

OLIVIA TAYLOR, Constructing the ‘economic migrant’ narrative during the refugee crisis: the neoliberal state of exception and political-economic ‘bare life’

The refugee crisis has been a dominant issue in recent years. There has also emerged a narrative differentiating between so-called ‘economic migrants’ and refugees. This piece explores what this ‘semantic slipperiness’ means for understandings of migration. Implied narrative of the less worthy ‘economic migrant’ to Giorgio Agamben’s theory of the refugee as ‘bare life’, asking if it is possible to be rendered less than this excluded figure. I then explain the significance of such narratives to the modalities of neoliberal governance, legitimating a migration policy driven by market logics, and constructing a ‘neoliberal state of exception’, which forcibly excludes certain populations from both political and economic rights. In so doing, I connect literature on migration with neoliberalism as a technique of governance, and reflect upon a need for a more appropriate and purposeful vocabulary to reassert humanity in the political and economic world.

Introduction

2015 will likely be remembered as a year dominated by the European refugee crisis. Whilst the reported numbers of migrants arriving in the EU differ between agencies, such as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and Frontex, the European borders and coast guard agency, the unprecedented increase is widely regarded as the largest movement of refugees since the end of the Second World War. Over the course of 2015, 293,000 migrants travelled to the European Union by sea (UNHCR 2015b). The numbers of refugees to formally register in Europe between January and June 2015 reached 137,000 - an increase of 83% from the same period of 2014 (UNHCR 2015b). In 2014 and 2015, Syrians have been the largest single nationality to apply for asylum in Europe, followed by Afghans and Iraqis (Eurostat 2016), demonstrating that, while the fallout of the conflict in Syria has been a major driver behind the spike in migration flows to Europe, the cause of the crisis is not confined to just one region or conflict. The policy response from Europe has been mixed, exposing the disparities between European nations. On one extreme, in 2015 Germany was the largest single recipient of new asylum applications, with 441,900 people registered over the course of the year (UNHCR 2015c). Of course, this must be considered in light of their national economic and political priorities. Germany is notable for a record of encouraging migration of low-skilled industrial labour, termed in German the *gastarbeiter* (guest-worker) – though this has historically been encouraged only when economically beneficial (Oezcan 2004). In contrast, following widespread calls for action, the UK offered asylum to just 20,000 refugees in the wake of the Syrian crisis (Gower and Cromarty, 2015). As the scale of refugee flows is close to unprecedented, the ‘refugee crisis’ is as much ‘a crisis of international borders (and) neo-colonialism...’(Tyler 2015).

This piece takes, as a point of departure, the narrative that emerged during the crisis, which differentiates between so-called ‘economic migrants’, implying those who choose to migrate for economic gain, and refugees. I explore the implications connected to this differentiation that some migrants are less worthy of help than others. By engaging with examples of the UK policy response to the crisis, I argue that this differentiation is an outcome of an inadequate vocabulary for describing migrants. I then highlight two further points: I link the ‘economic migrant’ narrative to Agamben’s (2008) seminal theory of refugees as ‘bare life’, the human rendered

without formal or substantive rights. I ask questions of what the ‘economic migrant as a sub-refugee’ category might mean and explore Agamben’s compelling but controversial theorisation. Secondly, I explain this differentiation through a critical discussion of the nature of the neoliberal state – which I frame not simply in a ‘thin economic conception’ (Wacquant 2010: 197) but instead as a form of governance. Therefore, I connect such narratives about migration to policies driven by market logics, arguing that the lack of vocabulary for accurately describing migrants creates opportunities for such narratives to be constructed. Through this, I provide an economic angle to Agamben’s (1998) ‘bare life’, viewing it as the political adjunct to economically ‘surplus life’ (Duffield 2014) in the ‘neoliberal state of exception’ (Ong 2006). This article therefore takes a topical debate and connects this with literature on migration theory and conceptualisations of neoliberalism both as a growth paradigm and technique of governance. My discussion concludes that we need a more nuanced vocabulary with which to articulate the complexity of migrant trajectories, as well as following Susan Owens (2009) in her call for grounding the public debate on migration through the adequate separation between human life and the political world, extending this to the political-economic world too.

The False Dichotomy – So-called Economic Migrants and Refugees

The debate surrounding the terminology used during the crisis - between refugees and the upsurge in the ‘economic migrant’ description - has become a symbolic issue. The furore was articulated by an Al Jazeera editorial, which stated that the network would stop using the word migrant in relation to the tragic events in the Mediterranean, arguing that this word choice dehumanised people and had been used as a ‘blunt pejorative’ (Malone 2015). Shortly thereafter, a string of other media organisations, including the *Washington Post*, the *New York Times*, the *Guardian* and the *BBC*, published similar articles urging examination of word choices to describe the crisis (Carling 2015). These contributions were met at the time with a groundswell of support on social media; the Al Jazeera article alone was shared over 50,000 times on Facebook (Vonberg 2015), and was championed by figures such as the musician Bono, who embodies the ‘voice of mainstream, Western good conscience’ (Apostalova 2015). The UNHCR (2015a) responded to this mounting debate through a viewpoint article entitled ‘Refugee or Migrant – Which is right?’ - reiterating the legal definition it draws between refugees and migrants originating from the United Nations Refugee Convention (1951). It concluded that, given the complexity of the refugee crisis, the commission would thus refer to ‘refugees and migrants’ when referring to movements of people by sea in the Mediterranean (UNHCR 2015a).

Even within academic fields of discussion, there are disparities in the language used to describe migrants and refugees. For example, within the legal sphere, it is common for the notion of refugee status to be seen as a tool to secure and protect rights. This viewpoint is exemplified by James C. Hathaway’s legal exploration of refugee status, in which he argues that the category is an important distinction to signify who is the ‘most deserving of the deserving’ (1997). However, social scientists have often taken a more critical approach to the binary distinctions between migrants and refugees; Betts (2013), for instance, rejects the dichotomy. Betts argues that the nature of displacement has changed to such an extent that we cannot neatly draw a line between those who choose to migrate and those who are forced to do so, introducing the term ‘survival migration’ to better capture this complexity. Similarly, the notion of ‘forced migration’ as conceptualised by scholars, such as Turton (2003), who highlights the difficulty in differentiating

between compulsion and choice in the decision to migrate; subsequently Chimni (2008), sought to entrench this approach as a discipline of its own.

Nonetheless, the rhetoric of less worthy ‘economic migrants’ has been reflected and further shaped by the policy response to the migration crisis. In the UK, the Home Secretary – and now Prime Minister - Theresa May - made it clear in her speech to the Conservative Party Conference in October 2015 that the UK would differentiate between ‘economic migrants’ and refugees, stating: ‘people on both extremes of the debate ... conflate refugees in desperate need of help with economic migrants who simply want to live in a more prosperous society’ (May 2015). This distinction was further reflected in policy, resulting in the UK accepting asylum seekers only from refugee camps in the Middle East, implying a distinction between those who have already made it to the UK or the to border at Calais as the ‘wealthiest, strongest and fittest’, and through a ‘pseudo-Darwinian implication of queue jumpers’, suggesting that they are less deserving of refugee status than those still in camps (Travis 2015). Such narratives are presently being translated into practice, as the Home Office recently announced progress on their ‘Asylum Strategy’, which incorporates this distinction in its rhetoric and policy breakdown (Travis 2016). This approach also affects campaigners, who argue they have been handed an artificial ‘Sophie’s choice’ (Yeo 2015), given warnings from the Home Office that efforts on their part to advocate for asylum seekers deemed by the government not to be ‘in genuine need’ would damage the chances for others to successfully seek asylum;

‘... My message to the immigration campaigners and human rights lawyers is this: you can play your part in making this happen – or you can try to frustrate it. But if you choose to frustrate it, you will have to live with the knowledge that you are depriving people in genuine need of the sanctuary our country can offer.’ (May, 2015).

A need for a new vocabulary: theorisations of migration, problems of ‘semantic slipperiness’ and false dichotomies

Conceptually, the distinction between migrants and refugees is a false dichotomy. It serves to oversimplify the real complexity of the reasons to migrate, which can rarely be neatly categorised into economic or security reasons, and are frequently both at the same time (Cummings *et al.*, 2015; Betts, 2013). Instead, it can be argued that at the heart of the problem is the need for secure livelihood opportunities and basic human rights, which span both requirements for a basic standard of living as well as the need for political stability and safety (Cummings *et al.* 2015; Betts 2013). Moreover, individual motives to migrate may change in nature and in importance over the course of a journey, indicating the need to reflect on the ‘complex and fluid reality of people’s migration experience’ (ibid). There have been calls for the formation of more dynamic categorisations of migration, and as explained above these have been especially pointed from the social science community. For example, Betts (2013) has argued that the changing nature of displacement necessitates the term ‘survival migration’ in order to expand the categories of refugee and migrant, whilst Turton (2003) and Chimni (2008) have sought to found ‘forced migration studies’ as a field of its own. Terms such as ‘mixed flows’, the ‘migration-asylum nexus’ and ‘transit migration’ have also become increasingly common in academic and some policy circles (Collyer and De Haas, 2012). Moreover, whilst the aforementioned UNHCR article entitled ‘Refugee or Migrant – Which is right?’ neatly avoids the crux of the issue by re-iterating the legal distinctions between the two, referring to

movements of people by sea as ‘refugees and migrants’, other UNHCR research papers acknowledge the need for a nuanced understanding of the issue. A 2008 paper written by the commission embraces the ‘asylum-migration nexus’ and the author even goes one step further to argue that ‘the complexity of today’s displacement goes well beyond the ‘asylum-migration nexus’ (Crisp 2008:2). Whilst acknowledging that the answers perhaps lie beyond the UNHCR’s precise mandate with regard to refugees, it is nonetheless reflective of the drivers and objectives of the organisation that such nuanced understandings have not filtered through into their public statements, especially in the context of a refugee crisis where a sophisticated understanding was so direly needed. Clearly, there is a long way to go in mainstreaming nuanced conceptualisations of the causes for migration.

Within the realm of the media, while this debate around terminology in relation to events in the Mediterranean seemed well intentioned, it highlights the ‘semantic degrading’ (Taylor 2015) of the word ‘migrant’ due to political narratives and associations that it has become attached to. There is nothing inherently degrading in definitions of the word ‘migrant’; however, the implications and associations it creates when contrasted with the word ‘refugee’ are obtusely negative. In this vein, Taylor (2015) contributes a number of the most common contemporary word associations we make with regard to the word migrant or refugee: as the former links to the idea of cheap labour and ‘illegality’, the latter alludes to temporary camps, to Palestine in the Middle East and to post-disaster contexts such as Haiti in the aftermath of the 2010 earthquake. Thus, whilst popular interventions such as Al Jazeera’s stance might seem welcoming, they in fact reinforce the fabricated dichotomy of ‘good refugee’ and ‘bad migrant’, failing to meaningfully counter anti-migrant rhetoric (Vonberg 2015).

Overall, there is significant difficulty in navigating between the term ‘economic migrant’ and refugee, a ‘semantic slipperiness’ whereby the distinction between the two is understood by some to be such a grey area that the actors involved either simplistically or tactically converge the two. This approach is exemplified by the UNHCR framing of ‘migrants and refugees’. Alternatively, others construct a false dichotomy through which the terms are forcibly divorced, as can be observed in UK migration policy. Both approaches are mired in difficulty because of the loaded connotations attached to these words, most obviously in the case of the ‘economic migrant’. Betts (2013) points out that, when ‘survival migrants’ do not qualify for the traditional terminology of a refugee, institutions and states are thus not obliged to assist them, highlighting that they have a large degree of discretion and room for manoeuvring around assistance and engagement. Crucially, this ambiguity creates opportunities for political leveraging, through processes of categorisation and rendering complexity legible.

Agamben’s ‘Bare Life’, so-called economic migrants and refugees

Turning to migration studies literature, Giorgio Agamben is a scholar whose accounts of how the refugee is excluded from society are notable within the field of migration studies. Moreover, his work provides a counterpoint for where this leaves the framing of the ‘unworthy refugee’ in the so-called economic migrant description; whereby the subdivision of refugees into the ‘economic migrant’ versus ‘genuine refugee’ strongly challenges Agamben’s theorisation. Agamben’s theory originates from a particularly legal reading of biopolitics, drawing on Foucault’s theories about the techniques through which government regimes manage human life processes (1997). Specifically, where Foucault’s approach to biopolitics focuses on the ways in which human life

processes are controlled by regimes of power through knowledge and authority, especially throughout the neoliberal era, Agamben's primary concern is for 'human rights' and the limits of this concept (Schuilenberg 2008). Indeed, since the turn of the millennium, a constellation of events in the aftermath of 9/11 and the deepening of neoliberal governance have led many in the academic community to a more human rights focussed notion of biopolitics. Specifically, this means not simply understanding power struggles but theorising the mechanisms through which ordinarily illegal acts are committed in the name of optimising other human capabilities (Lemke *et al.* 2011). In viewing biopolitics as a method of optimising human capabilities, it can also be understood as the politics of 'make live or let die' (Li 2010); a theme increasingly identified in the European response to the refugee crisis. For example, Baele (2016) points to the hypocrisy of 'European societies investing so much in health at home and, at the same time, erecting ever more impermeable ...barriers to keep refugees at bay'. This also points to how market logics pervade neoliberal migration policy in aiming for the 'greater good' of economic gain at almost any cost, a point that I shall develop further. This understanding of biopolitics as the politics of 'make live or let die' has also been termed 'necropolitics' by Mbembe (2003) and is increasingly being used in migration studies literature to theorise the abandonment suffered by migrants during the ongoing refugee crisis and displacements.

In this vein, Agamben's work on 'bare life' argues that we understand human life as either the fully political life *bios* and the 'bare life' *zōe*, the merely alive human without rights to act politically, drawing parallels to the Roman figure of *homo sacer* - a person anyone can kill without the act amounting to murder. Given this distinction, he challenges the very definition of human rights because it assumes that everyone has equal political and human worth; as in the 1st Article of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 'all humans are born free and equal in dignity and rights' (UN General Assembly 1948). Therefore, in viewing human rights as redundant he is sanguine about their failure;

'...each and every time refugees no longer represent individual cases but rather a mass phenomenon (as was the case between the two world wars and is now once again), these organizations as well as the single states – all the solemn evocations of the inalienable rights of human beings notwithstanding – have proved to be absolutely incapable not only of solving the problem but also of facing it in an adequate manner.' (Agamben, 2008: 92).

His theorisation certainly presents a compelling framework and is perhaps so widely used because of the way the excluded figure of *homo sacer* is placed at the centre of his analysis. However, Agamben's ideas are not without critique, the most compelling of which being the overlook of refugees' subaltern agency (Ramadan 2012), as well as taking the reduction to 'bare life' too far, thus failing to build an appropriate distinction between human life and politics (Owens 2009). Such criticisms are relevant to my own argument for a more nuanced and humanising migration vocabulary.

Nonetheless, what does Agamben's theory of 'bare life' elucidate for the recent debate over refugee terminology during the crisis? If, according to the notion of 'bare life', refugees are wholly excluded and denied rights of any sort, is it possible for further degradation through the casting of the 'less worthy' refugee? Certainly, the conditions faced by many across the

Mediterranean in Europe's unofficial camps from Lampedusa to Calais could be a new low in the response to refugees, a deliberate disgrace 'designed to force migrants back along their pathways of expulsion' (Rygiel 2011:5). Alternatively, however, does the fabrication of a category of even less worthy refugees underline how the degree of exclusion we see in 'bare life' is constructed and regulated? For sure, from a conceptual standpoint it is impossible to become less than the state of 'abstract nakedness' (Owens 2009:569) presented in Agamben's concept of 'bare life'. The subdivision of refugees into the 'economic migrant' versus 'genuine refugee' presents an interesting challenge to Agamben's theorisation, exposing the simplicity of his polarising argument. Whilst my interpretation suggests that the 'economic migrant' narrative is a specific mechanism through which their exclusion can be constructed, regulated and maintained, it certainly underlines the lack of granularity in the Agambenian approach. In remedying this, I suggest that the specific nature and mechanisms through which the construct of 'bare life' has occurred are unique to the neoliberal state. Specifically, the aforementioned 'semantic slipperiness' and absence of appropriate vocabulary with which to describe people creates an opportunity for the construction and propagation of simplifications and false categorisations. Moreover, I argue that, while these developments are intricately connected to the nature of the neoliberal state, they are certainly not novel.

A neoliberal state of exception: political-economic 'bare life' and 'surplus life'

In the *State of Exception*, Agamben (2005) argues that attacks such as 9/11 have been used by the state as a tool to justify extraordinary extensions of state power and security measures, permitting more aggressive tactics of exclusion and persecution than ever. Notably, Agamben does not view this phenomenon as an aberration but instead historicizes these practices and connects them to Roman law and a ritual known as *iustitium*, which translates as similar to the suspension of *habeas corpus*. In so doing he sees this action as deeply inscribed into the history of legal and constitutional practice. I suggest that recent developments in neoliberal governance have deepened and extended the capacity for extraordinary departures in governance exemplified by the 'state of exception' and help to explain the construction of the 'unworthy refugee' narrative during the refugee crisis of 2015. It is important to note that the terminology for 'extraordinary' extensions of state power is something of a misnomer, given that these measures have become increasingly commonplace. For example, it is expressed in Duffield's 'permanent war' (2014) – which further emphasises Agamben's point that such policies are not an aberration but instead emerge from deeply inscribed state practices. Thus, a situation emerges whereby such practices are not only omnipresent but have been further sharpened as tools of the neoliberal state.

In theorising the nature of neoliberalism as a system, it is important to view it not in a 'thin economic conception... as market rule' (Wacquant, 2010: 197) but as a form of governance. It is especially important to focus on the mechanisms through which 'public consent is secured for unequal policies' (Tyler 2013:5), most often through the production of fear and anxiety such as alarmist narratives about migration. Another key element in the procurement of public consent by the state is the power of categorising (Foucault 2009) or otherwise 'rendering legible' complex situations through abstractions and simplifications (Scott 1998), both of which strongly relate to the practices of simplifying the complexity of the aforementioned migrant-refugee nexus. It is also important to move away from the misconception of neoliberalism as a *laissez-faire* approach and instead view it as a deeply biopolitical form of governance, characterized by

‘permanent vigilance... and intervention’ (Foucault 2008). Indeed, Foucault (2008) attributes the birth of biopolitics to the advent of the neoliberal epoch. Linking neoliberalism as a form of governance to Agamben’s ‘state of exception’ points to Aiwah Ong’s work on the *Neoliberal State of Exception*, in which she gives a uniquely economic reading of Agamben’s *State of Exception* and asserts how the economic globalization of neoliberal capitalism today is deeply associated with growing numbers of the globally excluded with the most minimal of rights. She argues therefore that neoliberalism as exception ‘excludes populations and places from neoliberal calculations’ of the market (Ong, 2006:4).

It is important to understand why the neoliberal state sees migration in such an alarming light as to control it through exceptional mechanisms. One key reason is the drive to govern according to market logics, prioritising economic growth at almost any cost and, in so doing, optimising conditions for some at the expense of others. Further to this, the neoliberal state requires control over its borders – and therefore its labour pool, which in an increasingly globalized world can be seen as a ‘last bastion of its sovereignty’ (Dauvergne 2008). The Marxist theorist Louis Althusser argues that both a domestic labour and goods market is a prerequisite for capitalism (2006) and therefore, in economic terms, ‘the border brings order to capitalism’ (Stratton 2009: 681). Imogen Tyler’s (2013) analysis of the fabrication of another ‘refugee crisis’ of the early 2000s in the UK, following the opening of EU borders, further exemplifies the importance of a controlled border, or the perception of control, to neoliberal capitalism. Tyler points to the construction of a narrative of ‘bogus asylum seekers’ – through very similar means to the construction of the ‘economic migrants’ and refugee dichotomy. In so doing, not only did the myth of ‘marauding asylum seekers’ distract from the arrival of significant numbers of predominantly Eastern European migrant labourers but they also justified the move towards a more punitive border regime. Finally, as a corollary to the requirement for controlled labour inflow at the border, there is a desire for an external reserve labour pool, exemplified by David Harvey’s proposal that capitalism ‘must perpetually have something outside of itself in order to stabilise itself’ (2003: 140). In the context of migration, this translates to potential migrant labour that is maintained ‘outside of itself’: beyond the border, for example in the (former) jungle camp of Calais - which presents a cheap labour reserve pool that could be called upon if needed but does not otherwise tax the state in any significant way.

The neoliberal state is also deeply concerned over migration for labour supply, and specifically, the supply of labour with what are perceived as the right skills for the economy. For example, the tightening of migration policies in Australia towards the punitive approach taken today as well as the legitimating political narrative of migration anxiety – both of which reflect similar policy shifts in the United Kingdom - have been linked to a decreased need for unskilled labour. Stratton (2009) argues that the key reason for this tightening of migration policies is the market logic of neoliberalism in Australia, which sees refugees and asylum seekers as useless surplus labour; too expensive to skill in the areas where Australia has labour shortages. Similarly, EU migration policies are seen to differentiate and regulate between four types of labour: from highly qualified through to low-skilled guest workers, the illegal trans-national labour force, and at the bottom of this hierarchy, to ‘economically superfluous’ refugees (Euskirchen *et al.* 2007) – though of course this overlooks the fact that many refugees are in fact highly skilled. This notion of the ‘economically superfluous’ is an important concept that evokes Mark Duffield’s (2014) arguments that ‘surplus life’ is inherently a by-product of capitalist growth, through the

mechanism of ‘accumulation by dispossession’ (Harvey 2003), which refers to the centralization of wealth in the hands of few by dispossessing others of their livelihoods.

The idea of ‘economically superfluous’ is also a key connection back to migration literature and Agamben’s ‘bare life’, groups who are not just politically excluded but - as in Aiwah Ong’s (2006) conceptualisation of the term - are also economically redundant. These two forms of exclusion go hand in hand, ‘just as economically superfluous life is... produced and consumed in the maintenance of capitalism, so a politically surplus life is produced and consumed as a necessary adjunct of political order’ (Agamben 1998: 27-28). Such exclusion is perhaps then the ultimate biopolitical act – the abandonment of populations in the interest of optimised economic growth, their labour understood as surplus in relation to the utility of capital (Li 2010). Yet as much as their ‘surplus labour’ is redundant and politically disempowered, it also presents a threat to order and it is for this reason that it is subject to such punitive exclusions. Ironically then, ‘surplus labour/life’ is rejected by the state and yet subjected to the full force of its powers, as in the nature of the hinged ‘state of exception’, making extraordinary departures in policy both to include as well as exclude (Ong 2006).

Conclusions: Going beyond Agamben and political-economic ‘surplus life’

‘If refugee populations are not to face some inexorable trend toward a rule of ‘exception’, then it will not be through reclaiming ‘bare life’. It will be wholly dependent on the ability to forge a public realm grounded on the appropriate distinction between ... human life and the political world.’ (Owens 2009:567)

Whilst ‘bare life’ is a useful theory for critiquing failures to adequately respond to refugee crises, it is much less useful for shaping what might be possible in the future. Agamben’s (2008) dystopian analysis and brutal dichotomy between political and ‘bare life’ is unsurprisingly criticised in much of the migration studies literature. While both compelling and unsettling, its basis in such a brutal dichotomy is no better than some of the divisive rhetorical politics it intends to counter and, as we have seen, it fails to take account of the complex, shifting and imaginative mechanisms through which abandonment is legitimated and carried out by the state. This is particularly relevant to my argument, which has shown how the construction of false dichotomies and ‘semantic slipperiness’ creates opportunities for new sub-categories of more and less worthy, and for justifying their exclusion.

Thus, one of the most significant criticisms of Agamben suggests that instead of improving the condition of ‘bare life’ by trying to reclaim the category of the excluded, our ability to move forwards will be dependent on ‘forging a public realm grounded on the appropriate distinction between human life and the political world’ (Owens 2009: 567). To make this argument, Owens draws on the philosopher Hannah Arendt to distinguish between the political and ‘bare life’ and adopts the case of refugee lip sewing to demonstrate that even the most powerless refugee still retains agency for political acts, such as the choice to self-martyr. In the case of the neoliberal states of exception, constructed in order to exclude unwanted ‘surplus life’, Owens’ argument reminds us: not only do we need a public realm grounded on an appropriate distinction between human life and the political world, we also need a better distinction between humans as life and humans as labour or an accessory to economic growth. The numerous examples of migrants and refugees asserting their humanity and agency through acts of solidarity, protest and reworked

citizenship across excluded spaces of Europe from Lampedusa in Italy to Calais in France (Davies and Isakjee 2015) remind us of the persistent challenges they present to Agambenian theorisations of their ‘powerlessness’ to the state as well as the state’s own efforts in abandonment and exclusion. The emerging examples of survivalist ‘campzenships’ (Sigona 2015) underlines the significance of their contested political agencies.

Moving forwards, it is essential to go beyond the Agambenian approach. In parallel with Owens’ (2009) call for grounding the migration debate on an adequate separation between the human and political world, this discussion calls for developing and mainstreaming a nuanced and purposeful vocabulary for understanding the complex reasons people migrate. It is through the ‘semantic slipperiness’ and false dichotomies surrounding migration that gross simplifications propagate and empower policy makers to take advantage of this. In such contexts, the neoliberal state, driven by biopolitical market logics, and with the opportunity to reframe migration in a light that justifies its ‘exceptional measures’, renders migrants as both political and economic ‘surplus life’. Whilst approaches such as Al Jazeera’s refusal to use the word ‘migrant’ in the context of the refugee crisis are well-intentioned but what they in fact do is perpetuate the lack of appropriate vocabulary. Indeed, in February 2016 as the EU debate about how to manage refugee movements between Greece and Turkey rumbled on, the Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras made a statement urging that Greece could not become a ‘permanent warehouse of souls’ (McVeigh and Smith 2016) – language that pointedly evokes my argument that the state has situated human life as economically and politically redundant. At the same time, Tsipras sought to reassert humanity in his statement by challenging this, with the sharply contrasting and evocative language of a ‘warehouse of *souls*’ (emphasis added). Ultimately, such voices urgently need to be empowered by a nuanced, and much more intentional vocabulary in order to reassert humanity in the political and economic debates emerging from the refugee crisis.

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