

General theoretical elements Advocacy Academy

This handout is part of the educational materials of the Advocacy Academy: a masterclass for policymakers and refugee advocates developed by Refugee Academy in collaboration with the partners of the AMIF project 2incING, for the participation of refugee-led advocacy in policymaking. The materials are freely available on our website and can be used by refugee-led advocacy groups to provide a training or masterclass for policymakers.

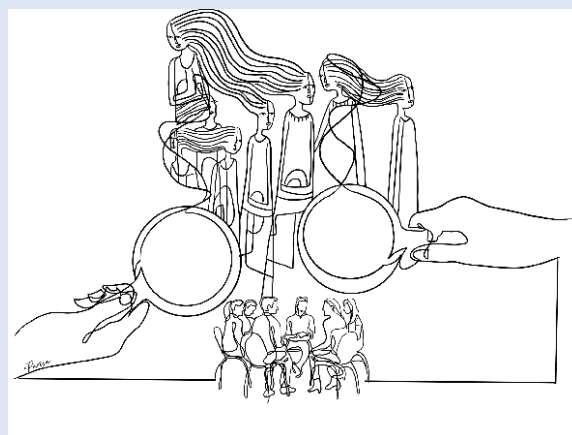
In this handout, we highlight the most important theoretical concepts that are used in the masterclass, most of which are mentioned in the video-lecture by Halleh Ghorashi (part of the masterclass materials).

Polyvocal governance – or polyvocal policymaking

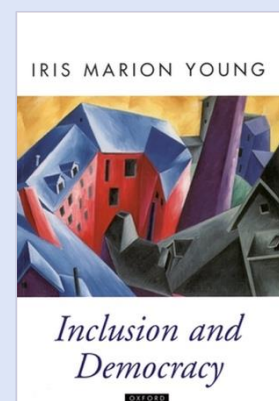
These notions are important to understand why the active inclusion of refugee/migrant perspectives into policymaking is crucial and how it fits into the democratic process. Refugee-led advocacy it is essential to correct the 'democratic deficit' of representative democracies, and to create policies that are actually attuned to the lives of the people they are meant for.

- **Politics of presence or politics of ideas.** Anne Philips talks about the "**politics of presence**": the importance of the actual presence and actual participation of people who belong to a group that is not (adequately) represented in the political game. This is different than a "politics of ideas". "**Politics of ideas**" means that the focus is on the ideas that are brought forward in debates and discussions, regardless of who is bringing them to the fore, while "politics of presence" stresses the physical presence of certain bodies into the debate. The politics of presence, while not sufficient, is a necessary first step for inclusive politics and policymaking. The next step is to actually give the distinctive lifeworld of the non-privileged groups present a place, or make otherness productive, in decision-making processes. So not only space for presence, but *also* for ideas.
- Another important question is: Who is actually appearing? Who is visible? Halleh in her lecture refers to **phenomenology**, which is the study of lived experiences. The study of "phenomena": appearances of things, or things as they appear in our experience, or the ways we experience things, in a direct or intuitive manner. So our experience of a process of decision-making is directly informed by who is part of it.

- **Comfort, panic and stretch- zones.** A first step in thinking about conditions for participation, is to focus on what is needed for learning in a collective space. The advocacy academy itself is a space for learning. Policymakers need to be able to learn in such a space, just as in spaces for participation and consultation, they need to learn to listen to refugee advocates. Both too much comfort and too much unsafety will make learning impossible. In the **comfort zone**, one feels comfortable without anxiety or discomfort. There are no new challenges or reflections to start a learning process. The other extreme is the **panic zone**, a space that is overwhelming and far from comfortable. In this zone, people experience stress and anxiety. Learning is impossible because people are forced to expend all their energy on coping with stress and panic. In between is the **stretch zone**. In this space, things can be unknown and can become uncomfortable, but there is room for a learning process.
- **Polyvocality.** We use 'polyvocal policymaking' to stress the fact that there is a multitude of perspectives and knowledges which are relevant to policymaking. People which are positioned differently in society (have different live experiences, different social positions, different identities) also have different types of knowledge which are relevant to policymaking. (**see also: politics of presence vs politics of ideas**).
- Part of polyvocality is the importance of **including specifically perspectives of minority groups** in the process of decision making. In our case: refugee/migrant voices (from now on called: Refugee perspectives). Refugees often do not have access to the formal ways for democratic representation. Also, policymakers mostly have a very different network and lifeworld than the refugee and migrant communities for which they design policies. So, polyvocality implies the actual admission of a diversity of voices, and especially those voices that are often considered deviant.



- **Participatory governance** means active participation of citizens in decision making processes by governments. This can vary from more traditional forms like advisory councils to more recent forms like [‘citizen summits’](#) (see link for an example). In the lecture Halleh refers to the Belgian historian David van Reybrouck who wrote the book: *Against Elections. The case for Democracy*. He proposes a form of democracy which is radically participatory: instead of having elections, citizens assemblies are appointed by lottery, who decide on specific policy matters. This book has been one of the inspirations for various experiments in the Netherlands and Belgium to work with citizen assemblies or summits, especially for cities (G1000). Participatory governance is an upcoming way of working also in other countries. It entails the recognition that for complex societal challenges there is need for inclusion of multiple perspectives. However participatory governance practices are **not automatically inclusive**.
- **Deliberative democracy.** We use Iris Marjon Young’s notion of democracy. She writes that *deliberation* is the key of democracy: this is the process of discussion that precedes decision making. Democracy is not just about which decisions are made (the outcome) but mostly about which perspectives are included in the discussions that lead to specific decisions (the *process*). These discussions can take place in all kind of different spaces, in and outside official institutions. This process of democratic decision making is a way to discover together what are the decisions and policies that most increase social justice (democracy with a focus on discussion is called: ‘deliberative democracy’).
- For democracy to work, it is essential that this process is inclusive, so that many different perspectives can influence which decisions are made. This is called **political equality**. It that every perspective (of different groups in society) should be heard and have the same chance to influence the discussions that lead to decision making. In other words: everyone should have an equal chance to make a difference. In this way, decision making will be better informed and more equal. [NB. This notion is not mentioned in the lecture but can be used for discussion in the advocacy academy if you like]
- **Deep democracy.** That is why Young states that deliberative democracy should be taken one step further. If we really want it to be inclusive, we need to look deeper at the way in which the process of decision making is actually done, so we need: ‘*deep democracy*’. Because mainstream processes of deliberation tend to exclude certain voices (even without conscious/explicit exclusion). For instance: voices which are not trained to participate, or groups which have been historically excluded from decision making. Thus: There is a need to rethink the rules and processes



that are meant to include citizen perspectives and make participatory governance inclusive. For instance, disruptive or emotional voices/contributions to the debate should also be listened to, especially when they are expressing the views of people who have been traditionally excluded from decision making. This is often not easy.

In short: Democracy should be the process where all perspectives and groups have access to the discussions that precede decision making. Only in this way can democracy contribute to equity. This is most important for participation of groups that have historically been excluded, but that policy is about. These perspectives enlarge the idea of what equitable and inclusive policies can be. Deep democracy means to actively work to make space for unusual and even disruptive voices in the process of decision making /policy making.

Power

- **Visible power** – This is power that some people have over others, for instance because they occupy specific powerful positions or because others are dependent on them. This is the case with coercive power: Some groups can force their will on other groups. This form of power is connected with visible and explicit forms of exclusion, like when specific political powers explicitly block the participation of refugees, or perpetuate border violence.
- **Invisible power: Normalisation** – In the lecture Halleh talks mostly about invisible power, which leads to invisible or implicit forms of exclusion: these happen without people even being aware of the exclusion they are producing. This is a way of thinking about power that comes from thinkers like Michel Foucault, for instance. He says: power is everywhere, it is not something that is in the hands of some people, but it is part of the way we act, talk and think, which we consider 'normal'. Without even realizing, we keep certain structures of power in place. Think for instance of the power within gender relations. Inequality between women and men is something that is engrained in how we do many things as individuals and as society, and has also been kept in place by institutions for centuries. Halleh talks about the way in which arriving as a refugee in NL, she realized that she had to fight not so much the visible power of people or institutions trying to exclude her, but the invisible power of certain images and ways of thinking that were widespread in society, like being always seen as a powerless victim. This meant fighting something invisible that existed even in the actions of kind people that wanted to help. This notion of invisible power is also called normalized power, or 'discursive power': the power of how we make certain connections in our way to talk about and understand the world ('discourse').

The power of normalization. Examples of invisible power or discursive power:

In the Netherlands we see for instance very strongly the power of the 'discourse of lack': Migrants and refugees are approached foremost as people that lack the abilities and qualities to participate in society, a weak group that should be helped to overcome their lack. This discourse is very widespread and also informs social policy and integration policy. The effect of this form of invisible power is that talents of refugees and migrants and their potential to contribute positively to society remain hidden and are not perceived as such. Another, even more exclusive discourse is that which depicts refugees as a potential threat of society.

An example of discursive power that we saw in the Croatian context is the strong discourse of Croatia being 'transit country': There is a strong dominant idea that migrants and refugees do not want to settle and therefore integration policies and social policies for them are not necessary. This form of invisible power has the effect that policymakers do not invest in policies that are needed by those migrants and refugees that would want to settle and integrate in Croatian society. Through this discourse, the potential investment of migrants in the Croatian society and their wish to connect to society remains invisible.

In different local and national context, different forms of visible and invisible exclusion are at play. Important questions to discuss are:

- *What are the visible barriers that produce exclusion of refugee voices in your context?*
- *What are examples of invisible / discursive power which limit the possibilities of inclusion and participation of refugees?*

In-betweenness: working to counter invisible power

Halleh explains in the lecture that when power is more invisible/discursive, one cannot go 'against' it, because there is no visible enemy. She proposes that the way to go to counter this form of power is not against, but in-between:

- **In-between actions – actions between the lines.** These are actions that happen 'in between the rules' and that make it possible to be creative and imagine possibilities

- **'In-between people' – people living between context.** Being refugee for many entails occupying an intermediate state between old and new lives, this creates a dual perspective that makes it clear that nothing is self-evident and can become a source for originality. Refugee advocates should be able to make their in-between position productive by becoming translators between various contexts. From this position of in-betweenness, refugee advocates potentially combine different types of awareness: *practical awareness* (understanding how the system works), *reflective awareness* (seeing the connection between their personal experience and societal structures) and *relational awareness* (mirroring their own experience with the stories of other refugees).
- **Embedded stories.** When they have *relational awareness* and *reflective awareness* refugee advocates can bring what we call 'embedded stories'. These are stories that are not per se representative of a whole group, but are also more than individual stories, because they are mirrored to the experiences of others in one's network, and they are taken as exemplificatory to make a point about something that does not work or works in the system.

In-between people

Edward Said refers to the 'exilic condition' (read: refugee condition) of living in-between worlds, cultures, and structures as a potential way to remain creative and original. He argues that, while the condition of in-betweenness for refugees could lead to feelings of disconnectedness, it also has a great potential to lead to originality and creativity because exiles constantly negotiate their past and present discourses (Said 1994). Refugees do not have the privilege of taking their present context for granted. The simultaneous existence of often conflicting past and present contexts creates a condition of forced reflexivity. But this could be considered an advantage over people without migration experience, since, if one can live only in the present, one risks disappearing in that present (Bauman 2000, 206). The in-between condition of refugees could in this context be considered a potential opportunity to unsettle the normalized structures in the policymaking.

- **In-between spaces – spaces for interaction between people.** When the sources of exclusion work through normalized and repetitive practices of everyday interactions, the main way to resist is to create delayed spaces for reflection. The act of delay as a first step protects us from what Thomas Eriksen (2001) called "the tyranny of the moment." "To go fast means also to forget

fast," as Lyotard argued (in Janssens and Steyaert 2001, 109). The hastiness of our actions strengthens the power of normalization: acting in accordance to what is considered 'normal', obvious. Stopping to think and creating delayed in-between spaces of reflection in our hurried routines enables us to rethink our own position in these processes and, from time to time, to think of actions that can disrupt these taken-for-granted structures. Delayed interspaces help us to include difference yet go beyond dichotomies of difference (Ghorashi and Ponzoni 2014; Ghorashi and Sabelis 2013). Within these in-between spaces, stepping aside (Janssens and Steyaert 2001) helps to create temporary interspaces that are empty of judgment. Dutch philosopher Theo de Boer (1993) refers to this step as *epochè* – a temporary suspension of the truth of one's own judgment. This implies de-centering the subject position and creating space for alterity. It also provides an alternative to othering by approaching the other from the position of the other. Since there is no end to that process, once the space is emptied from the dictatorship of the self, the self–other dichotomy becomes blurred, leading to interaction through the continuous balancing act of sameness and difference. The assumption here is that distancing from "the self" (stepping aside) could create novel ways of and space for relating to the other.

- **Capacity building** - In between actions, people and spaces can lead to change, because they can help challenge and disrupt what is taken for granted and considered 'normal' (cfr: invisible power), and open up alternative ways to see and imagine. But to actuate this potential we need to work on the competences of all actors involved in the process of decision making. *So not only capacity building of advocates or representatives of refugee communities, but **also capacity building for policymakers**.* For advocates it is important to understand the context they are entering, to develop strategic abilities and to actuate the three potential forms of awareness described above (practical, reflective, relational). For policy makers it's important to have the capacity to see more, to listen better, and to also be receptive to the moments when the perspective of the other becomes disruptive. Indeed, to counter invisible power disruption is essential, in order to see differently.
- **Creating material conditions for co-creation and capacity sharing.** In order to fully develop the capacities needed to create polyvocality advocates and policymakers need to learn from each other: Capacity sharing. For this to happen we need space for **co-creation**, which literally means creating together the conditions to learn from each other and exchange knowledge. This works when people feel co-owners of the space and feel a shared responsibility for the learning process.

Participatory spaces

In order to understand the conditions for participation of refugee perspectives, we distinguish differently kinds of participatory spaces. With spaces we mean context and situations for decision making and consultation. In other words: "Opportunities, moments and channels where citizens can act to potentially affect policies, discourses, decisions and relationships that affect their lives and interests" (Gaventa). Gaventa talks about closed, invited and created spaces:

- **Closed spaces:** Refugees do not have a seat at the table: no access to the space of discussion and decision making.
- **Invited spaces:** Refugees are invited to participate and discuss; they are guests in a structure of (explicit and implicit) rules and expectations that regulate their contribution. Examples are being invited to participate to a debate or participating in advisory boards set up by institutions. These spaces that are controlled by policymakers/representatives of institutions. The fact that refugee advocates are sitting at the table does not mean automatically that there is actual inclusion of perspectives. Often in invited spaces the rules are not transparent or not inclusive, the role of advocates is not clear and expectations are not explicit. Participants to invited spaces will not automatically feel safe enough to bring in perspectives that are disruptive. And it is not automatic that the contribution of refugee advocates is taken seriously, beyond a validation of what policy makers want or are prepared to hear.
- **Created spaces:** These are spaces set up and controlled by refugees themselves, such as a conference or event organized initiated by refugee-led groups, to which they invite policymakers or representatives of institutions. One example of this is the G100. Created spaces can give refugee advocates the power to shape a context in which they can actually articulate and express their perspectives, but may not automatically lead to commitment and engaged presence of policymakers on where policymakers feel safe enough to learn.

Participation in invited and created spaces does not guarantee that advocates will actually have the opportunity to contribute meaningfully. Formal inclusion (presence) in consultation structures does not mean the actual inclusion of perspectives. In order for refugee advocates to actually make a difference in the democratic process (see: 'deep democracy') we need to shape spaces in which it is possible to reflect together on the conditions and rules of the space and learn from each other what is needed in order to learn from each other.

- **Co-created spaces:** Policymakers and refugee advocates can also shape together spaces for participation, defining in dialogue with each other what is needed for both to share their knowledge and learn from each other. This means that there is a mutual effort to create an in-between space (see above) for listening to each other. These spaces are both safe enough for participants and at the same time daring (or 'brave'): they allow for participants with different positions to compare their experiences, and so also to become aware of invisible mechanisms of exclusion (invisible power). In such spaces, there is both respect for different positions and the possibility of spotting one's own blind spots through a different lens. Spaces are and daring where there is enough delay and confidence to allow for friction and where discomfort is considered productive. Daring spaces are by definition stretch zones (see: 'Comfort, panic and stretch zones').

