplemented with more banal and bureaucratic internal constrictions which work to encourage immigrants to leave. Detention, degradation, and destitution have become the modus operandi for facilitating the removal of unwanted migrant bodies in the UK, Denmark, and Sweden. Canning provides a vivid look into the ways external and internal border controls are executed in Britain, Denmark, and Sweden. Although there are similarities, each country uses the strategies differently, particularly since the increase in immigration to Europe from 2015.

Collectively, the chapters in this volume investigate how refugees are constructed not only as a threat, and/or scapegoats for gaining votes and political power, but also as a specific category of people in need of welfare state interventions. It is the aim of this book to disentangle the different policy fields and to investigate their impacts on the daily experiences of newly arrived refugees. The importance of daily experiences also stems from the nature of the bureaucracies themselves. We go beyond the analysis of restrictive discourses, regulations, and practices and focus on the construction of different notions of 'crisis' and the different manifestations of violence that emerge when refugees encounter Northern European welfare states and their bureaucracies. Thus, we discuss asylum processes and integration programmes as phenomena that must be understood in the context of the bureaucratisation of everyday life. As such, the chapters offer insights that go beyond the most recent construction of crisis in 2015 to investigate long-term approaches to state–society relations, and political, social, and cultural membership in the welfare state.

## Notes

- 1 By 'Northern Europe', we refer to those countries in Europe's North-West that are not post-communist states and, in this sense, share a history of having developed into welfare states (currently neoliberalised) with a population that

is marked by recent immigration from Global Southern countries: e.g. people from the former colonies in the UK and the Netherlands, workers and their families who moved from Turkey to Germany, or people who came as refugees from various places to the Nordic countries. Thus, ‘North’ refers to the geographical location of the countries, while ‘West’ is understood historically (hence including, e.g., Finland but not the Baltic countries).

- 2 Abiri (2000) argues that the generosity of the Swedish system has in fact fluctuated considerably over the years. Others such as Brekke (2004), Noll (2005), Barker (2012), and Joormann (2019) provide evidence that problematise the notion of generosity showing the inhumanity and arbitrariness of the Swedish refugee regime.
- 3 Abram and associates use the term ‘forced-displaced people’ to refer to those people who are ‘categorised and labelled as refugees, asylum seekers, internally displaced people, and stateless people’ (Abram et al., 2017: 8). When we use the word ‘refugees’, we use it as an overarching term, while we use ‘asylum seekers’ in those contexts where it is important that the person(s) in question are waiting for a decision on their asylum claim.
- 4 According to statistics published by the EU, trust in national governments is highest in the Netherlands, followed by Sweden, Luxembourg, Finland, and Germany (European Commission, 2017).
- 5 Since 1 September 1997, the Dublin system (currently ‘Dublin III’ [EU Regulation 604/2013]) is central to the administration of asylum in Europe. With the Dublin system, the signatory states agree that they have the right to expel asylum seekers to another Dublin-signatory state. This opens up for expulsions to the country where the applicant is registered to have entered ‘Europe’ as defined by the area that encompasses the territory of the Dublin system’s signatory states (see e.g. Brekke and Brochmann, 2015).
- 6 In the context of refugee asylum, it is important to stress that many financial benefits are not granted to asylum seekers whose applications are pending. Or, as the Swedish Social Insurance Agency, *Försäkringskassan*, clearly states on its webpages: ‘When you are waiting for a residence permit you do not have the right to [receive] money from *Försäkringskassan*. But when you have received a residence permit you *may* have the right to money from *Försäkringskassan*’ (Swedish Social Insurance Agency, 2018, our translation, emphases added; see also chapter 9).
- 7 The Schengen Agreement, signed in 1985, is a treaty that guarantees the freedom of movement for people and the abolishment of border checks within the specific geographic area of Europe ([https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/borders-and-visas/schengen\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/borders-and-visas/schengen_en)).
- 8 One-and-a-half years later, in May 2017, these ‘strengthened border controls’ were again loosened (Joormann, 2017). By then, the numbers of asylum applications in Sweden had diminished significantly, while business interests and the regional authorities were pushing for a model of border controls with less impact on the travel of commuters, tourists, and other (wanted) border-crossers (Barker, 2018).
- 9 Even prior to 2015, scholars observed the intensification of border controls and criminalisation of immigration in Europe’s North (Abiri, 2000; Aas, 2007; Bosworth and Guild, 2008; Barker, 2013). Importantly, such accounts explain

that refugee migration is discursively constructed and framed increasingly as a security problem (see Abdelhady and Malmberg, 2018). The increased number of refugees arriving to Europe in the aftermath of the popular uprisings in the Middle East have only intensified this discursive construction of threat and the consequential securitisation (Abdelhady and Malmberg, 2018).

- 10 During the first half of 2017, 12.1 per cent of accepted asylum seekers in Sweden were granted PRPs, while the remaining 87.9 per cent received TRPs based on refugee status or another protection status. See, in Swedish, [www.migrationsverket.se/download/18.4100dc0b159d67dc6146d5/1506929524658/Beviljade+uppeh%C3%A5llstillst%C3%A5nd+2017.pdf](http://www.migrationsverket.se/download/18.4100dc0b159d67dc6146d5/1506929524658/Beviljade+uppeh%C3%A5llstillst%C3%A5nd+2017.pdf) (Accessed 19 October 2017).
- 11 The 'Jewellery Law' stated that refugees' valuables worth more than 10,000 DKK (approx. 1,200 GBP) should be confiscated by Danish authorities (see Crouch and Kingsley, 2016).
- 12 Similarly, literature on the exclusion of Arab Americans post 11 September 2001 points to the fact that the resulting policies followed established norms and procedures that preceded the terrorist attacks (see e.g. Cankar, 2009).
- 13 Our three main cases, Denmark, Germany, and Sweden, all had their own colonial ambitions/projects (although not as successful as, for instance, Great Britain and France).

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