

# “Managing” the Polyphony The Discourse of Fraud and Epistocracy in the Context of Migration

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This paper discusses the struggles of differently positioned social and political groups to establish authority over narrations in relation to contemporary migration processes toward the EU. Deriving from Malkki’s determination of voice, as the “ability to establish narrative authority over one’s own circumstances and future, and, also, the ability to claim an audience” (1996: 398) and act upon, the paper deals with the question of credibility and disqualification of certain voices. It focuses on two discursive mechanisms: the silencing of migrants’ voices by the establishment of disqualifying discourse of fraud on the one side and epistocracy, the appraisal of credibility of voices of privileged groups, on the other.

Keywords: voice, migrants, discourse of fraud, epistocracy, credibility

## Introduction<sup>1</sup>

The aftermath of the last “summer of migration” (see Kasperek 2016; Kallius 2016; Beznec et al. 2016; Bužinkić and Hameršak 2017) shows an increase of securitarian attempts of the EU as a political body to subject migration to the enhanced control of physical movement both externally, at the territories of third countries, as well as internally, within the borders of the EU member states. The media, but also international and local NGOs, all report on the appalling conditions in which migrants live<sup>2</sup> and relay the testimonies and observations of the

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<sup>2</sup> *Daily Mail* 10 January 2017, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-4107102/Belgrade-migrants-wait-food-pictures-similar-Second-World-War.html>; *Independent* 22 April 2016, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/the-chios-hilton-inside-the-refugee-camp-that-makes-prison-look-like-a-five-star-hotel-a6996161.html>; *Telegraph* 15 March 2017, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/03/15/dunkirk-migrant-camp-must-dismantled-soon-possible-like-calais/> (last access 19 October 2017).

effects of violence they are subjected to by formal and informal groups in "buffer" and member-states<sup>3</sup>.

This awareness however, has not led to any change in practice. On the contrary, it seems that a securitarian tone of migration policy, with all its mechanisms of migration "deterrence", has gained increasing approval not only in the wider public, but is also gradually gaining support in national laws (Gunesh et al. 2016).<sup>4</sup> This text discusses some of the structural factors that are supporting the lack of reaction of the host society toward the everyday difficulties faced by migrants.

In particular, I will discuss discursive mechanisms that shape the discussion on migration from politically and/or economically devastated countries in Asia and Africa, to the wealthier, economically and politically privileged locations in Europe.<sup>5</sup> I will focus on *fraudulence*, as one of the dominant qualifications which speakers from the receiving countries ascribe to *migrants* and their *intentions*. The presumption of migrants' fraudulence can be found in informal accounts, such as in everyday narratives, in media reports, political debates, but also at the basis of some legal acts. The pervasiveness of the *discourse of fraud* bears important consequences on migration practice and lives of migrants: it diminishes their credibility and imprints dishonesty onto their activities. On the other side, the ability to make a judgment of someone's credibility corresponds to the notion of *epistocracy*, the privileged position to produce accounts which are likely to be accepted as truths. The authority, that is, juridical power of producing taken-to-be-truths, bears heavily on the socio-political position of the speaker and the role the speaker has in the concrete situation, which can even predetermine what can be said at all and how what is said can be understood in the final instance. The socio-political position profoundly affects ability to present and to be represented, to be trusted or derogated, and thus may increase or hinder possible perlocutionary outcomes of narrations (on perlocution, the effect that *saying something* has on non-linguistic world, see Austin 1962: 101).

<sup>3</sup> Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) 2016, <http://www.msf.org/en/article/eu-migration-crisis-update-june-2016>; UNHCR interactive data, <http://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/mediterranean>; UNHCR 2017, <http://www.unhcr.org/news/briefing/2017/3/58be80454/unhcr-deeply-concerned-hungary-plans-detain-asylum-seekers.html> (last access 19 October 2017).

<sup>4</sup> Amnesty International 2015, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2015/09/hungary-refugees-blocked-by-forces-criminalized-by-laws/>; see, for example, recent changes of legislation in Slovenia: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2017/01/slovenia-amendments-to-aliens-act-denies-protection-to-refugees/> and Hungary: <http://www.helsinki.hu/en/hungary-law-on-automatic-detention-of-all-asylum-seekers-in-border-transit-zones-enters-into-force-despite-breaching-human-rights-and-eu-law/> (last access 19 October 2017).

<sup>5</sup> In the text, the term "migrants" is used irrespective of persons' administrative statuses. The other terms – "refugees", "economic migrants", "asylum seekers", etc. – are presented as found in the discussed narrations.

In more general terms, I will re-present discursive mechanisms of struggles of differently positioned social and political groups to make their interpretations of various aspects of contemporary migration processes toward the EU recognized and acted upon. In other words, I will deal with the problem of *voice*. Malkki identified voice as the “ability to establish narrative authority over one’s own circumstances and future, and, also, the ability to claim an audience” (1996: 398). Voice is thus seen as an ultimate performative, which aims to make changes in the current state of affairs. As with any performative, in order to be realized, it needs to fulfil formal conditions: the subjects, those who speak, have to hold certain positions which give them ability not only to speak, but also to be *up-taken*, heard and acted upon (on performatives see Austin 1962). The notion of voice is embedded within the notion of power and social stratification. O’Donnell defined two dimensions of voice: the horizontal one, which induces solidarity within a social stratum, and the vertical one, related either to protesting against the powerful ones or imposing force from the above (O’Donnell 1986).

Long-lasting reflections of the role of the *interpretative authorities*, as those who represent others, have shaped anthropological inquiry (Clifford 1988). The questions which arose in the debates concerning notion of voice in anthropology and related disciplines, about “privileged informants”, objectivity and bias, distinction between accounts given by amateurs or professionals, are highly relevant not only for contemporary migration research but also for migrants’ lives. Therefore, this paper emphasizes the question of socio-political contingency of credibility and examination of the dominant factors which affect it in order to indicate structural asymmetry between various groups. It shows that, besides principal division to hosts and migrants, which is predominately based on citizenship, there exist numerous subdivisions based on micro-identifications, mostly related to professional occupation and the institution/organization a person works for. This asymmetry leverages their voices, the ability of being represented, listened to and acted upon, resulting not in polyphony, but in the overrepresentation of interpretations of some groups and the silencing of the others.

The paper is structured as follows: through an analysis of corresponding examples from Serbian and international media, reports of NGOs, scientific literature (all to be specified in the text) and informal narratives obtained during the multi-sited ethnographic fieldwork conducted on several occasions in Serbia from 2012 to 2017, I will first describe the prominent elements of the fraud discourse, one of the mechanisms of disqualification of contestants for authority over narrations; then I will describe how *fraud* transcends from depicting certain intrinsic characteristic of persons, to depiction of a whole set of their actions, which serves as self-justification of the initial disqualification; then I will say something about epistocracy, a systemic position of an *a priori* recognized interpretation authority. In the end, I will con-

clude about the fundamentally monologue-based structure of epistocracy, which systematically deprives certain groups of voice.

### The credibility games: derogatory potential of the fraud discourse and uncontested interpretation authority of epistocracy

While researching narratives about migration, I discovered a set of similar notions pertaining to something that can be labelled as fraud discourse (on fraud discourse and migration see Haynes et al. 2010; Power et al. 2012). In Serbia, as well as elsewhere in Europe, it was very common to hear or read narrations that questioned the intentions of migrants: *fake asylum seekers*, for example, were perceived as those who used the asylum system as a means for achieving something other than international protection, either as a way to enter a country, legalize their stay, or take advantage of various benefits it could bring, including "pocket money", free accommodation, food, money for voluntary return, etc. Similarly, *bogus refugees* were perceived as those who pretended to be running from wars in their countries of origin, and who did not appear to be "really vulnerable" (Molnar Diop 2014; Neumayer 2005). The dis-vulnerability sometimes was ascribed to their gender, age and general appearance (they were "too male", too young, fit, strong, happy, determined), sometimes it was ascribed to their "true" nationality (they were seen as pretending to be from war torn countries, while they had "actually" been members of militant groups, government, terrorists, etc.).

The fraud assumption, which equals calculated dishonesty in order to get some advantage (Eggers 2009), transgresses from public discourse into the administrative and legal one and back, where the claims for asylum are examined on the basis whether they are or not *genuine* enough to be admitted into a country, to enter the asylum procedure or to be granted protection. In cases where the right to asylum had been denied, on any level, formal or informal, that is, in institutional or in general public narratives, migrants had been labelled as *unwanted economic migrants*, "those who chose to migrate, in order to improve their lives", "those who would steal our jobs", "those who would work for such small salaries, that even our salaries would be reduced". However, some of them had further been deemed *fake economic migrants*, "since they did not come to actually work, they came because of the welfare system in our state", "to live for free and receive benefits", "to take from the well without replenishing it" (the growing literature on these narratives includes Schierup et al. 2015; Anderson 2013; Costello and Freedland 2014; Kalm and Johansson 2015). We see that both in general public discourse, as well as in institutionalized asylum system, examination of migrants "real intentions" plays an important role.

The fraud discourse, which constructs migrants as a specific, unified group notably characterized as fraudulent, is not contained to simply labelling persons:

it transgresses personal characterizations and becomes attached to a set of activities that migrants *do*: so we read about “asylum shopping” (which implies that migrants are *calculating* in which state to file asylum claim log, thus disrespecting the rules and narrations of the Common European Asylum System which sees all EU states’ asylum systems as equal; on asylum shopping see Moore 2013), strategic lying in order to get asylum or benefits; abusing the asylum system or hospitality of the receiving state, etc. Fraud is thus the fundamental paradigm which can be abstracted from particular qualifications of migrants and their activities. Therefore, it can be seen as a form of conceptual metaphor (on conceptual metaphor/metaphorical concept see Lakoff and Johnson 2003). Metaphorizing is a procedure of abstraction through which the expression used as metaphor loses its reference to an individual object and takes on a general value by giving prominence to one of its possible attributes and thus it hides its other possible aspects (Ricoeur 1994: 107). One of the significant features of metaphorizing is that the abstraction and paradigmatic relations result in systematization of experiences (Lakoff and Johnson 2003: 19). Similarly, through the process of abstraction, which accentuates fakeness, dishonesty and hidden intentions and mitigates other possible expressions, migrants are constructed as substantially fraudulent. Furthermore, within the course of developments of the discourse of fraud, characteristics that have initially been related to a part of migrants as a distinct group are now beginning to apply to the whole group.

The host society does the speaking, *re-presenting* migrants and their activities, while migrants are primarily objects of talk, and are deprived of their own voice. The transgressional derogatory potential of the discourse of fraud generates semantically related effects which result in the diminished credibility of migrants as a distinct group. They are not only silenced initially and turned into objects of talk, but also any future attempt to present their own voice, to become subjects of talk, will be covered with this additional layer of meaning – *even as subjects they cannot be trusted*. There are many examples that testimonies of migrants about abuse performed by institutions and individuals, from transit and destination countries as well as from their countries of origin, are not considered as trustworthy by the officials or are being disapproved as being a part of some “hidden agenda”.

One of the better known examples happened near Farmakonisi island in Greece, in January 2014, when 11 persons died.<sup>6</sup> The survivors accused the coast guard, employed in Frontex mission Poseidon, for being responsible for not undertaking the rescue mission of the women and children that fell in the

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<sup>6</sup> Group of lawyers for the rights of migrants and refugees offers detailed description here: <http://omadadikigorwnenglish.blogspot.rs/2014/08/briefing-on-farmakonisi-boat-wreck.html> (last access 19 October 2017).

water after the boat capsized due to the pushback actions of the coast guard. The authorities dropped the investigation in August 2014 stating that the testimonies from the survivors were – unfounded (Group of lawyers for the rights of migrants and refugees 2014). The nongovernmental organizations point to a series of cover ups, including the alternation of the chronological sequence of the incident and the lack of any technical recordings, such as phone or radio calls, photos, videos, GPS coordinates, as if the incident had never happened (*ibid.*). In the context of Serbia, in March 2015 Human Rights Watch issued a report about police abuse towards migrants, which was denied by the police and Commissariat, and even no investigation was opened.<sup>7</sup> Thus, not only had the testimonies of migrants been ignored and presented as fraudulent, but also the intentions of the international organization which published the report, were presented as having a “hidden agenda”, or even as part of some wider conspiracy, directed against state institutions which were accused of misconduct. The latter development can only partially be related to the derogatory potential of the discourse of fraud. The representation of distrust ascribed to counterpartyed authorial voices (see Clifford 1988: 43) by groups from the host society indicates that identifications other than migrants/hosts can also serve as bases for derogations. However, it is concentrated on the fundamental relation whether counterparties do or do not trust migrants, or, rather, whether counterparties recognize (allow) or ignore (do not allow) manifestation and the up-take of migrants’ voices. The fact that they are in position to allow or not allow manifestations and up-takes of migrants’ voices undoubtedly indicates asymmetry in power relations.

The struggles of differently positioned social and political groups to establish authority over narrations which re-present migrants in this or that manner is ubiquitous. The “hidden agenda” narrative, applied to disqualify counterpartyed groups from this struggle, is pervasive: it is attached not only to migrants, but also to the organizations that help them. In the Serbian context, one of the most “denounced” actors is No borders Serbia.<sup>8</sup> No borders is an activist framework stating that all persons are equal and all should be able to travel on equal basis, and it is against divisions, injustices, racism, fascism, structural violence. Its main operational objective is to enable migrants’ voices to be articulated, heard and acted upon. According to some of the state actors and civil society organizations, this network is often presented as an organized, almost militant group of people that is actively working against the asylum system and is thought to be directly responsible for several protests of

<sup>7</sup> A detailed account is available at: <http://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/posle-izvestaja-hrw-da-li-su-migranti-na-udaru-srpske-policije/26957629.html> (last access 19 October 2017).

<sup>8</sup> The site of No borders Serbia is available at: <https://noborderserbia.wordpress.com/about/> (last access 19 October 2017).

migrants.<sup>9</sup> Similarly as Soros, Rothschild or “Islamic State” leaders are, according to some conspiracy theories that I encountered in media and interviews, paying each migrant ten thousand of euros to come into Europe,<sup>10</sup> “anarchists” from No borders are said to be orchestrated by undisclosed foreigners to manipulate migrants just to produce chaos and make problems to national institutions and nongovernmental organizations trying to manage migration according to the law.<sup>11</sup>

However, the pursuits of “hidden agenda” do not come only from outside Serbia: the official data, especially about the “number of migrants”, “number of terrorists among the migrants” and “infectious diseases which the migrants carry”, given by governmental institutions and international organizations are in some contexts considered as being misleading by the local population. For example, during the protests in Banja Koviljaca in 2011 (see Stojić Mitrović 2014), against the presence of migrants in the town, the protesters repeated that the governmental institutions were hiding the “true” scale of “threats” that migrants carried, in order to pacify the residents, and to pursue Serbia’s EU obligations. In a series of protests across Serbia over the course of six years, local residents expressed distrust towards national institutions and their capability in “taming” migration and protecting its own citizens.

From the above examples, we can see some general features of the fraud discourse: it is related to deception conducted in order to obtain some personal gain and it is intentional. Effects of this kind of fraud, that is, threats that are seen to possibly arise from it, are potential, pending, i.e. have not become manifest yet. However, they are seen as targeting the existing order, public services and public servants working “in good faith”, “our” welfare state, “real refugees”, citizens, and finally, “our way of life”. Fraud discourse does not concentrate on actual harm made to the “deceived” ones, but on dishonest intentions (Eggers 2009). Above all, it is the attack on the moral order; it serves to degrade moral standards of the group that is targeted as making a fraud. As credibility is ascribed not only to what a subject speaks, but also in accordance with her social position and concrete status, the fraud

<sup>9</sup> *Politika* 4 October 2016, <http://www.politika.rs/sr/clanak/364951/Mars-migranata-ka-granici-Evropske-unije>; *Blic* 4 October 2016, <https://www.blic.rs/vesti/beograd/migranti-prave-haos-u-beogradu-pod-jakom-policijskom-pratnjom-zaustavljaju-saobracaj/q58tgsy> (last access 19 October 2017).

<sup>10</sup> See, for example: <http://www.kurir.rs/planeta/austrijski-mediji-rotsild-pokrenuo-seobu-migranata-sve-izbeglice-dobile-po-11000-evra-clanak-1909805>; <https://rs-lat.sputniknews.com/analize/201510031100015306-soros-izbeglice-naseljavanje-evropa/>; <http://www.novi-svjetski-poredak.com/2017/03/08/otkriveno-islamska-drzava-placa-maloljetnim-migrantima-put-u-europu-ako-je-oni-prihvatite-unistiti/> (last access 19 October 2017).

<sup>11</sup> In Serbia: <http://www.novosti.rs/vesti/beograd.74.html:628302-Anarhisti-pokrenuli-migrante-iz-Beograda-FOTO>; in Greece: <http://balkans.aljazeera.net/vijesti/anarhisti-prekinuli-misu-zbog-izbjeglica>; in France: <http://mondo.rs/a950320/Info/Svet/Neredi-u-Kaleu-Izbeglice-i-anarhisti-pale-kamp.html> (last access 19 October 2017).

discourse is thus an instrument of epistemic discrimination conducted in favour of those with more political power (on epistemic discrimination and epistemic oppression see Fricker 2013). The operationalization of the fraud discourse by which the credibility of certain interpretations is eroded, serves as a weapon in the struggle for domination of the confronted groups. In other words, the position to which some individuals and groups are ascribed to within the socio-political system, determines the credibility which would be given to their interpretations.

While the derogatory potential of the transgressing fraud discourse serves to shrink space for manifestation, diminish credibility and buffer audibility of certain voices, epistocracy, on the other side, enables instalment of *truths*. Epistocracy is determined as the privilege of some groups to produce and distribute knowledge (Estlund 2003). Epistocracy privileges some people over others with the aim of generating outcomes of better epistemic quality (Prijić-Samaržija 2014: 1172–1173).

In the context of migration, where different actors, national, international, private, etc. compete for power, public sympathy and funds, we encounter two major principles of epistocracy: "expertialization" and "(eurocentric) nationalization of truth". To put it very concretely, it is more likely that the interpretations offered by experts or persons professionally involved within migration process, such as lawyers, administrators, police, etc., would be treated as more credible than interpretations of certain events or situations offered by activists, independent volunteers, individuals and other non-professional practitioners, while migrants are at the very bottom of the *trust spectrum*. Prijić-Samaržija emphasizes that knowledge needs to be considered as a socially situated phenomenon (2014: 1167). Besides testimonial injustice, which is conducted by ascription of credibility deficit to the speaker, credibility excess can also lead to testimonial injustices by causing epistocrat "to develop epistemic arrogance rendering him closed-minded, dogmatic and blithely impervious to criticism" (ibid.: 1171).

One example concerns a private company, to which two German states outsourced the management of several refugee shelters. Even though refugees complained that they were ill-treated, humiliated and intimidated by the staff, the abuse was acknowledged only when emails sent between staff members leaked. In these emails, the staff discussed what to do with a large financial donation. Instead of buying a children's sandbox, the director suggested getting a "child guillotine" and to get the "maximally pigmented" refugees do the cleaning up. Other employees discussed a crematorium for the decapitated. After the emails leaked, the company was fired.<sup>12</sup> Another example comes from Serbia: for years, migrants complained about the manner in which one administrator ran the asylum centre in Bogovadja.

<sup>12</sup> *Deutsche Welle* 15 August 2016, <http://www.dw.com/en/berlin-cuts-ties-with-refugee-housing-firm-after-unspeakable-emails/a-19476506> (last access 19 October 2017).

There was a series of media articles, NGO reports, even protests by migrants, activists and local residents, but only when the partner organization, with a similar standing in the Serbian socio-political context, filed official complaint, he was quietly removed.<sup>13</sup> It appears that it is necessary that both the “accuser” and “the accused” hold the same or at least similar socio-political position to have the effect of “hearing” each other and acting correspondingly. On the other hand, when the socio-political position and power is very different, we witness silence. For example, police abuse reported by migrants and published in the report of Human Rights Watch,<sup>14</sup> which I mentioned before, or daily reports about violence in Bulgaria and Hungary, the political actors with juridical power simply seem to ignore.<sup>15</sup>

As there exists pervasive distrust among differently positioned host groups, matters of profession, affiliation and nationality of the speaker serve as the ultimate basis for the assessment of credibility. The official migration management in Serbia (and the EU) is largely shaped according two “credibility principles”: “expertialisation” is related to the general technocratic trend when reports given by professional practitioners are recognized as value-neutral and purely factual (compare Holst 2012: 47). The credibility excess stems from the assumption that training and experience of expert reduces contingency of narration (Clifford 1988: 34). Experts are believed to be adequately trained for making reliable assessments, with the *a priori* accepted premise that the training had been completed and accomplished well, that norms had been fulfilled, that they had been well established and that the experts had managed to remain unbiased. On the contrary, expert accounts often serve to support policies by providing them with legitimacy – demonstrating that one has know-how, has the access to information that is considered reliable, has the material and human resources to gather information, and has the established protocols of utilizing, all serve to boost legitimacy (Boswell 2009: 70). In practice, experts are trained to pay attention to certain clues and ignore others: in ritualized texts, such as official reports, they are construing a reality, giving accounts filled with data suitable for the client (Clifford 1988). While these norms, routines and standards do help keep them focused and concise, they also reduce the range of possible actions, interpretations and recognition of unexpected factors and relations.

<sup>13</sup> *Novosti* 16 August 2015, <http://www.novosti.rs/vesti/naslovna/drustvo/aktuelno.290.html:543727-CK-Sjekloca-ugrozava-rad-azila> (last access 19 October 2017).

<sup>14</sup> Human Rights Watch report on Serbia 2015, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2015/04/15/serbia-police-abusing-migrants-asylum-seekers> (last access 19 October 2017).

<sup>15</sup> FRA report on Current Migration Situation in the EU: Hate Crime, November 2016, [https://www.google.rs/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=3&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=0ahUK EwjG-On34-zSAhUMJ5oKHcpaBdgQFggkMAI&url=http%3A%2F%2Ffra.europa.eu%2Fsite%2Fdefault%2Ffiles%2Ffra\\_uploads%2Ffra\\_uploads-2016-november-monthly-focus-hate-crime\\_en.pdf&csug=AFQjCNEtd6RR69JEXd5WQoxSF6rw-F5Pow&sig2=sBubIY5YdHZYLPoskm4ZTA&bvm=bv.150475504,d.bGs](https://www.google.rs/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=3&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=0ahUK EwjG-On34-zSAhUMJ5oKHcpaBdgQFggkMAI&url=http%3A%2F%2Ffra.europa.eu%2Fsite%2Fdefault%2Ffiles%2Ffra_uploads%2Ffra_uploads-2016-november-monthly-focus-hate-crime_en.pdf&csug=AFQjCNEtd6RR69JEXd5WQoxSF6rw-F5Pow&sig2=sBubIY5YdHZYLPoskm4ZTA&bvm=bv.150475504,d.bGs) (last access 19 October 2017).

While reports given by professionals are likely to be given credibility excess, on the other side, reports offered by non-professional practitioners are treated as likely to be value-laden (Holst 2012: 47). However, reports made by both categories of practitioners are seen as more objective than those made by migrants. Migrants are often recognized as those in serious need of epistemic paternalism, "social practice of communication control or a regulation of information that aims towards optimal truth-production" (Prijić-Samaržija 2014: 1173). Epistemic paternalism involves speaking for persons that are to be represented, but not letting them speak for themselves. While this can be emancipatory in the way that it enables at least some kind of representation for otherwise underrepresented or even invisible groups, it can also be seen as further deprivation of agency and subjectivity and political subordination of these groups (compare Rivetti 2014).

The nationality of the speaker has a notable role in credibility accession. Besides the host/migrants division, in the Serbian official context, value neutral and purely factual are those assessments offered by national and official European institutions (for example, in order to induce credibility excess, a professor from Belgrade, during a public lecture on migration and security which was held in spring 2017, told the audience: "I will give you real data, provided by national institutions, the data that will be presented in Brussels, and not the data from some nongovernmental organizations or those you can find on the internet"), value-laden are those offered by nongovernmental organizations especially with foreign funding (such as, for example, Human Rights Watch or Doctors Without Borders), while reports made by international activists are mostly ignored.

## Conclusions

In this text, I discussed some of the struggles of differently positioned social and political groups to establish authority over narrations in relation to contemporary migration processes toward the EU. In particular, I examined the question of credibility and disqualification of certain voices. Based on Malkki's determination of voice, as the "ability to establish narrative authority over one's own circumstances and future, and, also, the ability to claim an audience" (1996: 398) and act upon, I indicated some of the elements of the socio-political context which substantially influence audibility, that is, the potential of narrations of certain groups to be acknowledged and lead to possible perlocutionary effects. I focused my presentation on two discursive mechanisms: the first one is silencing of migrants' voices by the establishment of disqualifying discourse of fraud; the second one is epistocracy, the appraisal of credibility of voices of privileged groups. Therefore, this research did not deal only with the literal content of what is being said, but with the more pragmatic level where additional layers of meaning had been derived from contextual

circumstances of speaking, and especially from the role of the speaker, perceived as a subject occupying a specific socio-political position.

Migrants, as ultimately foreign and without any direct political influence, are inherently voiceless, until some other political actors speak for them. In the Bogovadja example, they often refused to testify or even give an interview to NGOs in order to “avoid problems”, such as staying in Serbia longer than just transiting as fast as possible, or arriving on bad terms with those on whom they were dependant on everyday basis. Structurally deprived of voice, silenced, they cannot speak against fraud discourse in which they are inscribed by the more powerful actors and ruling system of inequalities. Epistocracy thus allows only monologue-based structure: those “on top” address their subjects and allow very little vertical voice, and the little of it they allow is strictly controlled; furthermore, they forbid the dialogical structure entailed by horizontal voice (O’Donnell 1986: 13). This results not only in the suppression of the specifically public dimension of the subjects, but also in the severe loss of their subjectivity – they are not to be trusted, their speech is not to be heard, their interpretations are *a priori* invalid (Clifford 1988). If their horizontal voice is obstructed, solidarity is prevented and their combined vertical potential is hindered/suppressed. In other words, denial of a credible voice is a political denial, and in extension, it is a denial of agency, denial of subjectivity. On the other hand, as a political instrument, epistocracy by reduction of polyphony fortifies the privileged positions of the ruling elites.

To conclude, fraud discourse, and its opposite, epistocracy, both have substantial political value. They are potent, both in political and in practical terms, since they can serve as means of justification for the implementation or rejection of certain practices. As a political instrument, fraud discourse is the manifestation of generalized systemic violence toward the dis-favoured social categories, foreigners and citizens alike. As a result, questioning migrants as a collective rather than individuals legitimizes the introduction of even stricter securitarian policies.

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