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**“IN TIMES OF A CRISIS” – ONTOLOGICAL
PREMISES OF ASYLUM LAW DEBATES IN
FINLAND AND AUSTRALIA**

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ABSTRACT

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Over the past decades, irregular movement across national borders has increased when various humanitarian crises have forced people to seek refuge outside their country of origin. Due to increased displacement of people, asylum seekers have become a highly controversial topic in politics and public discussion. While there is plenty of research on asylum policies and experiences of asylum seekers, the ways in which politicians justify their arguments for or against particular asylum bills have received less attention.

The aim of this study is to fill the research gap by examining justifications of arguments in asylum law debates of two different countries, Finland and Australia. Similarities and differences in political discourses are accessed through epistemic governance approach. The study focuses on commonly accepted facts and assumptions that politicians rely on when they create and reproduce certain images of social reality. These ontological assumptions are analysed through discourse analysis.

Although there are some differences in the ways in which Finnish and Australian politicians debate on asylum seekers, the study discovered significant similarities between asylum law-related discourses in the two countries. The study identified several shared assumptions of reality that can be found in both Finland and Australia, which supports the claims of epistemic governance that national policies are affected by world cultural influences. While this study contributed to epistemic governance research by examining one object of epistemic work, ontology of environment, in relation to asylum laws, future studies are needed to create a more comprehensive picture of how asylum seekers are portrayed in political sphere.

Keywords: Asylum seekers, Finland, Australia, epistemic governance, parliamentary debates

The originality of this thesis has been checked using the Turnitin OriginalityCheck service.

List of Abbreviations

ALP – Australian Labor Party

CLP – Country Liberal Party

Ind. – Independent Politician

LP – Liberal Party of Australia

KAP – Katter's Australian Party

Kesk. – Suomen Keskusta (Centre Party)

Kok. – Kansallinen Kokoomus (National Coalition Party)

ONP – One Nation Party

PS – Perussuomalaiset (True Finns)

SDP – Suomen Sosiaalidemokraattinen Puolue (Social Democratic Party of Finland)

UNHCR – United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background

In the recent years, the movement of people across borders has increased globally, creating an impression that the contemporary world might be entering the age of migration (Castles, de Haas & Miller 2013, 3). International migration itself is not a new phenomenon, but its expansion to global level, along with its highly politicized aspects and the grown importance of its social and economic effects, reflects recent changes (ibid). Over the past decades, movement of people has become more independent and harder for nation-states to control (Hiltunen 2019, 46–48). This so-called irregular migration¹ has been estimated to become more common than ever before (Castles, de Haas & Miller 2013, 3). According to UNHCR (2019), there were approximately 70.8 million forcibly displaced people around the world in the end of 2018.

The number of asylum seekers has increased in many parts of the world especially when conflicts, poor living conditions and various other reasons have prompted people to search for safer and better living abroad (Freedman, Kivilcim & Özgür 2017, 1). One of the biggest humanitarian crises in the recent years has been the Syrian war, which has forced more than 5.6 million people to seek refuge abroad and left 6.1 million displaced in Syria since 2011 (UNHCR 2020a). Most Syrian refugees have settled in neighbouring countries, but many have also searched for asylum in Europe or other continents (Freedman, Kivilcim & Özgür 2017, 1). The expansion of asylum seeking in Europe has often been referred to as a ‘refugee crisis’ in politics and media, for the consequences of irregular migration have been tragic in several ways (ibid). Thousands of asylum seekers who attempted to cross the Mediterranean to reach Europe have drowned and other routes to Europe have proved to be dangerous as well (ibid).

While the severity of different humanitarian crises around the world is rarely disputed in public, the increased number of arrivals has led receiving societies to discuss whether people have a right to search for safer life outside their country of origin. Increasing asylum seeking has been considered problematic because it seems like some asylum seekers might have come to Europe or other receiving regions in search of better life, instead of having fled persecution (Hiltunen

¹ For more information on irregular migration, see for example: McAuliffe, M. & Koser, K. (2017). *A long way to go: irregular migration patterns, processes, drivers and decision-making*. Canberra, Australia: Australian National University Press.

2019, 47). Convention Relating to Status of Refugees or the Geneva Convention, a famous UN treaty that was established in 1951, defines a refugee as a person who is forced to leave his or her home country because of violent persecution (UNHCR 2010). The definition, which is interpreted in various ways in different nation-states, excludes people who are fleeing threats that might be more indirect, such as general unsafety, famine, environmental catastrophes or lack of economic opportunities (Tarvainen 2016, 62). This leads to controversial moral and political questions, such as who is entitled to protection, in what country and on what grounds.

Especially after the terrorist attacks against the United States on the 11th of September in 2001, asylum seekers have become connected to notions of illegality and threat, which has led to asylum and immigration policy restrictions in many countries (Hayes & Mason 2012, 3–5; Whittaker 2006, 20–21; McMaster 2002, 280). In Europe, political discourses have shifted from humanitarian aspects to negative economic impacts of asylum seekers, as well as increased concerns over immigrants' potentially disrupting effect on social cohesion (Whittaker 2006, 20–21). Likewise, in Australia politicians have used public concerns to enforce division between 'genuine' refugees and 'illegal boat people' (McAdam 2013, 436). More recently, the financial crisis of 2008 and the European migrant crisis in 2015 have further hardened attitudes towards asylum seekers and other displaced people. In many countries, so-called right-wing populist parties² that tend to promote national values and oppose immigration have gained more support.

Indeed, many states struggle with the political aspect of balancing between rights of citizens and non-citizens, as well as with deciding whether to concentrate humanitarian resources on taking in refugees or helping their countries of origin (Betts & Loescher 2011, 18). Despite obvious differences between migration histories and current situations of different nation-states, there also seem to be some surprising similarities in the ways asylum seekers are discussed in politics and public discussion across the world, which is also reflected to some similarities in asylum policies. Alasuutari and Qadir (2014) suggest that the similarities can be explained and analysed through the framework of epistemic governance. The main idea of epistemic governance is that when discussing a topic, such as asylum seekers, actors attempt to utilise each other's and their listeners' shared conceptions of reality and influence them (Alasuutari

² For definitions and discussion on right-wing populism, please see for example, Akkerman, T., de Lange, S. L. & Rooduijn, M. (2016). *Radical right-wing populist parties in Western Europe: into the mainstream?* London: Routledge., or: Muis, J. & Immerzeel, T. (2017). Causes and consequences of the rise of populist radical right parties and movements in Europe, *Current Sociology Review*, 65(6):909–930.

& Qadir 2019, 2). In this study, I will utilise epistemic governance approach to examine how politicians attempt to affect their listeners' perceptions of reality during parliamentary debates in Finland and Australia. The two countries are quite different in relation to asylum seeking, which makes an interesting case for epistemic governance approach.

Finland has received relatively few asylum seekers in the past, but during the so-called European migrant crisis, the number of people seeking protection in Finland increased remarkably. The country that had received between 2,000 and 3,000 asylum applications in most years of the 21st century was suddenly hit by more than 32,000 applications in 2015 (UNHCR 2020b). Almost two thirds of the people who arrived in Finland in 2015 came from Iraq (Eurostat 2016). The unexpected surge of arrivals posed a huge challenge for Finnish immigration service, reception centres and police since they were not accustomed to deal with such large numbers of asylum seekers (Rautio & Juutilainen 2016).

Although the movement of people to Finland has subsided in the following years, the events of 2015 have left a mark in Finnish society. Since the migrant crisis, Finland has restricted its immigration policies, and Finnish people's attitudes towards asylum seekers have become more divided (Hiltunen 2019, 249–250; BBC News 2015). Like in many other European countries, there have been changes in the political climate of Finland, perhaps most notably the rising support of the right-wing populist Finns Party³ (PS). The party, which has adopted more radical nationalist and anti-immigration sentiments along with increased immigration and multiculturalism in Finland, has brought new nuances to public discussion and managed to resonate with many people's opinions on asylum seekers (Jungar 2016, 117–119).

Similarly, increased displacement of people in the recent years has affected Australia in many ways. Although there are many other forms of migration directed to Australia too, the country has become especially well-known for its struggles and policies related to so-called irregular maritime arrivals or 'boat people'. Australia's response to asylum seekers has been quite controversial throughout the 21st century. On one hand, the country has highlighted its generosity by receiving relatively large numbers of quota refugees, while on the other hand, authorities have attempted to halt the boat arrivals with harsh policies, such as mandatory asylum detention and offshore processing (McKay 2013, 24).

³ The party was known as the True Finns until its split in 2017. In this study, I will refer to the party by its former name since the most recent data from Finland I utilise is from 2016 when the name True Finns was still in use.

Concerns over uncontrollable ‘flood’ of unauthorized arrivals have received plenty of attention in media and politics over the past several decades, although the reality of spontaneous asylum seeking has not always been quite so dramatic (Hayes & Mason 2012, 4–5). Apart from more than 11,500–12,000 applications in 2000 and 2001, the number of asylum applications varied between about 2,500 and 5,000 during the 2000s due to Australia’s strict border policies (UNHCR 2020b). However, after the abolishment of the Pacific Solution and escalation of different humanitarian crises around the world, the number of people seeking asylum in Australia has increased significantly. Since 2010, the number of applications has mostly varied between 10,000 and 15,000 during the second decade of the 21st century, but during the Syrian refugee crisis in 2016 and 2017, more than 27,000 and 34,000 annual applications were lodged. (ibid).

1.2. Research questions and purpose of the study

Much of existing social scientific research on asylum seekers in Finland and Australia is focused on analysing either asylum policies (McAdam 2013; Schloenhardt & Craig 2015; Hiltunen 2019), refugees’ experiences and integration into receiving societies (Hayes & Mason 2012; Gothóni & Siirto 2016) or public discussion and attitudes towards asylum seekers (Keskinen, Rastas & Tuori 2009; Lueck, Due & Augoustinos 2015). While these are important topics, examining parliamentary processes where policy changes are justified and evaluated can also offer valuable insights in relation to asylum seeking.

As Alasuutari (2016, 95–96) points out, national parliaments represent broadly accepted democratic world-cultural principles and are a core element of practically all modern states, regardless of how democratic the actual decision-making is. Floor debates where members of parliament discuss law proposals, on the other hand, act as a public forum where politicians attempt to convince others of their agendas (ibid). Although floor debates do not always determine whether a bill is passed into a law, they are important platforms where legislation can be justified in acceptable and rational ways (Alasuutari & Qadir 2019, 106–107). Since parliamentary debates reflect acceptable political and moral discourses of society, they allow one to explore underlying assumptions of how the world is perceived in a certain context.

To better understand motivations and ideas behind certain asylum laws, as well as ways in which asylum seekers are referred to in public discussion, it is important be able to access these

shared assumptions of the world. Based on the well-known and rather popular idea of globalisation development that ties different parts of the world more closely together, one could also assume that there are cross-national similarities in the assumptions of reality that people make and present to others. While there is some comparative research that recognizes not only differences but also similarities between asylum-related discourses in different countries (Kneebone 2009; Canetti et al. 2016), much of it seems to take harsh attitudes and policies as a given or view dominant perceptions of asylum seekers mainly in relation to practical policies or defined sets of opposed opinions. The processes in which certain conceptions of asylum seekers are continuously created and reproduced in social interaction are rarely looked deeply into.

Furthermore, comparative studies on asylum seekers have mainly concentrated on comparing large Western (and often English-speaking) countries with one another. There has been very little research involving two countries with such different migration policies, histories, legislative procedures and geographic locations as Finland and Australia. Despite both countries being liberal Western democracies, Finland and Australia are located on the opposite sides of the world and are different in many respects, which offers an interesting background for examining similarities and differences in the ways in which politicians build images of reality. If factual assumptions of what is rational, true and convincing are similar in these two relatively different contexts, it would indicate that underlying assumptions behind political discourses are indeed similar in some nation-states.

To uncover what politicians consider as commonly accepted factual assumptions on asylum seekers, this study utilises parliamentary debates from Finland and Australia to examine which ontological facts Finnish and Australian politicians work with when they discuss asylum laws. In this context, ontological facts refer to commonly shared assumptions of what the essence of social reality is (Alasuutari & Qadir 2014). In practice, ontological facts are a combination of concrete scientific evidence and self-evident assumptions of the world (ibid). The aim of this study is to show how Finnish and Australian politicians utilise these assumptions of the nature of reality when they present arguments for or against certain asylum laws. Therefore, my research question is:

- What ontological facts are at work when politicians debate on asylum seekers in Finland and Australia? How are they utilised to justify arguments?

The theoretical framework of this study is based on epistemic governance approach. Epistemic governance is a form of governance that “acts upon people’s understanding of the world” (Alasuutari & Qadir 2014, 67–72). When actors seek to affect their listeners’ perceptions of social reality, they attempt to convince them of their arguments by utilising three objects of epistemic work: 1) commonly shared ontological facts, 2) perceptions of actors and identifications, and 3) broadly accepted norms and values (ibid). Alasuutari and Qadir (2019, 149–150) argue that since politicians always justify their arguments through what is considered rational, desirable and acceptable, essentially, all governance is epistemic. Therefore, studying parliamentary debates through epistemic governance approach is relevant, especially since the approach can reveal aspects of social change that would otherwise be difficult to grasp (ibid). This study contributes to existing research by applying epistemic governance approach for studying discourses on asylum laws in two countries, Finland and Australia. Although this study is not merely a case study that compares discourses in two countries, I will analyse similarities and differences between Finland and Australia when it is relevant to the analysis on ontological facts that are presented and reproduced in the debates.

The structure of this study is following. Chapter one introduces the topic and research question and discusses the relevance of the study in relation to existing research. Chapter two offers an overview on history and current situation of asylum seeking in Finland and Australia, as well as asylum policies in the two countries. Next, chapter three discusses parliamentary debates as data and contains descriptions of data and methodology. Chapter four introduces the theoretical framework of the study, epistemic governance and objects of epistemic work. The data is analysed in chapter five through epistemic governance approach, and the observations are discussed and concluded in chapter six. Finally, references and appendix are listed.

2. BACKGROUND

To make sense of parliamentary debates on asylum seekers, it is important to understand the context in which certain debates took place. Therefore, in this chapter, I will introduce the historical and political background of asylum seekers in Finland and Australia. I will also shortly discuss the current situation and public discussion in both countries in relation to asylum seeking.

2.1. Defining asylum seekers and refugees

As Gothóni and Siirto (2016, 11–12) note, terms *refugee* and *asylum seeker*, as well as other migration-related terms, such as *migrant* or *immigrant*, are often used interchangeably and rather inconsistently in everyday life and public discussion. Indeed, Hakovirta (1991, 10–11) argues that defining *refugee* is difficult since not all refugees fit in the same mould, and sometimes lines between refugees, migrant workers and immigrants could be blurry due to their overlapping experiences, situations and motives.

Probably the most well-known definition of refugee is from the United Nations Convention Relating to Status of Refugees from 1951, according to which a refugee is a person who has “*well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion*” (UNHCR 2010, 14). People become refugees by the definition when they flee their home country due to the government’s inability to protect its citizens from violence and human rights violations (Betts & Loescher 2011, 1). Countries that have signed the refugee convention are obliged to process asylum claims and follow the principle of non-refoulement, meaning they must not return refugees to areas where their life or safety could be threatened (UNCHR 2010).

The difference between refugees and asylum seekers is that refugees already have an established status as individuals entitled to international protection, while asylum seekers are still in the process of applying for asylum (Gothóni & Siirto 2016, 12). Before being recognized as refugees, asylum seekers’ motives and experiences must be accessed to determine whether they meet the criteria for refugee status (Whittaker 2006, 6).

In this study, the focus is on asylum seekers since throughout the parliamentary debate data politicians mainly discuss about people who are seeking international protection but have not yet been granted asylum. Therefore, I will mainly use the term asylum seekers, except in cases where people in question have already been recognized as refugees.

2.2. Asylum seekers in Finland

2.2.1. Asylum history and policies in Finland

Finland has a relatively short history of receiving asylum seekers. The first official refugees who settled in Finland came from Chile in the 1970s and Vietnam in the 1980s (Gothóni & Siirto 2016, 9). At first, receiving asylum seekers was an occasional event in Finland, which required special arrangements from the government, but in the mid-80s Finland started to receive annual quota refugees (Mäkelä 2016, 77). As a result of more regular refugee intake, Finland's first official Migration act (*L 400/1984*) came into force in 1984. In the new legislation, the grounds for granting an asylum were based on the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees⁴ (Hiltunen 2019, 48). In the past, Finland and other European countries mainly selected refugees through carefully supervised quota programs that emphasized assimilation to the receiving society, but since the 1980s, the number of independent asylum seekers who arrive in Europe on their own has grown significantly (ibid, 46, 49).

Although Finland had already received some small groups of refugees earlier, most Finnish people became more aware of displacement only when the first Somali asylum seekers arrived in Finland in the late 1980s and the early 1990s (Gothóni & Siirto 2016, 9). In contrast to the past decade of relatively few annual refugees, 1990 brought about 2,000 new arrivals, out of whom more than half were Somalian citizens escaping political violence in their home country (Hiltunen 2019, 66–67). Although the arrival of Somali asylum seekers across the eastern border caused some controversy⁵ and Finnish authorities were not prepared for dealing with such large numbers of arrivals, in the end, the government deemed the situation in Somalia to be too chaotic for returning the Somalis (ibid). In 1991, the parliament approved a new Migration act (*L 378/1991*), which enabled asylum seekers to obtain an asylum based on refugee status or a residence permit based on subsidiary protection (Finlex 1991).

After the unexpected influx of Somali refugees, the next significant increase in asylum applications in Finland was due to violence and persecution of Muslims during the Bosnian War between 1992 and 1995. The conflict forced more than 2.2 million people to flee from their homes in the former Yugoslavia (Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre 2018). While

⁴ See chapter 2.1.

⁵ Soviet Union was considered a safe resettlement country, which is why the phenomenon of many Somali refugees moving on to seek protection in Finland was problematic for the Finnish government.

most refugees stayed in their home country or the neighbouring countries, approximately 600,000–700,000 of them continued their journey to Western Europe (Hiltunen 2019, 70–71). At the time, most member states of the newly founded European Union (EU), which were struggling to form common immigration policies and standardise reception conditions, were not very eager to resettle Bosnian refugees (ibid).

In Finland, while the government imposed a visa requirement for Yugoslavs to avoid “uncontrollable” immigration, the tragic events in Yugoslavia raised a lot of public discussion among Finns on how to aid the victims of Bosnian war (Säilynoja 2015). In the end, most Yugoslav citizens who sought refuge in Western European countries received temporary protection, which allowed them to stay in their country of asylum until the local authorities deemed the situation in Yugoslavia to be safe enough for their return (Hiltunen 2019, 73–74).

Following the Bosnian War, an armed conflict in Kosovo (1998–1999) started another humanitarian crisis in the former Yugoslavia area. The duration of the conflict was relatively short, but violent attacks of Serb forces against ethnic Albanians and NATO bombing operations resulted in many casualties and widespread displacement of people (Ker-Lindsay 2010, 179–180). Along with other European countries, Finland agreed to provide temporary protection for a total of 1,000 ethnic Albanians who were fleeing violence in Kosovo in 1999 (Hiltunen 2019, 117). On the other hand, Finland aspired to standardize its immigration policies with other European countries in the 1990s, mainly through policy restrictions, such as extending the list of *safe countries of origin*⁶ and allowing quick turnarounds of asylum seekers who came from *safe third countries*⁷ (ibid, 117, 141). Since then, Finland and other European countries have continued to pursue a Common European Asylum System where asylum seekers would have equal rights, regardless of in which country they apply for asylum (Tarvainen 2016, 61–64).

In the first decade of 21st century, the annual number of asylum seekers arriving in Finland was still relatively small, varying between 1,500 and 6,000 (Ministry of the Interior Finland 2019). However, public discussion on asylum seekers was starting to become more critical, as

⁶ These are countries in which the risk of persecution is deemed to be so small that the applications are considered manifestly unfounded and they can be processed in expedited processing. See Finnish Immigration Service (2020a).

⁷ Safe third countries are defined as countries that respect Geneva Refugee Convention and in which asylum seekers do not face a threat of persecution or harm. According to current Finnish law, if an asylum seeker has arrived in Finland through a safe third country in which they could have received international protection, their asylum application will not be processed in Finland. See European Commission (2020a) and Finnish Immigration Service (2020b).

politicians raised concerns over ‘abuse’ of asylum system, anchor children⁸ and asylum seekers arriving from safe countries (Hiltunen 2019, 141–144). When Finland’s migration policies became more integrated with other EU member states in the 1990s and 2000s, it meant that the government’s focus was slowly starting to shift from resettling refugees to increasing border security, returning asylum seekers to their home countries and combating reasons behind displacement (ibid, 159).

Finland’s current Migration act (*L 301/2004*), which has later been modified with several amendments, came into force in 2004. The act differs from its predecessors so that it allows Finnish authorities to use expedited processing or reject asylum claims in cases where an application is considered unfounded or an applicant is from a safe country of origin or has transited through a safe country before arriving in Finland (Finlex 2004). There is also a notion of temporary protection, which can be given to people who are temporarily unable to return to their home countries because of certain reasons, such as difficulties with travel arrangements or general unsafety of the area (ibid). Currently, a person can receive protection in Finland based on confirmed refugee status or subsidiary protection in cases where they do not meet refugee criteria but could face harm or inhumane treatment in their country of origin (Finlex 2020). Between 2008 and 2016, asylum seekers who did not meet other protection criteria could also receive humanitarian protection if they were unable to return to their home country because of an unstable security situation or a natural disaster (Finnish Immigration Service 2016).

Although Finland has national migration laws, several EU agreements, regulations and directives have guided Finnish asylum-related decision-making and affected border policies after Finland joined the European Union in 1995 (Tarvainen 2016, 62–63). For example, Finland signed the Schengen Agreement⁹ in 1996, started following principles of the Dublin Convention¹⁰ in 1998 and joined EURODAC¹¹ database in 2003. Especially the Dublin

⁸ Children whose parents send them to Europe alone, often with strangers or human smugglers, in order to get residence permits for rest of the family through family reunification

⁹ The Schengen agreement, which came into force in Finland in 2001, allows free movement within countries that are part of the Schengen area. See European Commission (n.d.).

¹⁰ The Dublin Convention, which was established in 1990 and valid until 2003, stated that each asylum seeker’s first country of arrival was responsible for processing their asylum claims. It was established as principle on how to distribute the responsibilities and costs of dealing with asylum seekers. See EUR-Lex: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=CELEX%3A41997A0819%2801%29>.

¹¹ The EURODAC regulation, which was established in 2003, created a fingerprint database for asylum seekers, allowing authorities in different EU countries to trace the movement of people and access their records. See European Commission: https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/asylum/identification-of-applicants_en.

Convention and its successors, the Dublin II Regulation¹² of 2003 and the Dublin III Regulation¹³ of 2013, have had far-reaching and controversial consequences. The idea of processing asylum seekers in their first country of arrival has divided applicants unequally between European countries since most people have to pass through Southern European countries first on their journey to Europe (Hampshire 2015, 9; Tarvainen 2016, 65). Many European countries have followed agreements selectively and either ignored the Dublin Regulation by letting asylum seekers pass through their territory to other European countries or acted against the Schengen Agreement by restricting free movement and building walls around their borders (Lendaro 2016, 150–151).

During the 2008 financial crisis, the number of paperless migrants was increasing, and reception conditions were deteriorating in Greece in such an alarming manner that the EU started to support Greek economy (Hiltunen 2019, 176–181). As a result of the financial crisis and increased migration, right-wing populist parties that perceived globalisation, immigration and European integration as threats managed to gain more support and call for stricter border security in many European countries (ibid). In Finland, the populist True Finns party rose to the third biggest party with the support of 19.1 percent in 2011 parliamentary elections, which was a significant increase since the party's support was only 4.1 percent in 2007 (Official Statistics of Finland 2011). According to commentators, people's concerns over immigration and its effects on crime, national safety and employment led to the growing success of the True Finns (Arter 2010, 484).

Indeed, the number of asylum applications had started to increase in Finland in the late 2000s. When in 2007 there were about 1,500 annual asylum applications, in 2008 the number rose to about 4,000 and in 2009 to nearly 6,000 (Finnish Immigration Service 2020d). In the first years of 2010s, the Arab Spring revolutions in Tunisia and civil war in Libya increased irregular migration to Italy and other Southern European countries, eventually leading to the so-called European migrant crisis (Hampshire 2015, 9). However, despite increased movement of asylum seekers across Mediterranean, in Finland the annual number of asylum applications in 2010–2014 yet remained on a steady level between 3,000 and 4,000 (Finnish Immigration Service 2020d).

¹² See EUR-Lex: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2003:050:0001:0010:EN:PDF>.

¹³ See EUR-Lex: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2013:180:0031:0059:EN:PDF>.

2.2.2. European 'migrant crisis'

In 2014, a historically large number of asylum seekers arrived in Europe. In total, European countries received more than half a million asylum applications that year, which was mainly due to the significant increase in Syrian refugees fleeing a civil war in their home country (Hiltunen 2019, 195). The Syrian war was originally sparked by the Arab Spring pro-democracy movements that spread to Syria in 2011 (BBC News 2016). Later the anti-government protests turned into a bloody civil war between several different political and religious groups (ibid).

In the summer and autumn of 2015, the number of asylum seekers entering Europe via the Eastern Mediterranean and the Western Balkans increased even more when several European countries relaxed their border control and allowed asylum seekers to travel through their territories (Hampshire 2015, 9; Lendaro 2016, 151; Mäntymaa 2018). More than half of the arrivals were Syrians who fled the escalated Syrian civil war, but there were also people who escaped problems, such as violence and poverty, in other Middle Eastern countries (Hampshire 2015, 9). In total, the number of asylum applications more than doubled from 2014 to over 1.2 million applications in 2015 (Eurostat 2016).

In Finland, the increased migration to Europe became evident in 2015 when 32,476 people suddenly applied for asylum in Finland (Ministry of the Interior Finland 2019). Compared to the total of 3,490 asylum seekers in 2014, the number of asylum seekers grew by 822 percent in 2015, which was a much bigger increase than in any other European country (Eurostat 2016). Finnish authorities had estimated that there would be approximately 5,000 new asylum seekers in 2015, so they had great difficulties in registering and accommodating the arrivals after the unexpectedly large influx of asylum seekers (Gothóni & Siirto 2016, 14; Viinikka 2020).

Vast majority of applicants, around 20,000, came from Iraq, while rest of the applicants were mainly from Afghanistan, Somalia, Syria, Albania and Iran (Finnish Immigration Service 2020c). According to Mäntymaa (2018), there were various reasons for the large number of Iraqi asylum seekers seeking for protection specifically in Finland, such as opened route to north through Eastern and Central Europe, and positive image that news and social media had created of Finland as a country of asylum. The events of 2015, which have been referred to as the European migrant crisis in media and public discussion, revealed the divisions within

Finnish society, as some welcomed refugees to Finland and even to their homes¹⁴, while others criticised migration and multiculturalism or even spread hate speech on the internet (BBC News 2015).

Despite the large number of asylum applicants in Finland, in the end, only quite few asylum seekers were granted asylum. Most applications that were lodged in 2015 were processed in 2016, and although Finland accepted a historically large number of refugees in 2016, the number of accepted applications, 7,745, was still relatively small (Hiltunen 2019, 248; Finnish Immigration Service 2020d). After the migrant crisis, Finland restricted its immigration policies, for example by removing the category of humanitarian protection and by declaring Iraq, Afghanistan and Somalia, countries where majority of asylum seekers came from, as safe countries (Hiltunen 2019, 248–251). Since other European countries have answered to the migrant crisis with stricter border control measures too, in the recent years the number of asylum applications has decreased significantly in Finland (Konttinen 2019). In 2016, Finland received 5,651 asylum applications, after which the numbers have remained between about 4,500 and 5,000 annual applications, decreasing slightly every year until 2020 (Finnish Immigration Service 2020d; Finnish Immigration Service 2020c).

2.3. Asylum seekers in Australia

2.3.1. Asylum history and policies in Australia

Australia is essentially an immigrant society built on a couple of centuries of immigration (Jupp 2002, 5). Since Australian continent was discovered by European explorers, it has been a contested land that its British inhabitants have tried to protect from other European and especially non-European people (Hayes & Mason 2012, 1). At the end of the 19th century, Australia adopted a so-called White Australia policy, an approach based on racial discrimination, which limited immigration and rights of non-Europeans in Australia for almost a century (Jupp 2002, 8–9). The Immigration Restriction Act of 1901 that reinforced the idea of white Australia had no direct mention of people who were ‘undesirable’ immigrants because

¹⁴ During the migrant crisis, some Finnish people accommodated asylum seekers in their homes, perhaps the most famous example being PM Sipilä who offered his holiday home for migrants.

of their ethnicity, but in practice, the act was used to control migration from Asia (Neumann 2015, 14–15).

In the past, Australia only let relatively few selected immigrants settle in its territory, but during the World Wars, the country received about 15,000 refugees, some of whom were non-European (Neumann 2015, 70). After World War II Australia reinforced the White Australia policy again and started to support immigration from Britain, as well as from some other European countries (Richards 2008, 172). Australia aided war-torn Europe by resettling approximately 170,700 European refugees between 1947 and 1954 (Karlsen, Phillips & Koletch 2011, 2, 28).

As Hayes and Mason (2012, 2) argue, helping European refugees to start a new life in Australia was not purely humanitarian act since the newcomers were expected to return the favour by building the nation with other Australians. Australia only had around 7.5 million inhabitants at the time, so European refugees were an important addition to Australia's white population and workforce in agriculture and construction (Jupp 2002, 12–13). However, the post-war refugees faced pressure to assimilate and adapt to Australian culture since other European ethnicities were often deemed to be inferior to British Australians (Hayes & Mason 2012, 2; Neumann 2015, 75). Although notions of white and British Australia were still deeply embedded within Australian society, international pressure for non-discrimination of migrants based on their background led Australia to replace the Immigration Restriction Act 1901 with the Migration Act 1958 that lifted some entry restrictions¹⁵ (Richards 2008, 234–238).

Public attitudes towards asylum seekers started to change in Australia in the 1970s when the government abandoned the White Australia policy (Taylor, Wright & Stephenson 2014, 343). The government replaced it with new multiculturalism rhetoric that celebrated the richness of increasing cultural and ethnic diversity in Australia (McMaster 2002, 282–283). There were several reasons for the policy change, such as influx of Vietnamese boat refugees during the Vietnam War, need for population increase, and realization that non-British immigrants had not managed to eradicate the British foundations of Australia (Richards 2008, 246–250).

However, in the end of 1980s, Australia's multicultural immigration policies started to receive critique after their relatively wide support over the past decades (Hayes & Mason 2012, 3; Taylor, Wright & Stephenson 2014, 343). Some politicians and members of public saw the

¹⁵ For example, Migration Act 1958 removed the dictation test that had earlier been used to refuse entry of many Asian or non-English speaking migrants.

significant increase of Asian refugees and other migrants as threat to Australian community (Richards 2008, 281–285). The concerns were mainly due to increased arrivals of so-called ‘boat people’ who have become an increasingly controversial topic in Australian politics and public discussion over the past decades.

2.3.2. ‘Boat people’ and immigration detention

The first asylum seekers who arrived in Australia by boat were Vietnamese people who fled the Vietnam War in 1976 (Phillips & Spinks 2013, 1). The relatively small groups Vietnamese refugees who were resettled in Australia in the 1970s generally had a more welcoming reception than later maritime arrivals, such as Cambodian asylum seekers in 1989 (McMaster 2002, 285). Although some politicians raised concerns over unauthorized boat arrivals who they considered to be ‘queue-jumpers’ or illegal immigrants rather than genuine refugees, most people who arrived in Australia by boat in the 1970s were granted asylum (Neumann 2015, 270–277, 286–288).

Since the 1980s, the concept of ‘queue-jumping’ has become an essential part of Australian political debates and public discussion, as asylum seekers have been divided into ‘good refugees’ who wait for their asylum decisions in refugee camps and ‘bad refugees’ who “jump the queue” by arriving in Australia by their own methods (McAdam 2013, 437; Peterie 2017, 352). According to McAdam (2013, 438–439), the discourse has its roots in Australian refugee quota system, in which refugees who already live in Australia often use the special humanitarian program¹⁶ of 7,750 annual places for family reunification. The number of places is set, and it also includes asylum seekers who arrive in Australia on their own, either by boat or plane, which means that due to spontaneous arrivals there are fewer places left for people waiting in overseas refugee camps (ibid).

Indeed, ever since Cambodian asylum seekers started the second wave of boat arrivals in 1989, Australian government has attempted to prevent further increases in independent asylum seekers by toughening Australia’s asylum policies and border security (Richards 2008, 306–309). One of the most well-known and controversial measures has been introduction of

¹⁶ Special humanitarian program is a quota for refugees who face such extreme discrimination in their country of origin that their human rights are violated. Besides special humanitarian program, there is a resettlement program of 6,000 places for refugees chosen by UNHCR. In total, Australia’s annual refugee quota has 13,750 places.

mandatory immigration detention by Labor party in 1992, a policy which has for the most part enjoyed bipartisan support since then (McAdam 2013, 436–437; Healey 2013, 10). The detention policy that is one of the strictest in Western democracies allows Australian authorities to detain non-citizens who arrive in Australia without a valid visa until their case is processed, which has resulted in many people spending years in detention centres or even being arbitrarily detained (McMaster 2002, 283–284).

Although Australian government was concerned about boat arrivals already at the end of 1980s, asylum seekers who arrived by boat only constituted a small part of refugee intake until 1998. In total, only 3,124 people arrived in Australia by boat in 1989–1998, most of whom were later deported, while annual number of accepted refugees varied between about 11,000 and 16,000 during the 1990s (Australian Government 2020; Phillips 2014, 2; McMaster 2002, 286). The number of boat arrivals increased suddenly in 1999 when more than 3,700 people arrived in Australia by boat (Phillips 2014, 2). The increase was mainly due to growing numbers of asylum seekers seeking refuge outside Middle East (Jupp 2002, 193). In 2000, there were about 2,900 boat arrivals, but then in 2001, the number jumped to more than 5,500 (Phillips 2014, 2).

In autumn of 2001, a series of events that have later been referred to as the ‘Tampa Affair’ led to one of the most significant and controversial changes in Australian asylum law. When the captain of Norwegian cargo ship MV Tampa rescued 438 people from a sinking fishing boat in Indonesian waters and was pressured to take them to Christmas Island¹⁷ instead of returning them to Indonesia, Australia denied the vessel’s entry to Australia (Willheim 2003, 159–162). Despite international pressure to help asylum seekers on MV Tampa, Australian government maintained its hard line and quickly prepared new migration legislation¹⁸, which forbade people on MV Tampa from making lawful visa applications in Australia and allowed authorities to move them to Papua New Guinea for offshore processing (ibid).

The migration amendments to restrict all boat arrivals’ rights to apply for protection visa, combined with offshore processing agreements with Papua New Guinea and Nauru, and removal of some distant areas from the migration zone¹⁹, formed a set of policies introduced

¹⁷ Christmas Island is a part of Australian territory, located south of Indonesian Java and about 1,550 km north-west from Australia’s mainland. It is known as the location of one of Australian offshore detention centres.

¹⁸ See Border protection Bill 2001.

¹⁹ Australian government amended the Migration Act so that some distant territories were declared to be ‘excised offshore places.’ If an asylum seeker’s first place of entry is outside Australia’s migration zone, he or she has no right to apply for protection visa under Australian law. See Migration Amendment (Excision from Migration Zone) Bill 2001.

by the Howard Government that became known as the ‘Pacific Solution’ (Schloenhardt & Craig 2015, 537; Jupp 2002, 194–195; McKay 2013, 25). By sending asylum seekers who were classified as unauthorized maritime arrivals or unlawful non-citizens to Nauru and Manus Island²⁰, Australia became the only country in the world that processed asylum claims in so-called third countries outside its territory (Refugee Council of Australia 2019b). In total, 1,637 people, most of whom were from Afghanistan and Iraq, were held in Nauru and Manus Island between 2001 and 2008 (Phillips 2012, 3). Altogether, the Pacific Solution managed to cut down the number of boat arrivals quite radically since only 449 new asylum seekers attempted to disembark in Australia by boat during those years (Phillips 2014, 2).

However, the Pacific Solution’s detrimental effects on well-being and legal rights of asylum seekers made it a highly problematic policy (Refugee Council of Australia 2019b). As McAdam (2013, 437–439) argues, following the principles of 1951 Refugee Convention, no one should be punished simply for seeking refuge, no matter what their method of entry is or in which country they apply for asylum. In 2008, the Labor government abolished the Pacific Solution and closed Australia’s offshore detention centres in third countries (McKay 2013, 25). However, the government continued with its agenda of fighting human smuggling, detained asylum seekers on Christmas Island far away from Australian mainland and maintained the excision of distant territories from Australian migration zone (Phillips & Spinks 2013, 10).

After the dismantlement of the Pacific Solution, boat arrivals increased again in 2009 and 2010 when 2,726 and 6,555 asylum seekers arrived in Australia (Phillips 2014, 2). The Labor government, which had earlier criticised the Pacific Solution for being inhumane and inefficient, started to reintroduce similar measures that had been used to halt boat arrivals in the early 2000s (McAdam 2013, 439). However, the government stated that instead of ‘stopping the boats’, their aim was to ‘save lives’ by discouraging asylum seekers from taking a dangerous journey by sea (ibid).

In 2012, the government established a third country processing regime, which allowed Australian authorities to transfer unauthorized maritime arrivals²¹ to detention centres in regional processing countries Papua New Guinea or Nauru (Australian Human Rights Commission 2016). In 2013, the policy was extended to all asylum seekers who arrive by boat, denying their right for permanent resettlement in Australia for life, even if they are found to be

²⁰ Manus Island is one of the northern islands of Papua New Guinea. Like Christmas Island, Manus Island has become known for its infamous detention centre where Australia has detained its ‘unlawful non-citizens’.

²¹ Persons who attempt to arrive in Australia by boat without a valid visa

refugees²² (McKay 2013, 26). Furthermore, the new Liberal-National government introduced a policy called Operation Sovereign Borders, which gave Australian border security forces authority to turn back boats that are carrying asylum seekers (Taylor, Wright & Stephenson 2014, 351). Although the policy has been harsh on many asylum seekers who have been returned to their countries of origin or became stranded in Australia's neighbouring countries, it has quite efficiently 'stopped the boats', as the government promised²³ (Schloenhardt & Craig 2015, 566–567; Phillips 2014, 2).

However, Australian asylum policies have been criticised by several human rights organizations and committees for turning back the boats, as well as for inadequate living conditions and inhumane treatment of asylum seekers, some of whom are children, in offshore detention centres (Millar 2015; Australian Human Rights Commission 2016). After riots and several incidents that led to injuries or death of detainees, in 2016 Papua New Guinea's Supreme Court ruled that mandatory detention of asylum seekers on Manus Island was unlawful (BBC News 2017). Since then, both Nauru and Manus Island detention centres have turned into open centres that are not officially in use, and while some asylum seekers have been resettled in third countries, most are living in the local communities or are still staying in detention centres (Refugee Council of Australia 2019a).

To this day, Australia's asylum policies remain highly controversial. On one hand, Australia has one of the largest humanitarian programs in the world, which has granted protection for about 13,700 to 18,700²⁴ quota refugees every year during the 2010s (Australian Government 2020). But on the other hand, the country has continued to restrict its migration laws and detain unlawful non-citizens in onshore detention centres. In practice, Australia is holding many asylum seekers in arbitrary and indefinite detention that resembles imprisonment (Refugee Council of Australia 2020). In the beginning of 2020, more than 1,400 people were still held in detention, and the average time spent in detention was over 500 days (ibid).

²² The policy allows unauthorized maritime arrivals who are confirmed to be refugees to stay in regional processing countries or to be resettled in other countries, but if they wish to settle in Australia, they can only receive temporary protection.

²³ After the arrival of 278 boats with a total of 17,204 asylum seekers in 2012 and 300 boats with a total of 20,587 people one year later, there was only one boat with 163 passengers in 2014.

²⁴ An exception is 2016–2017 when Australia accepted almost 22,000 quota refugees due to migrant crisis of 2015.

3. DATA AND METHODOLOGY

3.1. Data

3.1.1. Parliamentary debates as data

Practically all modern nation-states have a national parliament that has been established according to broadly accepted democratic principles of world culture to demonstrate the legitimacy of the regime (Alasuutari 2016, 95–96). Regardless of the actual legislative powers of parliament, the symbolic significance of parliamentary sessions cannot be ignored (ibid). Besides being forums of decision-making, parliaments are arenas of political negotiation where politicians present their arguments to a wide audience of other politicians, citizens and media (Ilie 2017, 311). Since parliaments are public forums where politicians try to affect their listeners' perceptions of social reality and convey their arguments to the wider society in a comprehensible manner, justifications of policies give insight to the shared ideas of how actors perceive politics and what kind of arguments they deem rational or morally acceptable (Alasuutari 2014, 28).

Indeed, Alasuutari and Qadir (2019, 155–156) say that parliaments can be valuable *sites of social change* in examining assumptions of social reality. The authors define sites of social change as institutional locations where Foucauldian idea of connections between power and knowledge is apparent. Any institutional setting where power relationships and knowledge production constantly reshape each other could be a site of change. In fact, the authors argue that since the circulation of “power-knowledge couplet” affects all institutions of society, any context of social change could offer relatively similar insights to underlying assumptions of reality. Therefore, parliaments, social movements or international organisations could all reveal similar conceptions of what is considered rational, acceptable or desirable in a certain society. In that sense, parliamentary debates are certainly not the only relevant data that can be used to analyse assumptions on asylum seekers. However, I consider parliamentary debates as interesting data for this study because of their institutional location in the heart of national decision-making and political argumentation. If discourses in national parliaments of Finland and Australia bear resemblance to each other, it would indicate that despite many obvious

differences between the countries, there are also some world cultural similarities that guide social change in those two societies.

At first glance, the legislative systems of Finland and Australia seem relatively different. Parliament of Finland (Eduskunta, Riksdagen) is a unicameral legislature, which has 200 Members of Parliament (MP). On the other hand, Parliament of Australia is a bicameral legislature that consists of the House of Representatives (lower house), which currently has 151 Members of Parliament, and the Senate (upper house), which has 76 Senators. Furthermore, Parliament of Finland is a European-model parliament, while Parliament of Australia is closer to a Westminster-system parliament. In European parliaments, decisions are mainly made in parliamentary committees without dramatic confrontations between the government and opposition, while in Westminster-style parliaments, debates and rhetoric in plenary sessions, as well as accountability of ministers, have a more important role (Ilie 2017, 309; Dowding & Lewis 2012, 3–4).

Besides the differences in parliamentary systems of Finland and Australia, legislative processes are also quite different in the two countries. In Parliament of Finland, after an initiative is drafted into a law proposal and stakeholders have been consulted, the bill is reviewed by the government. After that, the bill is introduced and discussed in preliminary debate. It is then prepared in a committee before the first reading, in which members of parliament discuss the details of the bill and debate. Finally, parliament decides whether to approve or reject a bill in second reading, during which the bill cannot be amended anymore.

In Parliament of Australia, after an initiative is prepared into a bill in ministerial departments and reviewed by government party committees, the Minister who is responsible of the bill gives notice to the House of his or her intention to introduce a law proposal. Then, the bill is presented to the House of Representatives in first reading, which is mainly a formal procedure. Members of Parliament debate on the bill during second reading, after which the details of the bill are examined, and amendments can be made. In third reading, contents of the bill can still be discussed, but the bill cannot be amended. Before passing into law, a bill must be approved by both the House of Representatives and the Senate. The legislative process of Senate follows the same steps from first reading to third reading as in the House of Representatives.

In both Finland and Australia, parliamentary debates are recorded in transcripts. In this study, I utilise transcripts of plenary sessions provided by Parliament of Finland and Hansard records provided by Parliament of Australia. I will introduce the data and discuss how I collected it in the next section.

3.1.2. Data collection

The data of this study consists of speeches during six floor debates in Parliament of Finland and another six in Parliament of Australia. Since parliamentary debates take place during first reading in Finland, I selected six first reading debates of different bills. I also included preliminary reading of the bills in the data in cases where they contain relevant debate²⁵. In relation to Australian bills, I have included second reading debates in both Senate and the House of Representatives. The Parliament websites in both countries offer free access to legislation bills and floor debates related to them. The Finnish parliamentary debates are only available in Finnish and Swedish, so I have analysed the original Finnish versions and translated some relevant quotes from the data in English. I have also translated the names of Finnish bills that the debates address. For the Australian debates, I use the original English versions. The data that I collected is from the years 2002 to 2017.

I decided to collect data from two different time periods, the early-to-mid 2000s and the mid-2010s. This way, a relatively long period of time with varying asylum matters is represented, which makes the analysis less disposed to single events that could have a disproportionately large effect on the data. I wanted to include debates from points in time when asylum matters were either particularly relevant or controversial in public discussion. The debates from 2002–2006 took place in the new post 9/11 world, which creates an interesting setting for debates, as images of asylum seekers were starting to become more closely linked to external threats, such as terrorism (Whittaker 2006, 20–21). The debates from 2014–2017, on the other hand, happened around the time of Syrian war and European migrant crisis. Both Finland and Australia were affected by the increase of Middle Eastern asylum seekers during that time²⁶.

²⁵ In Parliament of Finland, it is common for politicians to debate on a bill during preliminary reading, after which the bill is sent to committee and later read and debated in first reading. In Australia, first reading is usually a purely formal procedure, and debate takes place during second reading.

²⁶ See sections 2.2.2 and 2.3.2.

Data from two different points in time also makes it possible to identify temporal changes, and debates from two different countries enable comparisons between them. As I mentioned in the chapter 1.2, examining ontological facts in two different contexts offers an interesting research design since similarities in ontological assumptions could indicate that world culture, synchronization or epistemic governance has a role in justification of national policies. Although simply comparing countries or time periods is not the main objective of this study, I will discuss the similarities and differences between Finland and Australia, as well as changes in time, when it is relevant to the analysis on ontological facts.

In both Australia and Finland, the government has introduced various migration-related law proposals over the past decades. Asylum seeking, as well as other kind of migration, has been an important topic in Australian politics throughout the 21st century. Most asylum seeker-related bills in the 21st century are updates or restrictions to migration legislation, which were motivated by certain migration-related events or in general, by increased numbers of asylum seekers²⁷.

In Finland, there have not been quite as many asylum seeker-related bills in the 21st century as in Australia. In Finnish parliament, there have been relatively few mentions of asylum seekers through most of the 21st century, although the number of mentions peaked a little in mid-2000s and again around 2010. Then, in 2015–2016 asylum seekers became a hot topic because of the European migrant crisis²⁸. If earlier there had been at most about 100 mentions of asylum seekers in parliamentary documents per year, suddenly there were more than 1000.

I chose the debates for my data based on the bills that they address. I decided to conduct data collection this way in order to find debates that are exclusively about asylum seeker-related matters, instead of searching for mentions of asylum seekers in debates related to other topics. To track down debates on asylum seekers, I searched for bills on parliament websites with several different keywords, such as asylum seekers, refugees and migration. I selected six bills from each country that address issues related to regulation of migration, concentrating particularly on asylum seekers. Because of this study's focus on asylum seekers, I ruled out

²⁷ See section 2.3.2.

²⁸ See section 2.2.2.

bills that are related to other types of migration, such as bills concerning work-based immigration. Combined with the certain time frames for bills, it narrowed down the selection of bills to some extent. At this stage, the selection of bills was based on the topics, as I tried to select bills that addressed varying asylum seeker-related matters when possible. However, it is important to note that the topics of the bills are actually not that relevant to the analysis since the aim of this study is to examine ontological assumptions behind politicians' arguments, instead of particular bills. Analysing only six bills from each country inevitably leaves out some discussions, but I consider it an adequate sample to analyse epistemic work that politicians engage in during the debates.

The data from Finland consists of the debates collected around six Finnish bills. The law proposals from the 2000s are from between 2004 and 2006, and the bills from the 2010s are all from 2016. They all introduce amendments to migration act or related laws. The data from Australia includes debates around six bills as well. The first set of three bills is from the years 2002 to 2006, and the second set is from between 2014 and 2017. In Australia, issues related to asylum seekers have usually been discussed under broader terms of migration and immigration, so I searched for migration amendment bills and chose those that were related to asylum seekers. In the next section, I will shortly introduce the bills that my debate data addresses, in order to clarify the background of arguments and themes that emerge in the debates. List of bills with their original names and reading dates can be found in appendix.

3.1.3. Finnish bills

*Migration Legislation Amendment (Integration of Immigrants and Reception of Asylum Seekers) Bill 2004 (No. 1)*²⁹

Migration Legislation Amendment (Integration of Immigrants and Reception of Asylum Seekers) Bill 2004 (No. 1) was first introduced on the 4th of May in 2004 as an amendment to Integration of Immigrants and Reception of Asylum Seekers Act 1999. The bill doesn't make radical changes to reception of asylum seekers in practice, but simply incorporates articles concerning the scope of immigration reception to new migration law. The object is to compensate for the abolishment of the previous migration law. In practice, the law defines under which reception program different groups of immigrants fall. For example, the scope of

²⁹ Parliament of Finland (2004a).

asylum reception covers persons who have applied for international protection until they have been granted asylum or removed from the country, while the scope of reception for persons receiving temporary protection reaches people who have temporary protection visas. The amendment also rules that holders of temporary protection visa can be treated like refugees in relation to asylum reception for as long as they are entitled to temporary protection.

*Migration Legislation Amendment (Integration of Immigrants and Reception of Asylum Seekers) Bill 2004 (No. 2)*³⁰

Migration Legislation Amendment (Integration of Immigrants and Reception of Asylum Seekers) Bill 2004 (No. 2) was introduced on the 2nd of February in 2005 and it makes amendments to Integration of Immigrants and Reception of Asylum Seekers Act 1999. The main goal of amendments is to standardise Finnish national legislation with the 2003 EU directive's minimum requirements concerning reception of asylum seekers. The first articles of the directive define requirements for adequate physical conditions in reception centres, while the rest of the articles determine asylum seekers' rights. For example, authorities should provide asylum seekers enough information about asylum process, allow applicants' free movement within the country or designated area and take special needs of vulnerable persons into consideration. For the most part, Finnish national legislation meets the directive's requirements even before amendments. However, some articles are not officially mentioned in Finnish legislation and thus need to be added to Integration of Immigrants and Reception of Asylum Seekers Act 1999.

*Migration Legislation Amendment (Migration Act and Register of Aliens Act) Bill 2006*³¹

Migration Legislation Amendment (Migration Act and Register of Aliens Act) Bill 2006 was introduced on the 21st of April in 2006 as an amendment to Migration Act 2004. The bill proposes that Finnish Immigration Service, police and Finnish Border Guard could ask reception centres to provide them information on unaccompanied minors and their family members. They would also have right to track down guardians or caregivers of unaccompanied minors. The extension of authorities' powers to access information on child asylum seekers is justified by a notion that finding children's family members is in their best interest.

³⁰ Parliament of Finland (2004b).

³¹ Parliament of Finland (2006).

*Migration Legislation Amendment Bill 2016 (No. 1)*³²

Migration Legislation Amendment Bill 2016 (No. 1) was introduced on the 4th of February in 2016. It proposes amendments to provisions of Migration Act 2004 concerning international protection. The main legislative change is that residence permits would not be granted on the grounds of humanitarian protection³³ anymore. However, people could still be granted asylum based on confirmed refugee status or residence permit based on subsidiary protection. The proposed removal of humanitarian protection from Migration Act is presented as an amendment that standardises Finnish legislation with EU and other European countries' legislation. The aim of the bill is to restrict Finnish asylum law and policies so that they don't appear too lenient compared to other European countries.

*Migration Legislation Amendment (Migration Act and Related Acts) Bill 2016*³⁴

Migration Legislation Amendment (Migration Act and Related Acts) Bill 2016 was introduced on the 31st of March in 2016. The bill suggests several amendments to legal procedures of court cases related to international protection and aliens. The aim of the bill is to enhance efficiency and cut expenses of tribunals by shortening the time for filing a notice of appeal. The bill also proposes restrictions on applicants' rights to legal assistance and introduces additional requirements for appealing to the Supreme Court. The amendments are argued to enhance asylum seekers' legal rights since cases could be processed faster, reducing the time applicants spend waiting in reception centres.

*Migration Legislation Amendment Bill 2016 (No. 2)*³⁵

The bill Migration Legislation Amendment Bill 2016 (No. 2), which was introduced on the 15th of September in 2016, proposes amendments to Migration Act 2004. The bill suggests that asylum seekers could be required to live in designated reception centres or register in them up to four times a day while their asylum applications are processed, if such measures are necessary for contacting applicants or ensuring their removal from the country. In some cases, unaccompanied minors who are at least 15 years of age and whose asylum applications have been rejected could also be ordered to stay in a reception centre until they are removed from the country.

³² Parliament of Finland (2016a).

³³ See chapter 2.2.1.

³⁴ Parliament of Finland (2016b).

³⁵ Parliament of Finland (2016c).

3.1.4. Australian bills

*Migration Legislation Amendment (Further Border Protection Measures) Bill 2002*³⁶
Migration Legislation Amendment (Further Border Protection Measures) Bill 2002 was introduced on the 20th of June in 2002, and it proposes amendments to the Migration Act 1958. Following the idea of the Migration Legislation (Excision from Migration Zone) Bill 2001, the new bill suggests further removal of certain distant territories from the Australian migration zone. The proposal adds the Coral Islands Territory and certain remote islands in different parts of Australia to the list of ‘excised offshore places’³⁷. The government justifies amendments by saying that human smugglers have started to transport asylum seekers closer to Australian mainland, and therefore, excising some islands from the migration zone is necessary to prevent unauthorized maritime arrivals from applying protection visas there.

*Migration Amendment (Duration of Detention) Bill 2003*³⁸

Migration Amendment (Duration of Detention) Bill 2002 was introduced on the 18th of June in 2003 as an amendment to the Migration Act 1958. The bill states that while an unlawful non-citizen is waiting for the decision of their immigration or asylum processing, they must be kept in immigration detention. They must remain detained until they are either removed from the country or granted a visa and can only be released if the court finds the detention is illegal or if the person is not an unlawful non-citizen. The bill would prevent interlocutory release of asylum seekers into Australian community.

*Migration Amendment (Designated Unauthorized Arrivals) Bill 2006*³⁹

Migration Amendment (Designated Unauthorized Arrivals) Bill 2006, which proposes amendments to the Migration Act 1958, was introduced on 11th of May in 2006 as a measure to enhance Australia’s border control. The bill allows Australian authorities to transfer all unauthorized maritime arrivals that arrive in Australian mainland to offshore processing centres. Some people who arrive by air without a valid visa will also be subject to offshore processing regime. These designated unauthorized arrivals will stay detained in designated third countries outside Australia while their asylum claims are processed.

³⁶ Parliament of Australia (2002).

³⁷ See chapter 2.3.2.

³⁸ Parliament of Australia (2003).

³⁹ Parliament of Australia (2006).

*Migration and Maritime Powers Legislation Amendment (Resolving the Asylum Legacy Caseload) Bill 2014*⁴⁰

Migration and Maritime Powers Legislation Amendment (Resolving the Asylum Legacy Caseload) Bill 2014 was introduced on the 25th of September in 2014. It amends the Migration Act 1958 and several other migration-related laws, in relation to human smuggling and management of asylum seekers. The bill gives border forces more power to deter human smugglers from entering Australian territory. It also introduces temporary protection visas and faster processing for unauthorized arrivals. Authorities will also be able to deport rejected asylum seekers from Australia faster than before.

*Migration Legislation Amendment (Regional Processing Cohort) Bill 2016*⁴¹

Migration Legislation Amendment (Regional Processing Cohort) Bill 2016 was introduced on the 8th of November in 2016. The bill amends the Migration Act 1958 and the Migration Regulations 1994. The aim of the bill is to stop unauthorized maritime arrivals in regional processing countries from applying for an Australian visa. All adult asylum seekers and transitory persons who are taken to offshore detention centres after 19th of July in 2013 are subject to the proposed act and are referred to as the regional processing cohort. Persons who have at any point stayed in a regional processing country can apply for a visa only if the Minister deems it to be in the public interest.

*Migration Amendment (Prohibiting Items in Immigration Detention Facilities) Bill 2017*⁴²

Migration Amendment (Prohibiting Items in Immigration Detention Facilities) Bill 2017 was introduced on the 13th of September in 2017. The bill amends the Migration Act 1958 and allows the Minister to prohibit certain items, such as mobile phones, drugs or child pornography, in immigration detention centres. The bill also increases authorities' powers for searching facilities and monitoring detainees. According to the Australian government, criminal activities conducted by high risk individuals, such as using mobile phones for escaping the detention centres or distributing drugs, threaten the safety of staff and detainees in detention centres.

⁴⁰ Parliament of Australia (2014).

⁴¹ Parliament of Australia (2016).

⁴² Parliament of Australia (2017).

3.2. Discourse Analysis

This study is focused on how politicians employ language in creating and reproducing shared conceptions of ontological assumptions. Therefore, I examine parliamentary debates through discourse analysis. Gee (2010, 8–10) notes that discourse analysis is a study of language with plenty of different approaches, none of which are “uniquely right”. He compares the process of constructing a discourse analysis with making soup. One can use research methods and theory as recipes to some extent, but discourse analysis is ultimately about mixing and adapting different ingredients to serve the purpose of a specific study. Similarly, Alasuutari and Qadir (2019, 151) recognize the large variety of discourse analysis approaches that can be used to make sense of social world.

However, Alasuutari and Qadir (2019) suggest that drawing from principles of Foucauldian discourse analysis could be particularly useful in epistemic governance research since epistemic governance is a neo-institutionalist approach that has been inspired by Foucault’s concepts of links between power and knowledge. Although a purely Foucauldian discourse analysis has often been deemed to be too complex or even impossible to conduct, Alasuutari and Qadir argue that elements of it can be applied to methodology of epistemic governance research. The authors summarize the main idea of Foucauldian discourse analysis in the following manner:

Foucauldian discourse analysis is getting at the rules and assumptions by which knowledge is produced and authorized and then circulated through institutions to establish relations of domination that make it impossible to think outside those rules. (Alasuutari & Qadir 2019, 153).

According to Foucault, producing power and knowledge is a continuous process where the two constitute each other within institutions, reinforcing certain forms of knowing and undermining others (Alasuutari & Qadir 2019, 151–153). Like epistemic governance approach, which examines how social change is justified through shared assumptions of reality, Foucauldian discourse analysis aims to access assumptions that knowledge and established perceptions of reality are based on (ibid). Since the aim of this study is to make sense of ontological assumptions that politicians rely while debating asylum laws, I utilise Foucauldian discourse

analysis as a wider framework, within which I analyse the ways in which speakers attempt to build pictures of reality.

4. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

4.1. Epistemic governance

This study draws on the framework of epistemic governance to analyse parliamentary debates in Finland and Australia. According to Alasuutari and Qadir (2014, 67–70), the main principle of epistemic governance is that actors try to affect the ways in which others view reality by appealing to ontological facts, actor identifications and shared norms and values. Various other approaches that have contributed to explaining governance in global world have described governance as a playing field on which actors attempt to influence others. However, Alasuutari and Qadir argue that previous studies haven't been able to pinpoint the exact processes of how that happens. Previous scholarship has also tended to overemphasize the role of certain agents as power holders, although scholars have often agreed power is not concentrated on one point in the global system. Because of the shortcomings in existing research, Alasuutari and Qadir (2014) suggest epistemic governance approach for pointing out the actual ways in which actors try to affect beliefs and understanding of others.

Epistemic governance is part of a wider framework of neoinstitutionalism, which has become an increasingly popular approach in sociology during the past few decades (Hafner-Burton & Tsutsui 2005, 1382). The line of theory is originally based on organisational studies, especially on a famous article by Meyer and Rowan (1977), and it emphasizes the role of culture and norms in shaping organisational behaviour. In their study, Meyer and Rowan (1977) argue that standardised models and norms of shared organizational culture make actors in different organisations adopt similar principles, which leads to increasing similarity called isomorphism. While organisations and societies might interpret and follow the models and norms in unique ways, there are some unexpected similarities in the way they operate and change with time (Meyer et al. 1997, 145).

There are various adaptations of the theoretical framework, out of which the world polity or world society theory has been particularly successful (Hafner-Burton & Tsutsui 2005, 1382).

The world polity theory, which was developed by Meyer and other institutionalists, presents an idea of a world culture (Drori & Krücken 2009, 7–9). The world culture can be defined as a set of cultural scripts that encourage different actors, for example nation-states, to adapt similar models and practices around the world (ibid. 13–16). According to Finnemore (1996, 335), some aspects of this isomorphism may be explained by similar practical demands and responsibilities of states, such as need for monetary units, law enforcement and services for citizens. However, Finnemore notes that local task demands alone cannot explain the similarities of institutional environments in different nation-states. Likewise, simply arguing that the strongest states or organisations rule others cannot explain the striking similarities in social practises around the world either, since there is no world leader who tells people how to organise societies (Alasuutari (2016, 1). Therefore, it seems evident there are cultural factors at play in the increasing isomorphism between organisations or states (Finnemore 1996, 335).

Alasuutari (2016, 51) suggests that the isomorphism between states could be viewed through the framework of synchronization. According to Alasuutari, the circulation of different ideas and policies around the world shows that factors contributing to social reality of nations, such as discourses and thought patterns, are synchronized. In other words, people adapt new ideas and principles in a somewhat similar manner across the globe. However, despite the shared assumptions of world culture and cultural models that circulate around the world, the practical ways in which national discourses and policies become synchronized can be different (Alasuutari 2014, 29). For example, comparisons with other countries are used as justifications of policies more often in certain nation-states than others (ibid).

Alasuutari (2016, 69–70) identifies three stages of creation, diffusion and use of policy models. First, certain policy introduces a new idea of potential policy model, after which the policy becomes more defined due to peer networking in domestic level, and finally, the policy format starts to circulate across the world. Alasuutari notes that especially international organisations have an important role in synchronization of domestic policies since their consultancy encourages domestic actors to adapt international policy models. Synchronization of national policies and discursive similarities in parliamentary debates have already been studied in relation to some topics, such as domestication (Rautalin 2013; Syväterä 2016), comparisons with other countries (Alasuutari 2014; Alasuutari 2016; Alasuutari, Vähäsavo & Pi Ferrer 2019) and authority of science (Syväterä 2020).

Besides synchronization of national policies, a more detailed approach of epistemic governance can be utilised in explaining why politicians and governments tend to adopt similar models in different parts of the world. Alasuutari and Qadir (2014, 68–70) suggest that similar epistemic assumptions in different countries are factors that contribute to the isomorphism between national policies. The authors describe epistemic governance as a way of governance that is not based on coercion, but on dissemination of knowledge and ideas. As Alasuutari (2016, 4–5) notes, synchronization of national policies does not happen through the strict rule of powerful states or organisations, but through their consultancy that influences national decision-making. The epistemic governance perspective draws from Foucault’s governmentality⁴³ and Goffman’s framing theory⁴⁴ and presents an idea of “governance that acts upon people’s understanding” (Alasuutari & Qadir 2014, 68–70). In other words, in policy making, actors make decisions and act based on each other’s conceptions of the world, as well as the situation at hand (ibid).

The main objective of epistemic work is to convince others of a certain way of thinking and make them act according to it by appealing to their values and beliefs (Alasuutari & Qadir 2016, 636). Essentially, politicians and other people who aim to affect views of others build their epistemic work on the support of people whose understanding of the world they seek to affect (Alasuutari & Qadir 2019, 22). However, as Alasuutari and Qadir (2014, 68–72) point out, epistemic work is not always apparent to participants. Actors may engage in epistemic governance unconsciously because shared cultural scripts are mostly mental images that are hard to grasp or view objectively. They are often taken for granted, which makes it hard to become aware of them. In fact, Alasuutari and Qadir argue that epistemic work is usually most effective when actors are not aware of its premises because that means the premises are widely shared and accepted.

Drawing on Brown’s (1989) theory of root metaphors, Alasuutari and Qadir (2016) suggest that epistemic governance can be studied through identifying imageries. Unlike single metaphors, imageries are “configurations of metaphors” that map out numerous underlying assumptions of the world (Alasuutari & Qadir 2016, 636–638). The authors say that politicians around the world utilise similar imageries with one another when they try to resonate with their

⁴³ See: Foucault, M. (1991). Governmentality. In G. Burchell, C. Gordon & P. Miller (Eds.), *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*, 88–104. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

⁴⁴ See: Goffman, E. (1974). *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of the Experience*. New York: Harper Colophon.

listeners' world views. The way in which imageries simplify complexities of the social world and offer tangible explanations for things that are hard to grasp is what makes them attractive to people (ibid).

Alasuutari and Qadir (2016) have detected three imageries of social reality, in which social change is driven by either progress, hierarchy or competing blocs. First, imagery of progress or modernization presents an idea that there are functional requirements for societies to constantly progress towards a more modern state (Alasuutari & Qadir 2016, 640–641). The imagery holds a naturalised assumption that reforms are inevitable and desirable for societies, in order to keep up with progress of other states (Alasuutari 2016, 30–31). Second, imagery of society as hierarchy introduces an idea of “chain of command” that shapes social interaction (Alasuutari & Qadir 2016, 641–642). Societies consist of different hierarchical levels and actors who hold different amount of power that allows them to affect others (ibid). Third, imagery of competing blocs presents an idea of camps or blocs that are constantly competing with one another in pursuit of securing their own interests (Alasuutari 2016, 38). The imagery has often been utilised in politics to create an image of shared national interest, which is opposed to other nations' interests (Alasuutari & Qadir 2016, 644–645).

4.2. Objects of epistemic work

Alasuutari and Qadir (2014) have identified three premises or aspects of social world, to which they refer to as objects of epistemic work, that are used to justify arguments in epistemic work: environmental reality, existing actors and norms or ideals. In this study, I utilise this theoretical framework of the objects of epistemic work in analysing parliamentary debates. Due to limitations of the study, I concentrate only on analysing the ontology of the environment, or in other words, the epistemic facts that politicians use during debates. However, as Alasuutari and Qadir (2014, 72) say, it is important to note that when people engage in epistemic work, they combine commonly accepted facts that they consider convincing with relevant actor identifications and norms or values that define what is acceptable. In fact, the authors argue that all the three objects of epistemic work are always present in epistemic work in various combinations.

Ontology of the environment

According to Alasuutari and Qadir (2014, 72–74), the first object of epistemic work, ontology of the environment refers to the shared understanding of what the facts are in the present social reality. To reach their goals, actors attempt to present the current situation in a way that supports their claims. Alasuutari & Qadir identify two aspects of ontology, paradigmatic and practical aspect, that are often linked together when people attempt to make convincing arguments. The paradigmatic dimension is a set of background assumptions of the world, for example what implications concepts of “society” or “national state” hold. As the authors say, it is often quite difficult to question the paradigmatic basic premises of social world since they are so widely accepted. Therefore, actors tend to utilise the paradigmatic assumptions as the base that they reproduce and build their arguments on, while concentrating on more manageable practical dimensions. The practical dimensions are more particular and specific ontological facts that only make sense against the background of paradigmatic dimension’s deeper grasp of the world.

Alasuutari and Qadir (2014, 74) say that politicians often build their arguments on commonly accepted existing facts and authorities, such as scientific organizations. When they attempt to influence the views and beliefs of their listeners, the important thing is not whether people believe in or agree with their representation of the reality, but whether the ontological facts politicians introduce are accepted widely enough to be utilised in epistemic work. In other words, politicians form their arguments based on the way they believe people think. According to Alasuutari (2016, 41), referring to ontological facts is most effective when a speaker manages to create a factual framework or background for the discussion that others accept as paradigmatic premises. Being able to determine the ontological assumptions behind the debate limits the scope of reasonable counterarguments since people are following a certain logic defined by the constructed paradigmatic background (ibid).

In practice, politicians utilise both paradigmatic and practical aspects of ontology together, combined with other objects of epistemic work (Alasuutari & Qadir 2014, 72–73). They use practical means as tools to form arguments, while reproducing certain paradigmatic assumptions that are beneficial for their agenda (ibid). When trying to convince others, politicians tend to refer to factual knowledge, such as statistics or reports by respected scientific authorities (Alasuutari & Qadir 2019, 120). At the same time, they often aim to reinforce background premises, for example by appealing to imagery of modernization or by attempting to convince others of the detrimental state of current affairs (Alasuutari & Qadir 2014, 73).

Especially if a politician is successful in defining the current situation as unsatisfactory, they can make way for reforms relatively easily, since even if others don't agree on details, they still play to the established image of the current state of affairs (ibid). An example of ontological assumptions as a tool of epistemic governance can be found in parliamentary debates, in which politicians appeal to science as an authority that defines rationality and facts (Syväterä 2020).

Actors and identifications

The second object of epistemic work is related to actors and identifications that people consider to be relevant when they make arguments. According to Alasuutari and Qadir (2014, 75), actors engage in epistemic work to influence people's ideas of what kind of actors there are and how they identify themselves and others. The authors say that the aim of epistemic work is usually to make others identify with certain groups or units, such as nation-state or political party, by appealing to real or imagined shared interests. This object of epistemic work is often combined with the imagery of competing blocs since different actors and groups pursue their own interests and seek to enforce conceptions of 'us' versus 'them' in their rhetoric (Alasuutari & Qadir 2016, 643–645).

Like other objects of epistemic work, the object of actors and identifications also has a paradigmatic and a practical aspect (Alasuutari & Qadir 2014, 75). The paradigmatic dimension is a deep-seated understanding on what kind of actors the social reality consists of and what their agency is like (ibid). For example, paradigmatic assumptions on concepts like "nation-state", "gender" and "ethnicity" are often hard to detect, but ultimately, they are the base that politicians utilise in justifying policies (Alasuutari 2016, 42). As for agency, people usually assume that persons and groups are rational actors who pursue their own interest (Alasuutari and Qadir 2014, 75). While paradigmatic aspect is the set of background assumptions on actors and identity, practical aspect consists of more tacit assumptions (ibid).

One of the most common ways to work on people's identifications is emphasizing national interest and patriotic aspects of society (Alasuutari & Qadir 2014, 75). Anderson (2006, 5–6) defines nations as 'imagined political communities' since concepts of nations bind together large communities of strangers who would otherwise not have contact or sense of connectivity with each other. According to Billig (2010, 11, 39), besides official ceremonies to celebrate the nation, nationalism is continuously reproduced in everyday routines or 'flaggings' of banal nationalism. Indeed, Alasuutari & Qadir (2014, 76) say that politicians often utilise imagined

sense of community in epistemic governance, as well as perceptions of shared interests of citizens of the same nation. Usually the interests that are presented as common good are only partial group interests, but when they are successfully presented as shared interests of everyone, they can be a powerful tool of epistemic work. An example of appealing to shared interests of the nation is when politicians reproduce understanding of national self-image or identity, which comprises of ideas of commonly shared values, cultural uniqueness and historical narratives describing the past of the nation (Alasuutari, Vähäsavo & Pi Ferrer 2019).

Norms and ideals

The third object of epistemic work is related to conceptions of what is appropriate, right or acceptable. Alasuutari and Qadir (2014, 76–77) say that actors appeal to shared norms and values and attempt to define what is good and desirable. According to the authors, some values, such as freedom, rationality and equality, are so widely shared they are a part of world culture and increase isomorphism of policies around the world. They are combined with facts and actor identifications to create sets of value-related assumptions that are then circulated around the world once they become popular in argumentation. However, despite increasing adaptation of similar norms and ideals in different parts of the world, it is important to note that the principles of world culture could be interpreted differently depending on the context.

Like other objects of epistemic work, norms and ideals also have two dimensions (Alasuutari & Qadir 2014, 77). Paradigmatic dimension is a set of background assumptions concerning values, and it offers a foundation for arguments of practical dimension that are used to evaluate morality of practical policies and actions (ibid). Epistemic work on values aims to both define and reinforce values and ideals, and it is often connected to identification talk (Alasuutari & Qadir 2019, 118–119). For example, people make references to other countries to define what kind of policies are desirable and to evaluate how different countries are placed in relation to following those policies (ibid).

Alasuutari and Qadir (2014, 77–78) point out that epistemic work on norms and values is not irrational or only based on affecting people's emotions. On the contrary, arguments related to norms and ideals are often intertwined with ontological facts and scientific evidence. This is apparent for example in cases where politicians appeal to moral authority of science to justify arguments related to ethical questions, such as abortion (Syväterä 2020). Alasuutari and Qadir (2014, 77–78) say that some widely accepted principles, such as human rights, are often

considered so self-evident and scientifically proven that they are not easily questioned. Especially values that seem self-evident can be very useful in epistemic governance since they are linked to imagery of progress in a sense that those values are widely regarded as principles that contribute to making the world better place. On practical level, to promote policy changes politicians often link their value-related arguments to international treaties. In cases where the state breaches an international agreement, politicians might argue that legislation amendments are necessary to avoid sanctions or negative impacts on the country's reputation.

5. ANALYSIS

According to Alasuutari and Qadir (2016, 638–639), politicians utilise ontological facts in epistemic governance since they help to create and reproduce certain images or perceptions of the world that can be used to support or oppose political changes. Indeed, in both Finnish and Australian debates on asylum law, practically all politicians who speak attempt to justify their arguments by appealing to shared and commonly accepted facts that are broadly considered convincing. From the beginning, politicians decide which practical facts to present to others and against what kind of paradigmatic background of assumptions. The selectiveness of discourses promotes one understanding of the world, leaving out other possible interpretations. In their epistemic work of defining facts, politicians for example paint images of an unpredictable world full of risks and threats, refer to other countries or similar events in the past, or appeal to common sense of others. In this chapter, I will analyse ontological facts that Finnish and Australian politicians rely on when they discuss asylum seekers.

5.1. Migrant crisis as a fact

One of the shared assumptions that emerges in asylum-related debates in Finland and Australia is that we are living in a time of uniquely severe migrant crisis. In many cases, the discourse appears to be a paradigmatic assumption behind arguments that politicians make. Besides, it is also utilised in more practical arguments to promote policy reforms. Interestingly, in Finland the migrant crisis discourse is only present in debates that took place after the start of Syrian war, but it is extremely common in those post-2015 debates. Meanwhile, in Australia notions of crisis are often less obvious, more contested and mainly connected to humanitarian

arguments, but they date back to early 2000s debates. Although there might also be other reasons for the observation, it seems likely that ontological premises are affected by the way asylum seeking is portrayed in media. In Finland, the concept of crisis was certainly reinforced in media where the events of 2015 were repeatedly referred to as the ‘asylum crisis’ or ‘European refugee crisis’. As for Australia, there seems to be an interesting dichotomy between Australian media and politicians continuously presenting unauthorized arrivals as a concern and other politicians downplaying the seriousness of refugee crisis.

Presenting crisis as a fact is especially obvious in Finnish debates of the mid-2010s where politicians continuously contrast the current world situation with the past one. The expression “this world situation” or some variation of it is present in nearly all speeches of post-2015 debates. Politicians do not usually define precisely what the current world situation is like. Yet, there seems to be a widely shared understanding of what participants think the situation at hand is. The understanding appears to be based on the idea that the reality of asylum seeking has fundamentally changed due to the European migrant crisis. Whether we are actually living in times of a crisis is irrelevant. Instead, what matters is that the assumption of a crisis has become so established that it sets the ontological environment for discussions, determining what kind of arguments and counterarguments are considered reasonable.

By emphasizing the uniqueness of the current situation compared to anything Finland or Europe has experienced before, Finnish politicians reproduce this commonly accepted perception of a ‘time of crisis’. Although notions of crisis are also utilised in more pragmatic arguments, for example by referring to particular events contributing to the ‘crisis’ and calling for certain actions, it seems like assumptions of crisis are often at such a deep paradigmatic level that they are not openly questioned. On the level of discourses, the migrant crisis has become a challenge that needs to be overcome, usually through restriction of asylum policies. In other words, politicians utilise the paradigmatic assumptions of crisis together with crisis discourse to justify their support of new bills. Sometimes assumptions of a crisis can be used to justify policy reforms even before the crisis has escalated in relation to a policy, which is the case in the argument of MP Ruoho (PS):

Very few residence permits have been granted based on this [humanitarian protection] criteria, but we need to be proactive in this world situation since we can assume the

numbers will grow due to increased number of asylum seekers. (Parliament of Finland 2016a, 11.02.2016).

In Australia, assumptions of the nature of crisis sometimes differ from Finland. Furthermore, unlike Finnish politicians who usually use crisis talk to justify asylum policy restrictions, most Australian politicians use the discourse to justify quite opposite arguments. Although some Australian politicians utilise rhetoric that reproduces the idea of uncontrollable surge of asylum seekers as a crisis that requires tougher asylum policies, interestingly, the crisis discourse is mainly used by politicians who promote humanitarian views. In fact, some of those politicians who argue that Australia should do more to solve the global displacement problem at its source and ensure wellbeing of asylum seekers blame the government for denying the existence of international refugee crisis. For example, Senator Lines (ALP) criticises the government for ignoring the global humanitarian crisis and demonising asylum seekers:

All the questions from government backbenchers to ministers, whether in the other place or in the Senate, are about stopping the boats. They are not about the world's global refugee issue. They are not about the world's global asylum issue. They are simply about stopping the boats and calling asylum seekers 'illegal maritime arrivals'—dehumanising them. (Parliament of Australia 2014, 04.12.2014).

Indeed, it seems like in a sense, refugee crisis is a contested ontological fact in Australia. On one hand, there is a somewhat shared understanding of displacement crisis that is happening around the world. Although some politicians may downplay the humanitarian aspects of the crisis by drawing their listeners' attention to border protection issues instead, the existence of crisis itself is hardly ever openly denied. But on the other hand, like I mentioned, the crisis is interpreted and portrayed in very different way depending on the speaker. The paradigmatic understanding of the nature of the crisis in Australia doesn't seem to be quite as established or commonly accepted as in Finland. In other words, while there are indications of a shared understanding of existence of crisis, its nature is contested.

However, when the crisis is presented in a similar way in Finland and Australia, there are striking similarities in expressions that politicians use. When politicians attempt to convince

others of the severity of the current migrant crisis in order to advocate policy restrictions, they use strong metaphoric expressions that enforce the idea of uncontrollable immigration as a fact. For example, when Australian Senator Scullion (CLP) expressed his support for 2002 bill on further border protection, he continuously referred to the sudden surge of asylum seekers arriving in Australia by boat in 2001 as “a tidal wave of people” (Parliament of Australia 2002, 09.12.2002). Similarly, Finnish MP Mykkänen (Kok.) described the increased migration to Europe in 2016 by saying it was “uncontrollable” and “avalanche-like” (Parliament of Finland 2016a, 11.2.2016). Like several other Finnish politicians, he also talked about “a flood of asylum seekers” (ibid). The dramatic expressions reproduce image of an uncontrollable influx of people, thus contributing to strengthening assumptions of migrant crisis.

5.2. A world full of threats

When politicians try to convince others of necessity of certain asylum policy reforms, such as stricter border policies or visa restrictions, they commonly justify their arguments by reinforcing existing assumptions of certain groups or individuals as a threat. Arguments that present the existence of threat as an ontological fact can be found in both Finnish and Australian debates throughout the 21st century. Politicians utilise certain paradigmatic background premises related to nature of threat, such as the assumption that people who arrive in the country “illegally” have a disrupting effect on the safety of the nation. The assumption is based on established ontological understanding of national borders that can only be crossed with appropriate authorization. Due to the largely self-evident paradigmatic assumption, movement of spontaneous asylum seekers is often perceived as deviant behaviour that threatens receiving societies. Asylum seekers are often linked to notions of crime and illegality, especially when they are discussed in relation to human smugglers who are widely considered to be vicious criminals who exploit desperate asylum seekers.

When Finnish politicians try to reinforce perceptions of asylum seekers as a threat, they usually portray them as ruthless economic migrants who seek to exploit Finnish welfare system. The discourse is based on paradigmatic assumption, according to which some asylum seekers are not ‘genuine’ refugees. Reinforcing assumptions of many asylum seekers being economic migrants who pose a threat to Finnish standards of living enables politicians to appeal to

common fears and concerns. If exploiting people's fear of losing their comfortable way of life because of an external threat is successful, it could be potentially be a strong argument for restricting asylum policies. An example of utilising the discourse is a speech by MP Hakkarainen (PS) where he also appeals to patriotic sentiments of Finnish people and reproduces division between 'us' and 'them':

The purpose of this law, this first step, is to secure the welfare state. That is all what this is about. 30 million new refugees will be generated in Africa every year, if we want. What will happen to our standard of living? [...] Do we want to secure our national welfare state? [...] We are patriotically trying to close the borders, secure the welfare state and so on. And an own culture: we have our own special language, Finnish, we have an own flag. We want to keep all these things. But if the achievements of socialism⁴⁵ arrive here, we will lose these things. (Parliament of Finland 2016a, 11.02.2016).

Besides presenting asylum seekers as a threat to Finnish economy and way of life, politicians also utilise paradigmatic assumptions of necessity of national borders that protect nation-states from foreign invasion. Although notions of illegality are not quite as radical and common in Finland than in Australia, some Finnish politicians still attempt to reproduce the idea of unauthorized movement across borders as "illegal" activity that is connected to crimes, such as human smuggling. Sometimes perceptions of threat are also presented through somewhat paradigmatic assumption of inevitable conflict between cultures or religions, while existing forms of xenophobia are also exploited. For example, some politicians attempt to portray Middle Eastern or Muslim asylum seekers as security threats. Often fears related to border security are somehow combined with economic concerns, like in MP Tavio's (PS) argument:

A borderless world is of course not realistic. If we decide to give up our borders completely, Finland will cease to exist tomorrow. Surely, a million Chinese people would gladly come and rob our resources. (Parliament of Finland 2016a, 11.02.2016).

⁴⁵ In this context, "achievements of socialism" refer to asylum seekers. MP Hakkarainen argues that socialist policies led to the large number of asylum seekers arriving in Finland in 2015, and therefore, he sarcastically calls asylum seekers "achievements of socialism".

In Australia, notions of threat are more common than in Finland. They are also more focused on border security than economic concerns. Although the presentation of asylum seekers, especially those who arrive by boat, as “illegals” is sometimes criticised by some politicians, the discourse that connects spontaneous asylum seekers to crime and illegality is deemed acceptable enough to be broadly used in argumentation. The observation is interesting, considering that neither applying for asylum nor arriving by boat is illegal under the Refugee Convention (Phillips 2015, 4). Yet, definitions of asylum seekers “illegals” or “unlawful non-citizens” reinforce conceptions of illegality and threat. In relation to notions of illegality and threat, Australian politicians tend to highlight how successful the policies of their party have been in deterring the threat from the sea. Indeed, especially members of Liberal Party often justify their arguments by claiming that their successful asylum and border policies have “stopped the boats”. Instead of drawing attention to controversies of offshore processing and mandatory detention, they emphasize how they have stopped the “illegals” from arriving in Australian shores.

However, illegality of asylum seekers is a controversial assumption. In both decades of the 21st century, there are several politicians who attempt to redefine asylum seekers in other terms than through a perceived threat. They criticise discourses, which according to them, exploit fear and demonise vulnerable asylum seekers and refugees. For example, MP McMullan (ALP) argues that exploiting fear is a political strategy, which is based on Australia’s long history of perceived threats from the sea (Parliament of Australia 2006, 10.08.2006). MP McGowan (Ind.), on the other hand, attempts to convince others that asylum seekers are not illegals and that they have a right to seek asylum (Parliament of Australia 2017, 07.02.2018).

Although Australian politicians often disagree on whether all asylum seekers are a threat, there is a widely shared understanding of certain individuals posing a threat to the nation. First, human smugglers’ criminal activities are broadly accepted to threaten Australia, and therefore, there is a bipartisan support over the fact that something needs to be done to deter them. However, practical arguments concerning appropriate measures to stop human smuggling vary. Second, politicians seem to form their arguments according to widely accepted ontological assumption that there are some dangerous individuals among asylum seekers. These “people of character concern” are broadly considered to be a potential threat within Australian society. Some politicians utilise fears of receiving more criminals, extremists or terrorists to justify restrictions of border policies. Like in Finland, assumptions of security threat posed by asylum

seekers are often based on their culture or religion. Politicians make generalisations of different groups of people based on existing ontological assumptions, such as link between Islam and terrorism, which has been established by events of 9/11 and other terrorist attacks, and which has been later reproduced by politicians and media. For example, based on foundations of fear and a practical example (an attempt at mass killing in his electorate), MP Katter (KAP) makes a generalisation that all Middle Eastern migrants are a security threat, in order to convince others of need for restrictions of immigration policies:

After the last attempt at mass killing, which was on the edge of the Kennedy electorate [...] I said, 'Well, that is it for me. There are no more people coming in from the Middle East. We are going to move legislation so that there are no more people coming in from the area between Greece and India—no more people.' I am sorry but it is too risky bringing in new people from North Africa and from the Middle East into this country. (Parliament of Australia 2016, 9.11.2016).

5.3. Pull factors

One of recurring themes of both Finnish and Australian asylum law debates is discussion on so-called pull factors. A widely accepted ontological fact seems to be that there are certain pull or attraction factors that prompt asylum seekers to favour certain destination countries. The factors are usually argued to be linked to “signals” the country is sending to arrivals through its legislation, access to services or attitudes towards immigrants. In Finland, pull factors are often referred to as “attraction factors”, while in Australia most politicians talk about “incentives”. Despite the slight difference in terms, the idea is similar. There seems to be a broadly accepted paradigmatic assumption of pull factors affecting the movement of people across the globe.

In Finnish debates, there are references to pull factors throughout the 21st century. Since the debates in early and mid-2000s, pull factors have been a factor that politicians deem accepted and convincing enough to be used in argumentation. In Finland, talk on pull factors is strongly focused on the assumption that Finland is somehow a particularly attractive destination for asylum seekers, especially for those who are described as “asylum tourists”. There is a strong

and for most part uncontested ontological assumption that some asylum seekers are not real refugees but economic migrants. These people are often referred to as “asylum tourists”, or even “adventurers” or “backpackers”, which reinforces perceptions of them being unauthorized travellers who are not in need of international protection. Most politicians who talk about “asylum tourists” simply reproduce the conception by using the word, but some also attempt to reinforce certain aspects of the concept by presenting “asylum tourists” as unscrupulous healthy young men who come to Finland to take advantage of Finnish welfare system.

Although not all Finnish politicians agree that Finland is particularly attractive to asylum seekers, pull factors still appear to be considered a broadly recognized fact since so many politicians use them to justify their arguments. Furthermore, there is also a relatively strong consensus that some measures are needed to reduce or avoid “unnecessary” pull factors. For most politicians, the main way to fight pull factors is by sending “right signals” to asylum seekers’ countries of origin. These signals are usually equated with restricting asylum policies. For example, MP Väistö (Kesk.) says that Finland should adjust its legislation so that asylum seekers would not consider Finland as a country where they can easily come to and take advantage of Finnish public services (Parliament of Finland 2004b, 12.05.2005). Similarly, MP Kurvinen (Kesk.) argues:

It is very important that Finland sends out right signals with its policies to countries of origin. We need to avoid all unnecessary pull factors... (Parliament of Finland 2016a, 11.02.2016).

When Finnish politicians discuss pull factors, they often claim that current policies increase pull factors. They present the failure of current policies as a self-evident fact, in order to promote change. If the strategy is successful, the shared understanding of failed policies can make policy reforms seem widely acceptable and necessary. For example, when debating on abolishment of humanitarian protection, several politicians attempt to portray humanitarian protection is an unnecessary and irrational policy that only acts as a pull factor. Even some politicians who claim to support humanitarian protection as a principle adjust their arguments according to the shared ontological assumption that the policy is ineffective in times of a migrant crisis. For example, MP Räsänen (SDP) argues that abolishment of humanitarian protection is a rational and necessary restriction in times of a crisis but softens the argument

by suggesting the policy could possibly be reintroduced in future if times are different (Parliament of Finland 2016a, 11.02.2016).

In Australia, pull factors are usually referred to as “incentives” and they are mainly used in relation to asylum seekers who arrive by boat. Like in Finland, the idea of incentives is present in Australian debates in the both decades of the 21st century. There also seems to be a somewhat similar paradigmatic assumption, according to which Australia is a particularly attractive country for asylum seekers. However, the practical discourses Australian politicians utilise are slightly different from Finland. While Finnish politicians usually argue that Finland is an attractive destination country because of its welfare system and certain social benefits, Australian politicians present more vague reasons that highlight the greatness of Australia as a nation. For example, MP Cadman (ALP) asks a rhetorical question “*who would not want to settle in Australia?*”, reproducing an idea that given a chance, anyone would like to live in Australia (Parliament of Australia 2006, 10.08.2006). Furthermore, Senator Cadman says that he cannot blame people for pursuing resettlement in Australia since he would do the same to ensure better life for his family (ibid). Senator Scullion (CLP) emphasizes Australia’s attractiveness in a similar way, but has a harsher attitude towards unauthorized arrivals:

It is a beautiful sun-kissed country, and no-one denies the right of people to wish to come to live here. The rest of the world probably want to come to live in Australia, but they will need to do so in a lawful way. (Parliament of Australia 2002, 09.12.2002).

Like Finnish politicians, many Australian politicians also recognize a need for policies that send “right signals” to asylum seekers. However, it is even more common for them to talk about sending a message for human smugglers. Asylum seekers and human smugglers are repeatedly linked together in debates since there is a clear paradigmatic assumption that human smugglers are the enemy that enables unauthorized maritime arrivals to reach Australian shores. Although politicians disagree on whether asylum seekers are “illegals”, like some politicians claim they are, there is a common understanding on human smugglers being criminals who need to be stopped. Majority of Australian politicians seems to accept the assumption that Australia needs to send a warning to human smugglers with its asylum policies, and as some politicians argue, also to asylum seekers who are waiting for an opportunity to come to Australia by boat.

However, politicians often strongly disagree on what kind of policies send the “right” message. Sometimes their practical arguments on policies that reduce incentives could be very different from each other. For example, MP Kelly (LP) argues that unauthorized arrivals who belong to regional processing cohort need to be banned from ever being permanently resettled in Australia because if they had hope of living in Australia, they would resort to the help of human smugglers to reach their goal (Parliament of Australia 2016, 10.11.2016). According to MP Kelly, the bill on regional processing cohort needs to pass into law since removing incentives to come to Australia through a third country will ensure that “the boats remain stopped” (ibid). On the other hand, several Australian politicians oppose further excision of remote islands from Australia’s migration zone because they don’t think the policy reduces incentives to come to Australia in an unauthorized manner. For example, Senator Kirk (ALP) attempts to convince others that it is not rational to assume that desperate asylum seekers who arrive by boat would be stopped by a removal of certain territories from Australia’s jurisdiction (Parliament of Australia 2002, 09.12.2002). In fact, she argues that excision of islands would simply give asylum seekers a stronger incentive to target the mainland where they can apply for Australian visa without being sent to offshore processing centres.

5.4. Comparisons with other countries

When discussing laws on asylum seekers, politicians often make comparisons to other countries to prove a point. Comparisons enable speakers to create and enforce various international standards, which are considered desirable, or refer to international agreements, which are widely considered binding. They also allow speakers to introduce unsuccessful policies from other countries as warnings of what ill-advised decisions could result in. When politicians try to affect their listeners’ perceptions of what policies are effective, they tend to present effects and consequences of different policies as certain kind of ontological facts. Usually their aim is to create or reproduce understanding of certain foreign policies as either “good” or “bad” policies through rational arguments that are based on facts and evidence. Policies that are deemed to be good or effective are argued to be examples that the country should follow. On the other hand, policies that are considered bad or ineffective are presented as lessons that the country should learn from.

Especially in Finland, politicians tend to use policies in other countries as either “good” or “bad” examples of how asylum seekers can be dealt with. Of course, these notions of “good” or “bad” are subjective, but since politicians try to choose example policies that they consider widely accepted and convincing enough, there is often a shared understanding of which policies are desirable and which are not. Indeed, since comparisons to other countries are used as practical examples to support change of Finnish asylum policies, politicians tend to give examples of carefully selected countries that they consider to be the most convincing for their argument. To introduce foreign policies that Finland could learn from, Finnish politicians often talk about how things are managed in other EU countries or Scandinavian countries, especially the neighbouring country Sweden. The most common argument they use is that Finland should standardise its policies with other EU countries.

Many politicians present common European asylum policy as a desirable outcome that should be pursued in all European countries. The argument helps to justify amendments to national legislation, such as removal of humanitarian protection in 2016. When politicians discuss on the bill concerning abolishment of humanitarian protection, those who support the policy reform justify their argument by claiming the policy change clarifies Finnish legislation and unifies it with other EU countries’ legislation. They argue that the unique category of humanitarian protection has made Finnish legislation appear too lenient compared to the rest of Europe. As a result, Finland might appear as an attractive destination for asylum seekers. The discourse is closely connected to paradigmatic assumption of pull factors, which were discussed in the previous section.

Most example countries that Finnish politicians refer to are other European countries, but there are also examples of comparisons with Australia that are used to advocate stricter border control and asylum policies. Like I mentioned in chapter 2.3, Australia has become known for practising offshore processing of asylum seekers in ‘regional processing countries’, Nauru or Papua New Guinea. Inspired by the tough policy, MP Hakkarainen (PS) suggests in two different debates that both Finland and EU should follow Australia’s example and not let asylum seekers arrive in Europe on their own (Parliament of Finland 2016a; Parliament of Finland 2016b). Both MP Hakkarainen and MP Savio (PS) claim that Australia puts its national interest first by processing asylum seekers in third countries and deciding on what terms they can enter the country (Parliament of Finland 2016b, 05.04.2016). MP Savio also argues that Australian asylum policies can be considered relevant examples for Finnish decision making

since “Australia is part of the same Western cultural sphere as Finland” (ibid). MP Hakkarainen, on the other hand, makes a more practical argument that Finland and EU should adopt similar offshore processing policies as Australia:

Australia doesn't allow boats carrying asylum tourists to land on their territory at all. Australian navy escorts the boats to a closest island that doesn't belong to Australia. Nauru and Papua New Guinea are destination countries where arrivals will wait in detention centres. They will fill applications and wait for decisions there. EU should follow Australia's example. (Parliament of Finland 2016b, 05.04.2016).

Although both Finnish and Australian politicians utilise ontological facts from other countries in their arguments, making comparisons with other countries to justify policy reforms is still much more common in Finland than in Australia. There are some occasions when Australian politicians suggest Australia could learn from policies in other countries, such as when MP Katter (KAP) notes that Saudi Arabia and Dubai don't take in any refugees when he protests against resettling Middle Eastern refugees in Australia (Parliament of Australia 2016, 09.11.2016), or when Senator Harris (ONP) argues Australia should follow the principles of the Dublin Convention and ban forum shopping, like European countries have done (Parliament of Australia 2002, 09.12.2002).

However, most Australian politicians who make international references either present Australia as a model country for the rest of the world or express their concerns in relation to Australia's human rights obligations. Reproducing images of Australia as world leader that other countries look up to serves in justifying moral and rational foundations of existing policies. Politicians utilise the discourse when they want to prevent radical changes to policies or when they think it is useful to appeal to patriotic values and team spirit of Australian citizens. Besides being an ontological assumption that politicians try to establish on paradigmatic level, the world leader discourse also draws from people's conceptions on actors and identifications, as well as imagery of competing blocs. An example of the discourse is MP Kelly's (LP) speech, which enforces a somewhat shared understanding of Australia as a model country:

Every single Australian can be proud of how successful our immigration program has been and proud that we have taken migrants and refugees from all parts of the globe

and settled them in Australia. It becomes a beacon for other countries to copy. It is something we should be very proud of. (Parliament of Australia 2016, 10.11.2016).

Although many politicians who argue Australian asylum policies are exemplary, there are also many who challenge the ontological assumption. Politicians who oppose either current or proposed legislation often base their arguments on the importance of world-cultural principles, such as human rights, or international agreements, such as the Convention Relating to Status of Refugees or Convention on the Rights of a Child. A common argument is that Australia is breaching its international obligations and moral responsibilities towards asylum seekers, which is shameful and damages the country's reputation. The argument combines elements of ontological claims and values. According to Alasuutari and Qadir (2014, 77) values are not irrational, but instead, they are often connected to rational reasoning and scientific evidence in a sense that some values and principles appear so self-evident that they are considered functional requirements of social development. Indeed, neither Australian or Finnish politicians question whether human rights or rights of a child are necessary principles, which shows that certain values are quite paradigmatic.

5.5. Limited resources as a fact

One of commonly accepted facts in asylum seeker-related debates is the limited nature of resources. Especially when promoting new restrictions on migration, politicians tend to remind others of the common perceptions of financial reality. The core argument is usually that the resources that can be used to help asylum seekers are limited, and therefore, those who are the neediest must be prioritised. The statements hold an assumption that everyone admits state resources to be scarce. Indeed, the amount of resources that can be used to help refugees is usually not challenged, which indicates that participants broadly accept it as paradigmatic ontological background. However, on practical level, politicians sometimes argue on how the designated resources should be directed.

The ontological fact of limited resources has been utilised in both Finnish and Australian debates throughout the 21st century. In both countries, there seems to be a relatively strong assumption of a natural division between 'genuine' refugees who need help and 'fake' asylum

seekers who have other motives for applying for asylum. When politicians create and reproduce definitions of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ asylum seekers, they utilise conceptions of actors and identifications, as well as norms and ideals in the process. However, when the background understanding of more and less deserving asylum seekers has been established, it also acts as one of the ontological background premises for discussions. Politicians in either country rarely challenge the idea of these two different classes of asylum seekers. Instead, they usually admit that since the resources are limited, it is necessary to help the neediest and most vulnerable asylum seekers. The assumption of limited resources combined with idea of deserving and undeserving asylum seekers is apparent for instance in MP Kopra’s (Kok.) argument:

The world is full of people who need help. We can’t assist everyone, so we should distribute our scarce resources so that we can help the needy, and those who can build a future on their own can do it by other means. (Parliament of Finland 2016a, 11.02.2016).

While limited resources are a paradigmatic assumption in a way, they are also often used in practical arguments. It is quite common for speakers to present statistical facts or numbers that show the costs of asylum seekers to the country. Interestingly, referring to statistics as an authority is more subtle in Finland, meaning that politicians rarely talk about exact sums of money or the Budget. Instead, they base their arguments on general descriptions of the capacity of Finnish asylum system or resources of authorities who deal with asylum seekers. For example, MP Hakkarainen (PS) introduces estimates of how many asylum seekers would appeal to different courts after a negative asylum outcome, in order to convince others that courts don’t have resources to deal with all the potential appeals (Parliament of Finland 2016b, 05.04.2016). Furthermore, besides ontological facts, MP Hakkarainen also strongly leans to actors and identifications as an object of epistemic work, most notably by reinforcing an unfavourable definition of asylum seekers as “asylum tourists” and by highlighting divisions between Finnish people and asylum seekers by asking what would happen to “our” judicial system if the number of asylum seekers further increases (ibid).

On the other hand, Australian politicians tend to justify their arguments by presenting exact sums of money that are used for dealing with asylum seekers. In Australia where unauthorized boat arrivals are often viewed as a threat to the nation, it seems to be quite a common argument

that the resources used on halting boat arrivals could be either used for helping ‘genuine’ refugees or Australian people. For example, Senator Harris (ONP) argues that every time a rejected asylum seeker appeals to Federal and High Court to complain about their asylum decision, it comes at a “horrendous cost to the Crown” since the estimated cost of \$270,000 per case is therefore deprived from resources to improve the wellbeing of Australian people (Parliament of Australia 2003, 08.09.2003). Likewise, Senator Harris defends the Pacific Solution during debate by appealing to its cost efficiency:

...On average, it costs the government \$50,000 for every unauthorised arrival by boat from the time of arrival to the time of their departure from Australia. Do the arithmetic: if 3,000 people arrived in Australia in any one month it would cost us, the taxpayers, \$150 million just to process them for that one month, and people talk about the costs of the Pacific solution! I think the Pacific solution is one of the most economical actions of the government, because it stopped absolutely overnight the proliferation of people entering this country. (Parliament of Australia 2002, 09.12.2002).

Referring to costs of asylum seekers can be used to justify very different, even completely opposite policies. As mentioned above, the discourse has been used to justify the Pacific Solution. However, it has also been utilised in justifying arguments against the offshore processing regime. Some politicians argue that besides being inhumane, offshore processing and turning back the boats is also expensive. For example, Senator Stephens (ALP) argues that instead of directing funds to costly and uncompassionate offshore processing, the government should address displacement at its source, in other words, asylum seekers’ countries of origin (Parliament of Australia 2002, 09.12.2002).

The ontological assumptions of limited resources are hardly ever questioned in Finnish debates, which indicates that the understanding of the nature of resources is quite paradigmatic. However, in Australia, some politicians challenge the idea of limited resources as a fact. According to them, Australia is a wealthy country that could take in more refugees and direct more resources to helping displaced people in their countries or origin. By presenting such an argument, politicians challenge the economic view of limited resources, which is often dominant.

6. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The aim of this study was to examine the ways in which Finnish and Australian politicians create and reproduce assumptions of reality to justify their arguments for or against asylum law proposals. To access these ontological assumptions, I applied epistemic governance approach and discourse analysis for studying floor debates in parliaments of Finland and Australia.

I identified five discourses of ontological facts that are utilised by both Finnish and Australian Members of Parliament. Politicians tend to present the ontological reality of asylum seeking through 1) an idea of a migrant crisis, 2) perceived threat posed by arrivals, 3) assumptions of pull factors, 4) international comparisons, and 5) an idea of limited nature of resources. These ontological assumptions are combined with one another to create convincing arguments. Although all these justifications based on ontological facts can be detected in both Finland and Australia, there are differences in how they are utilised. Different aspects of ontological facts are often highlighted in the two countries, besides which politicians sometimes build practical arguments that differ significantly from factual arguments in the other country. There are also some differences in the use of ontological facts in debates of early-to-mid 2000s compared to debates of mid 2010s. For example, notions of crisis emerged in Finland only after the European migrant crisis.

Finnish and Australian justifications based on ontological facts were the most similar in cases of pull factors and limited resources. Both Finnish and Australian politicians founded their arguments on ontological premises, such as attractiveness of their country, a need to send the right message to unauthorized arrivals and scarcity of resources. Notions of threat were also relatively similar in the two countries since both Finnish and Australian politicians reproduce paradigmatic assumptions of national borders and illegality of unauthorized movement, while occasionally exploiting fear and xenophobia. However, Australian politicians refer to border security threats more often than Finnish politicians who are more focused on economic concerns.

In relation to migrant crisis as a fact or comparisons with other countries, many practical arguments differ in Finland and Australia. The idea of a crisis seems to be more paradigmatic

in Finland than in Australia, besides which the nature of crisis is often defined in different terms in the two countries. Finnish politicians frame the crisis as an uncontrollable influx of asylum seekers, many of whom are considered as economic migrants, while Australian politicians usually appeal to the idea of crisis in order to justify humanitarian arguments. As for international comparisons, Finnish politicians often argue that Finland should adopt similar policies with other countries. However, Australian politicians rarely introduce foreign policy models as examples of effective asylum legislation. Instead, they present Australia as a world leader that acts as a model for other countries.

Especially the difference between international comparisons in Finland and Australia is an interesting remark since the observation of Australia being presented as a world leader is on the same lines with Alasuutari's (2014) findings on American discourses. In his study, Alasuutari examined international comparisons that politicians make during parliamentary debates in six countries. While international comparisons were common in most countries that were included in the study, the USA was an exception where politicians usually presented international policy models as self-evident premises for new policies, instead of referring to their existence in other countries. According to Alasuutari, this could be due to the idea of American exceptionalism, which presents the USA as an exceptional country or world leader that follows its own trajectories. Interestingly, Australian parliamentary debates on asylum seekers contain similar notions of Australia as a world leader whose policy models are examples for the rest of the world. Like American politicians, Australian politicians rarely suggest that Australia should adapt similar policies with other countries. Perhaps in a sense, Australian politicians also consider their country exceptional.

Despite some differences in practical arguments of Finnish and Australian politicians, the existence of similar ontological premises or paradigmatic assumptions would seem to indicate that the similarities between Finland and Australia could be explained through world polity theory. As Alasuutari (2014, 29) notes, there are two basic aspects to the idea of world culture. First, there are shared premises, principles and values, through which politicians justify policies, and second, there are policy ideas and models that circulate around the world (*ibid*). Although Finnish and Australian asylum policies are quite different, the shared assumptions of ontological facts are surprisingly similar. It seems like similar discourses, such as notions of threat, crisis and limited resources, can be found in different parts of the world. The way in which politicians appeal to scientific evidence, statistics and numbers as authority also appears

to be surprisingly universal. Indeed, there seems to be quite a strong argument for synchronization of Finnish and Australian discourses on asylum law.

The finding of similarities between ontological assumptions of Finnish and Australian politicians is significant since it demonstrates that besides certain cross-national similarities in practical asylum policies and discourses on asylum seekers, which have been detected in former research, there are also similarities in underlying assumptions that politicians in different countries rely on. These deep-seated, yet constantly transforming core assumptions set the background for all discussion and decision-making on asylum seekers, or any topic, which is why they offer important insights to what is considered rational or acceptable in a society.

Although this study focused only on one object of epistemic work, ontological facts, it is important to note that objects of epistemic work are not separate from one another. Indeed, while analysing the data, I detected a variety of discourses related to actors and identifications, as well as norms and ideals. The finding supports the argument of Alasuutari and Qadir (2014) of all objects of epistemic work being present in epistemic governance. To sum up my observations on other objects of epistemic work: politicians attempt to define themselves, other politicians and asylum seekers in a way that supports their arguments, while appealing to suitable norms and values. Asylum seekers are usually presented as either victims or threat, burden or asset, or deserving or undeserving. Peterie (2017) made strikingly similar observations in her study on governmental discourses of compassion in Australia. Although her study analysed press statements by Australian ministers through a framework of compassion studies, the discourses that defined asylum seekers as actors were largely similar with the discourses that I identified through analysing objects of epistemic work. As for norms and values, I discovered a relatively large variety of values, many of which were connected to humanitarian principles of world culture. For example, Finnish and Australian politicians appeal to many broadly accepted, almost self-evident values, such as compassion, freedom, equality, justice or rationality.

While this study contributed to epistemic governance research by analysing ontological premises in asylum law debates of two countries and offering some valuable insights on how world cultural principles and synchronization could shape discourses in two relatively different contexts, there are limitations to the study. Although focusing only on one object of epistemic

work enabled me to construct a more detailed analysis on ontological facts within limits of the thesis, it inevitably left out some interesting premises. To get a more comprehensive picture of what kind of discourses asylum law-related epistemic governance consists of, it would be useful to look at other objects of epistemic work too, as well as imageries of social world.

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APPENDIX

Appendix 1: Finnish bills

Name of the bill	Finnish name of the bill	Preliminary debate	First Reading	Second Reading	Outcome
Migration Legislation Amendment (Integration of Immigrants and Reception of Asylum Seekers) Bill 2004 (No. 1)	HE 78/2004 vp, Hallituksen esitys eduskunnalle laiksi maahanmuuttajien kotouttamisesta ja turvapaikanhakijoiden vastaanotosta annetun lain muuttamisesta	5 May 2004	11 Jun 2004	15 Jun 2004	Assented on 9 Jun 2004
Migration Legislation Amendment (Integration of Immigrants and Reception of Asylum Seekers) Bill 2004 (No. 2)	HE 280/2004 vp, Hallituksen esitys eduskunnalle laiksi maahanmuuttajien kotouttamisesta ja turvapaikanhakijoiden vastaanotosta annetun lain muuttamisesta	8 Feb 2005	12 May 2005	17 May 2005	Assented on 27 May 2005
Migration Legislation Amendment (Migration Act and Register of Aliens Act) Bill 2006	HE 31/2006 vp, Hallituksen esitys eduskunnalle laeiksi ulkomaalaislain ja ulkomaalaisrekisteristä annetun lain 8 §:n muuttamisesta	25 Apr 2006	8 Nov 2006	14 Nov 2006	Assented on 8 Dec 2006
Migration Legislation Amendment Bill 2016 (No. 1)	HE 2/2016 vp, Hallituksen esitys eduskunnalle laiksi ulkomaalaislain muuttamisesta	11 Feb 2016	5 Apr 2016 6 Apr 2016	12 Apr 2016 13 Apr 2016	Assented on 29 Apr 2016
Migration Legislation Amendment (Migration Act and Related Acts) Bill 2016	HE 32/2016 vp, Hallituksen esitys eduskunnalle laiksi ulkomaalaislain ja eräiden siihen liittyvien lakien muuttamisesta	5 Apr 2016	15 Jun 2016 17 Jun 2016	21 Jun 2016 22 Jun 2016	Assented on 12 Aug 2016
Migration Legislation Amendment Bill 2016 (No. 2)	HE 133/2016 vp, Hallituksen esitys eduskunnalle laiksi ulkomaalaislain muuttamisesta	28 Sep 2016	13 Dec 2016 14 Dec 2016	19 Dec 2016 20 Dec 2016	Assented on 17 Jan 2017

Appendix 2: Australian bills

Name of the bill	House of Representatives first reading	House of Representatives second Reading	Senate First Reading	Senate second reading	Outcome
Migration Legislation Amendment (Further Border Protection Measures) Bill 2002	20 Jun 2002	20 Jun 2002	24 Jun 2002	9 Dec 2002	Negated on 9 Dec 2002
Migration Amendment (Duration of Detention) Bill 2003	18 Jun 2003	26 Jun 2003	11 Aug 2003	8 Sep 2003	Assented on 23 Sep 2003
Migration Amendment (Designated Unauthorized Arrivals) Bill 2006	11 May 2006	10 Aug 2006	-	-	Lapsed at the end of Parliament on 12 Dec 2008
Migration and Maritime Power Legislation Amendment (Resolving the Asylum Legacy Caseload) Bill 2014	25 Sep 2014	22 Oct 2014	28 Oct 2014	3 Dec 2014 4 Dec 2014	Assented on 15 Dec 2014
Migration Legislation Amendment (Regional Processing Cohort) Bill 2016	8 Nov 2016	9 Nov 2016 10 Nov 2016	10 Nov 2016	-	Lapsed at the end of Parliament on 1 Jul 2019
Migration Amendment (Prohibiting Items in Immigration Detention Facilities) Bill 2017	13 Sep 2017	6 Feb 2018 7 Feb 2018	8 Feb 2018	-	Lapsed at the end of Parliament on 1 Jul 2019

Appendix 3: Mind map on ontological facts

