International Journal of Multiculturalism
Volume 6, Number 1, 2025.44-59
https://doi.org/10.30546/2523-4331.2025.6.1.44

'DAD, WHY DO THEY ALWAYS CHECK OUR PAPERS?': DE-SILENCING EUROPE'S NON-EUROPEAN IMMIGRANTS: A STUDY OF BANGLADESHI 'MIGRANT' AND 'REFUGEE' EXPERIENCES IN ESTONIA

Aminul ISLAM
Estonian Entrepreneurship University of Applied Sciences, Estonia

ABSTRACT

This paper explores different aspects of the life stories of the Bangladeshi refugee and migrant populations in the context of Europe's ever evolving refugee and migration politics. Assumptions about migration and refugee populations in everyday life have often been the product of political elite or national media discourses. Both are limited in scope and largely antagonistic in tone. To challenge the prevailing perception of 'refugee' and 'migrant' populations as a burden and a threat to host societies, this paper draws on a series of qualitative and in-depth interviews with Bangladeshi nationals living as 'refugees' and 'migrants' in Estonia. It contrasts these narratives with that of prevailing discourses which emerge from Estonian media representations. The importance of participants' personal agency and the diversity and heterogeneity of their broader community emerge strongly from the evidence. In this way, the paper challenges the homogenous assumptions about refugee and migrant populations coming from outside of Europe and raises important theoretical, conceptual and policy questions about who should produce narratives about refugee and migrant populations and how these narratives should be deconstructed in turn. Ultimately, the paper draws attention to the necessity of listening to 'marginalised voices' and advocates for adopting a decolonial framework to unpack the politics of refugee and migration in Europe.

ARTICLE INFO

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received:
16 December, 2024
Accepted:
24 February, 2025
Published:
29 April, 2025
Available online:
29 April, 2025

KEYWORDS

Story, Narrative, Bangladesh, Migrants, Refugee

Introduction

This paper makes a case for de-silencing the voices of'migrant' and'refugee' populations in Europe. Its starting point is the commonly held assumption that Europe has received an ‘unmanageable’ inflow of non-European refugees and migrants recently, especially from the Middle East, Africa, and South Asia. The 2014–2016 period was particularly significant, with over 1.8 million arrivals to the region and the European Union (EU), constituting less than 0.004% of the EU’s population (Eurostat, 2016). Yet this period is commonly portrayed as a ‘crisis’ scenario (Balogh, 2017). While European countries formulated distinct responses when 'welcoming' these new arrivals, the majority adopted a negative and dehumanizing discourse, regularly portraying refugees as a serious security risk and cultural and identity threat (Bruneau et al., 2018). To safeguard their ‘European values’ some countries, such as Hungary and Spain, began to draw up wired border fences to essentially cease them as entry points to their territory (Claudia, 2017). A couple of countries, notably Germany, opened their borders and offered fast-tracked integration routes to new arrivals.

Similar divisions to the ‘crisis’ were also visible on the local level. On the one hand, thousands of volunteers and activists showcased solidarity with refugees, offering support and assistance in countries such as Sweden, Finland, and across the EU (Kallius et al., 2016). Conversely, pro-nationalist marches in Germany, Hungary, and some other EU countries (Bruneau et al., 2018) indicated the public’s growing appetite for pro-nationalist and anti-migrant policies. In short, by terming the refugee flow to Europe as a ‘crisis’ scenario, we have seen the (re)surgence (after 9/11) of the ‘politics of fear’ (Claudia 2017), with political leaders adopting this term ‘crisis’ to incite fear and divisions, just as their predecessors had done so with the ‘war on terror’ hitherto (Balogh, 2017).

These sentiments are relevant to how Europe handles the inflow of migrants and refugees from outside the continent today. It is evident that European attitudes toward Ukrainian refugees are determined by predispositions toward immigration. With European identity, attitudes towards Ukrainian refugees are rather positive (Alexandru et al., 2024), and one would expect this attitude to probably positively affect other groups of refugees, such as those from Afghanistan or Syria. Unfortunately, this has not been the case; the attitude towards refugees having backgrounds from outside

of Europe remains hostile (De Coninck, 2023). It seems Europe has learned very little when it comes to attitudes towards refugees as a whole. Therefore, the current study on immigrants having backgrounds from outside remains significant.

Much has been written on the individual aspects of Europe's so-called'migrant and refugee crisis', especially public attitudes towards recent arrivals as well as refugee and migrant experiences (Dionysios, 2021; Sevgi et al., 2022; Randall & Shalini 2016; Sigona, 2018; Burrell & Horschelmann, 2019). This paper zooms in on the latter issue and, notably, listens to refugee and migrant voices in Estonia, an EU member state and a small Baltic country, which has nonetheless been largely overlooked in the literature so far. Traditionally, debates on migration tend to focus on the 'largest' foreign ethnic group—Russian-speaking minorities—and their integrational aspects in the case of Estonia (Islam, 2016). By comparison, there has been little to no academic attention paid to migrants and refugees arriving from outside Europe (with notable exception by Islam, 2016-17). Yet, elite and public discourses towards non-European arrivals have become highly negative and critical over time (Sigona, 2018), even allowing for some serious on-the-ground violence and hostility to emerge. For example, the Estonian refugee center was set on fire in 2015, at the supposed height of Europe's'refugee crisis' (Postimees, 2015), clearly targeting to kill the over 50 residents then residing in the center. The then prime minister, Taavi Roivas, labeled the incident as the work of an 'evil person' and a'singular and exceptional event' (Postimees, 2015), without reflecting on the real, underlying causes of violence.

The voices of non-European refugees and migrants have been largely ignored in this context. This paper aims to bring the voices of Bangladeshi refugees and migrants to the forefront, whose stories, despite making up a small, but continually growing portion of the Estonian population, have never been heard before. This is surprising, not least given that some policy debates and (negative) media discourses have previously emphasised their increasing number specifically (Postimees, 2016).

In order to offer critical and in-depth empirical snapshots of 'the life stories' of 'marginalised voices' (Rutazibwa, 2016), this paper adopts an ethnographic interview technique and converses with 19 Bangladeshi nationals living as 'migrants' and 'refugees' in Tallinn. Prospective participants were identified as individuals who were frequently subjected to differentiation and exclusion from the Estonian community given 'Europe's refugee crisis'. The paper adopts a narrative approach to bring forth their life stories (Crawley & Dimitris, 2018) and identifies seven common themes, including the everyday representation of (Bangladeshi) 'migrants' and 'refugees' as

burden to the Estonian society, as criminals, dirty people, high in number and causing a 'storm' wherever they go. These representations in turn instil a sense of vulnerability and constant fear among the Bangladeshi nationals I spoke to. Zooming out of Estonia, these narratives seem to reflect the bottom-up dis/integration of (European) political communities in the context of mobile citizenship. Siklodi (2020, 91-118) illustrated how repeated bottom-up categorisations and separations of native groups of 'us', the full members of European political communities, and mobile/migrant 'others', the non-members, began to fuel broader processes of differentiation and exclusion – including by and among members of these supposedly separate communities. In this process, the voice of the 'other' is often claimed to be unheard or overlooked and legitimately so (Spivak et al., 1996; Quijano, 2007; Bhambra, 2014). While Siklodi (2023) only really examined these processes with regards to different groups of EU mobile/stayers, similar themes have been explored by other scholars in regard to the voices of non-European, non-white, non-Western, and so on voices, cultures and worldviews (Daniele et al., 2022' Sevgi et al., 2022; Beverly, 2020).

This paper is structured as follows. The first part provides a theoretical reflection on de-silencing and refugee voice and representation, followed by a justification of the study's narrative approach. After research methods, the third part of the paper recounts the seven aforementioned narratives. The final, concluding part considers the key contributions of this paper and identified potential avenues for further research.

Research Methods

This paper draws on 19 in-depth interviews with Bangladeshi immigrants and refugees living in Estonia during 2021, at the height of the Covid-19 pandemic and coincided with a national lockdown. During the interviews, it became quickly apparent that the pandemic contributed to the difficulties respondents were facing in making their voices heard by other members of Estonian society.

Methodological frame for this study emerged from the literature on oral narratives and life stories prescribed by Tonkin (1992), Yow (1994) and Bertaus (1991). Their reflections on how allowing respondents to share their 'stories' via open ended, in-depth interviews can offer a nuanced and comprehensive way to explore the daily lives of often overlooked groups of people, such as migrants and refugees were closely followed (similarly to research done by Edensor (2002) and Westwood & Phizacklea (2000)). The interviews opened with a general question, requesting respondents to

share their experiences of living in Estonia. While I generally refrained from interfering during their talk, a couple of prompts asking for specific examples or incidences (e.g., on their experiences in work or study places etc) were employed.

The interviews were conducted between September and December 2021. Every respondent arrived in Estonia directly from Bangladesh and has been residing there for over two years. Respondents were recruited via my existing networks which were made for my previous research project. The socio-economic make up of my respondents, and further descriptive information about the interviews, are presented in Appendix 1. For the purposes of the analysis, it is worth noting that two respondents had 'asylum seeker' status, while the others secured either a permanent or temporary residency status or long-term residency. All respondents live in Tallinn, age between 24-38 and I spoke to five women and 14 men in total. While the ratio of women and men respondents is reflective of the population, at the same time it was harder to reach out to the women. Each interview lasted around 45 minutes, though some interviews ran longer, depending on respondents' preferences on what and how much they wished to share. All the respondent's names that are presented for the analysis have been anonymised.

My own background as a Bangladeshi migrant was key to building rapport with my respondents. Allowing me to adopt an 'insider' position helped me to gather information, which offered me similar opportunity to Richies (1995), who drew on her own experiences with racism and sexism as an African American woman when establishing rapport with her African American female respondents. It was indeed evident during my interview sessions that participants were comfortable discussing sensitive issues. However, taking the insider position has the possibility of blurring the identity designation and the objectivity of the researcher (Delgado, 1998; Chaudhry, 2000). I also encountered some instances during my interview sessions. For example, some respondents simply did not finish their sentences assuming that I would anyway understand what they are talking about. I was particularly aware about these kinds of issues. Recognizing the importance of 'remaining a stranger' to my participants (Simmel, 2002) I made deliberate efforts to maintaining the separation between my experiences and theirs and followed Padgett's (2008) advice to hear what is said rather than assume that what is being talked about.

The interview data was analysed through narrative analysis. Seven subplots emerged from the data and these narratives were then analysed through secondary sources, namely elite and media representations. These representations are also from

around the time of the interviews and offer a counter perspective of how far the migrant narratives which emerged from the interviews reflect mainstream discourses, which shape public opinion in Estonia. The intention of introducing these representations was also to demonstrate that the media discourses of a group of people (immigrants and refugees in this case) are more often than not simple reflections of real facts or reality but rather the result of constructed realities.

Before turning to the interview data, it is important to reflect on the refugees and migrants I interviewed. According to the Bangladeshi association in Estonia, there are approximately 300 to 350 Bangladeshi living in the country. This makes Bangladeshi nationals one of the smallest migrant populations in the country – with the largest being the Russian, Ukrainian and Finns. There is thus very little, if any, specific reporting on this group and, so far, no specific research has been contacted with them. There is thus a need to engage with this group and this paper seeks to initiate such conversation.

Empirical narratives

Seven narratives were extracted from the interviewed data, including burden, fear, criminal, dishonest, number, storm, and dirty narratives. This section looks at each in more detail by doing both, 'giving' voice to respondents and interpreting their perceptions in the light of the decoloniality literature, first and foremost.

Burden narratives: Refugees know nothing

In the beginning, when I applied for asylum, many people from this country asked me, "Do I know any work?" I remember one day I was having a conversation with the social worker, who already knew my education background and work experiences. She asked me, "Do you think you can do this job?". I looked at her and answered, "You already know I have exactly the similar kind of job experience from my country that is required for this job." She did not say anything afterwards. I kind of felt the people in this society consider me as worthless. As someone who doesn't have the ability to work. I finally applied for a job by myself, without taking a social worker's help. I secured one. All I had to do was hide my refugee status (Ranjam 33 years old).

These stories are often ignored by the elite political discourses and even by the mainstream media. These narratives clearly indicate how elite political and media discourses affect public attitudes and can influence the work of even a social worker,

who is supposedly there to help asylum seekers. It does not matter which group of migrants (students, asylum seekers or refugees) and their background (based on gender, race or ethnicity). They are all consider a burden. Following the war on Ukraine and the surge in refugee flows, Mart Helme, an influential Estonian political leader of the EKRE party claimed, *"I talk to doctors. And the doctors are saying that the healthcare situation is terrible. HIV is going to return! Infectious diseases are being brought here from Ukraine that we have thought could never exist in Estonia anymore."* His sentiments suggest how homogenising right-wing discourses on refugees can be.

In the same remark he continued, *"These women, young women- we don't know what they're going to start doing here. Maybe hundreds of thousands of women from among them are going to start getting involved in prostitution."* According to this political leader, Ukrainian women and young women do not have any qualifications to find a job. He stated, *"We don't know what they're going to start doing here."* No matter where they are from, what their background is, which colour or race they belong to, refugees are all and always a burden. This is how misrepresentation of a silence group or community takes place. Often, members of these groups are portrayed as criminals, dishonest or just mere numbers.

Narrative 1 clearly indicates the consequences of such political rhetoric and its impacts towards a particular group of people. "I finally applied for a job myself without taking social worker's help. I secured one. All I had to do was hide my refugee status." If this respondent had not been hiding his refugee status, he would have ended up unable to find a job, becoming an unemployed person who would then become a burden on the society. This also gives us the sense that their stories are often unheard or overlooked by mainstream discourses, which often creates narratives that not necessarily true (Err, 2022).

Fear narratives: The mis-representation of refugees and migrants

I came to Estonia with the intention to have a better future. Basically, I came to study here with the intention at the back of mind that I will get a good job and get settled. While I was a graduate student, I had to do different kind of odd jobs. For example, I worked in a restaurant as a helper or a food courier. During my study period, I heard many times from my local colleagues that, "'Oh, you came here for work, not for study." It gave me a sense that I was taking away their jobs as a foreigner.

He continues,

I remember one day I was returning from my workplace, it was late night. The road was empty. All of a sudden one guy came and attacked me with a knife. I was talking in English, but that guy did not understand my words. I then ran away and that guy was chasing me with his knife. I was lucky. I was able to get into the main road and that guy did not catch me. I still think about what would have happened that day if he did. In those days, I always told myself, "Once I become a graduate, things will change. I will get a good job and I will not have to face these things." Now, I work in the corporate world, but nothing has changed. Almost every single day, I am asked by others, "Why did you not go back to your home country after graduation?" (Saiful, 29 years old).

These narratives are often ignored by the European society as a whole, as well as elite political or media discourses, except from very few individual activists or academics. The image of immigrants are often portrayed in a way that they are threat for society. The words that are being used by the media associated with immigrants are often the words that represents something to fear on. One of the prominent repertoires found from the newspaper reports reviewed was that of the immigrants being 'threat' for the society. This media representation amplifies the storm metaphor, reinforcing the image of refugees and migrants as a threat to society (see for example the article on, 'Estonia border patrols stepped up in wake of Lithuania crisis' (ERR, 2021)).

The term 'border patrols' is often associated with conflicts with neighbouring countries, as well as news and reports related to drug smuggle and human trafficking. These activities are viewed by the general population as threats to society and should be avoided (Ian, 2019). Following report makes such claim more profound, "Estonia's border preparedness has been boosted, particularly on its eastern frontier, in response to the migration crisis."

The terms 'eastern frontier' and 'border preparedness' give us the image of war related reports and articles. A sense that there are enemies and they need to be defeated. The following report installs this sense firmly, claiming "Estonian citizens see migration crisis as bigger threat than Russia" (Postimees, 2016). Given that Russia is the neighbouring powerful country, most people in Estonia see Russia as a threat to regional security. In this news article, immigrants are compared to such a profound threat. This particular excerpt strongly indicates how narratives are constructed rather than extracted from real facts.

Narrative 2 from the respondent clearly indicates the consequences of the above-mentioned (mis)representation of a group of people. Almost every single day, I used to hear, "Why didn't you go back to your home country after graduation?" In addition, this story clearly underscores that the respondent himself is still haunted by "what would have happened on that day" if he had not been able to get to the main road quickly. It shows how much fear he carries while living in the Estonian society day to day. Meanwhile, common media discourses portray immigrants as a threat to society. This clearly underscores that immigrants' own stories are not heard and are ignored by elite discourses (ERR, 2021).

Criminal narratives: Different treatment from the host society

One night I was walking down the street alone. It was very cold, and the roads were icy. Suddenly I saw an old woman fell on the street. She was trying to stand on her feet, but she was too old to stand on her own. I quickly went and helped her up. I always try to help, but sometimes I feel bad. Even-though I was helping, that old lady was rather hesitant. She was trying to keep a distance. She continues,

One day I went to the supermarket. I bought my things and put stickers (price tag) on all of them separately. When I went to the cash and handed over my things, the cashier opened my stickers and checked all the things by himself. This is not normal in this country. Usually, we are supposed to put stickers by ourselves and then we just punch it to the self-check-out machine or hand it to the cashier and cashier does it. I mean, the cashier punches those price tags to the machine. That cashier did not check anybody else's price tags before or after me. I was the only one who looked different there. Unfortunately, this has happened many times even after that. My 6 years old child one day asked me, "Dad, why do they always check our one?" I did not have an answer. (Ela 32 years old).

This narrative clearly shows how some individuals are treated differently just because of their colour or race. If we look at elite and media discourses, the common metaphor used by the reports on migrants as a rhetorical device, was that of a criminal narrative. Criminals are a threat to the society. This is known by even the most junior members of the society. Therefore, this notion creates a dangerous context for the migrants. Once they are identified as a threat, they need to be eliminated from the society. For example, one media report stated, "Migrants who are staying in the country without a legal basis and are subject to expulsion are placed in a detention centre of the Police and Border Guard Board with a capacity of 123 people." (Postimees,

2016) This extract has the term 'legal basis', which is often used in news, related to crime or criminal activities. The term 'expulsion' again is mostly used when a crime takes place. 'Detention centre' is a term related to criminals and their lives. These are the expressions which would normally be used or associated with media reports of criminal activities. Here, they are used to position migrants as the 'other'. Migrants are therefore someone to be fearful and they need to be isolated from the rest of the population. Narrative 3 from offers an insight of how such elite and media discourses shape people's attitudes. By comparison, examples of migrants being helpful are not found in such narratives. It is the overall falseness in these discourses which make new community members viewed as criminals, "she was rather fearful and was trying to keep her distance" ,and "Dad, why do they always check our one?" (ERR, 2021).

Number narratives: Not seen as a human, rather as some number

I am working in an IT firm over the last three years. Many of my Bangladeshi friends are also working in different sectors. We are contributing to this economy. We pay taxes and make the economy stronger. But, wherever I go, people ask me, "Why am I in this country? What is my motivation for living in this country? How many Bangladeshis live here? Etc Nobody asks me about what I do or how I am contributing to this society. (Mahmud 30 years old).

Often immigrants are portrayed as numbers with mainstream discourses concerned with how many immigrants come from which countries, how many take government subsidies, etc. For example, a report from a newspaper, stated *"Estonia is ready to receive up to 10 people evacuated from Afghanistan. The exact number of people for whom Estonia will be able to provide international protection will be known in the coming days" (ERR, 2021).* The report was written in a positive manner in terms of 'immigrants' being offered shelter during the chaos and terrifying situation, which has unfolded in Afghanistan since the return of Taliban to power. Yet, by clearly stating the number '10' it also shows how there is a limit, a restriction 'an exact number' Estonia can accept. It reassures the reader that the country will not accept more than ten refugees. The same sentiment, a fascination with numbers, can be traced in the above-mentioned narrative, where Mahmud is asked about *"[h]ow many [other] Bangladeshi lives"* in Estonia. Whereas narrative 4 indicates that Bangladeshis do not see themselves only in numeric terms. They are many different persons, with each 'contributing to this society' and 'paying taxes' to make the country's economy stronger. Yet they remain mere numbers for many people of the society because of the elite media discourses (ERR,

2021).

Dishonest narratives: The process of turning a particular community into the 'other'

Sometimes, I feel so depressed about the different treatment of people. At the university where I study, we have our friends from different countries. One day, I was not able to get into the class on time. I was only two or three minutes late. It was because of a delayed bus. My teacher asked me, "Why are you late?". I replied, "I am sorry. My bus arrived a bit late'. Teacher did not seem to believe me. She kept on talking, "Why did you not take an earlier bus, so to not be late?". She even said that if i come late in future, she will not allow me to get in. On that day I felt Okay. Since she is my teacher, she can say this. She continues,

But the very next day one of our classmates came more than 5 minutes late. The teacher asked, "Why are you late?" She gave the same answer, "My bus was late." Our teacher did not say anything more to her. I was so surprised by that. I think it was just because that classmate was European and was a white student. After the class, I asked my classmate why she was actually late. She said she was talking with her friend. It means she actually lied. Whereas I said the truth on the previous day. It was indeed the bus, which came late. I was not being lazy. I hope someday my teacher will realise her mistake. (Shumi 26 years old).

This story clearly underscores the 'dishonest' narratives. Elite political discourses are constructed in a way where immigrants are portrayed as individuals who cannot be trusted (Rutazibwa, 2023). Sometimes, discourses on immigrants raise questions about their history and integrity. The following media report for example shows not only immigrants are dishonest but also their intention to move; "*What causes problems is that few real immigrants cross the Mediterranean, most of the travellers are economic migrants from Africa"* (ERR, 2021. The term 'few' is used explicitly and in a way which suggests that large number of immigrants and asylum seekers are dishonest and it is a 'problem'. Singling out one group of migrants as 'African' again demonstrates how a particular group can be misrepresented and constructed in a negative manner. This media reporting is very much linked to narrative 5 about the teacher's reaction to Shumi's lateness and the dishonesty of her European classmate.

Storm narratives: Harmful to the society

I came here as an expat. I work for the most renowned IT company here in Tallinn. I am a well-educated person. I could have gone to anywhere in the world to do my job. I came to know that [Estonia] is the IT hub of Europe and it has good atmosphere for IT professionals. The very first day when I went to my office, one of my colleagues asked me, "Where are you from?" I said, "I am from Bangladesh". In response she said, "Oh, there are so many Bangladeshis in our office. The office is getting full of South Asians rather than locals'. I felt so bad, as if I had just arrived to the office from nowhere, without any qualification and my identity was Bangladeshi not as an office staff or as a colleague (Jokhon 38 years of age).

This particular story underlines how false representation constructs people's mentality toward a group of migrants. The most common rhetoric found in media discourses is that of the storm metaphor (Peter and head 2008). This storm metaphor creates an image as if immigrants bring a storm that will devastate and destroy the host society. For example, one media report declared that there was 'a broader state of emergency a couple of days earlier due to a surge in inward migration' (ERR, 2021). In this example, the terms 'declared',' emergency' and 'surge' are expressions that would ordinarily be associated with reports on severe storms, like cyclones or hurricanes, indicating the need for a state of 'emergency' to be declared by the authorities. Here, they are used to position immigrants as someone to be cautious of and as causes of potential harm to the Estonian society. It also suggests that they are a group of individuals who can destroy society, much like a super hurricane does. The following report repeats the same discourse, emphasising that immigrants represent a storm; *'The Estonian Rescue Board (Päästeamet) has sent just under a dozen tents and furnishings, including bedding, in order to house the migrants at camp and via the framework of the EU's civil protection mechanism, as well as 100km of barbed wire, and drones.'*

The words 'rescue' and 'tents' are often associated with a storm and its aftermath when there is a large population of victims affected by the storm. The use of 'drones' suggests that these immigrants need to be constantly monitored through drones and other technical support. The use of these metaphors may legitimise the perception that immigrants do not have agency of individual will to operate within a given structural framework. Whereas narrative 6 clearly indicates otherwise: '*I could have gone to anywhere in the world to do my job. I came to know that [Estonia] is the IT hub of Europe and it has good atmosphere for IT professionals'* (Postimees, 2021),

Dirty narrative: Stay away from them

Over the years, I have recognised that nobody sits beside me. If I am on the bus, most of the time the seat next to me is empty. The people would rather stand up instead of sitting next to me. I have noticed it even when I go to any office for any other purposes. People from this country don't want to come close to me. One day, I remember I was walking beside the playground in our neighbourhood. There were a lot of children who were playing at that time but when they saw me, they all stopped playing and quickly went back to their guardian's. This kind of thing happens to me often (Lovelu 31 years of old).

The account mentioned above gives us the indication that immigrants are often perceived as if they are seen as 'dirty'. Indeed, as mentioned earlier prominent political figures have openly claimed that it is refugees who bring 'Infectious diseases' with them to Estonia (ERR, 2022). Such labels will fuel practices of keeping a distance from new or recent migrant or refugee arrivals – especially if they look visibly different than Estonians.

Narrative 7 suggests that the mainstream narrative often carries overly negative connotations, portraying migrants as not just a burden (Crawley & Skleparis, 2018) but as an infectious threat. In order to consider how such narratives affect the lives of migrants in their everyday, their voices need to be heard by political leaders and presented in mainstream media reports.

Conclusion

This paper shed light on the often untold and largely overlooked stories of Bangladeshi migrants and refugees in Estonia within the context of Europe's relentless debates around refugee and migration politics. The main objective of this study was to provide an empirically rich account of the daily lives of Bangladeshi migrants and refugees, not just in their own words but in the light of broader discourse articulated by the elite and represented by media reports. To achieve this objective, the paper drew on a series of in-depth interviews and media reports from 2019-2021 from Estonia.

Seven main narratives emerged from the interviews. These narratives include the portrayal of migrants as representing an impending storm. This portrayal suggests that a state of emergency may be required due to their presence. Another narrative involves the observation of migrants who look different than Estonians as a mere number. This

perspective implies that migrants can be managed when clear targets are set. Additionally, migrants are sometimes portrayed as dishonest. They are viewed as lacking the trust of people. Finally, migrants are often depicted as dirty and are seen as needing to be distanced from the rest of society. These narratives are likely to impact Bangladeshis in Estonia given their visible 'otherness' from the rest of the society.

Acknowledgments

All the participants of this study.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Contact Information

E-mail: aminulislam80@yahoo.com

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CITE THIS ARTICLE AS: İslam.A., (2025). 'Dad, why do they always check our papers?': de-silencing Europe's non-European immigrants: a study of Bangladeshi 'migrant' and 'refugee' experiences in Estonia . *International Journal of Multiculturalism*.5(1).44-59. DOI:10.30546/2708-3136.2025.6.1.44