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Transnational Media

WS 15/16

Universität Bayreuth

From Nationalism to Transnationalism: Where Refugees Move

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1178915

Outline

"No paradox of contemporary politics is filled with a more poignant irony than the discrepancy between the efforts of well-meaning idealists who stubbornly insist on regarding as "inalienable" those human rights, which are enjoyed only by citizens of the most prosperous and civilized countries, and the situation of the rightless themselves" (Arendt, 1966: 279).

Introduction

This quote needs extensive reflection as it mirrors the contemporary crisis *for* refugees. Indeed, many papers on refugees and nationalism enter with a quote by Hannah Arendt. This is by no concern an invalid choice. Arendt, as a Holocaust refugee and American expatriate herself, discussed the conditions of refugees often connected to human rights obligations from the post-World War II context that arouse from a particular fascist form of nationalism. Today we do not speak of a world war, neither are there point-blank nationalist grounds for the 'refugee crisis' declared. Yet millions of people see themselves in a similar manner confronted not only by walls but questions of their status as human and political beings.

Insisting on transnational recognition of full legal status on any territory, refugees challenge nation-based rights. Their voices protest exclusive legal status for national communities solely grounded in its 'imagined' properties. Thus, nation's performative identity construction of inclusion and exclusion is critically assessed under the presence of refugees. In the following, the essay will elaborate on this 'imagined' character of nations that Anderson identified already over three decades ago suggesting a great vagueness and fluidity of the concept of the nation.

An introductory discourse analysis enables to grasp historical, political and cultural dimensions of nation formation which will inform not only the concept of nationalism but also its transgressor. Transnationalism, thus poses a further category of analysis that contests identity categorisations as it seeks to transcend but is often still restricted by identity politics that are ultimately based on national relations. Followingly, both concepts are contested by the current political events of refugee circulations, in exemplary necessity, to lay open certain discursive strategies of such national practices of inclusion and exclusion in legal and media spaces.

Hence, this essay will provide an introductory insight into the difficulties of localising a national experience. Yet to avoid the complication of a rigid or essentialising definition of nation or nationalism I will concentrate on nation as a category that functions ultimately as a factor for

identity formation and regulation of legal processes. The construction of a homogeneous Self that opposes a unified notion of the Other constitutes the core parameter of the nation in need to be read as a critical category. Consequently, nationalism defined by the "beliefs about the nation" i.e. the imaginings about the constructed national Self is to be equally critically assessed. Hence, these categorizations already highlight the importance of the methodological inquiries in approaching the subject.

In a similar vein as Social Media studies infamously have taught us that "the medium is the message" (McLuhan, 1967) and thus does not stand quietly outside the content that it expresses, Brubaker argues that "scholars do not stand outside the processes" (Brubaker, 5) they research on, neither are they outside the practices they employ. Instead the scholarly messengers are deeply implicated in the process of knowledge production through academic forms of representation, the "object of analysis", the "frame of reference" (Brubakr, 6), taxonomical tools but also their own socio-political positionality. Thus, it becomes this essay's ancillary yet necessary remit to emphasize methodological approaches and categories which are used in academic research and public discourse to analyse a specific subject, in this case trans/national identity formation of and by refugees.

In extended interest of analysing the trajectory of trans/national identity formations an outline of fundamental discussions on nationalism and transnationalism cannot be circumvented. Thus, if we seek to discuss the apparent impediments refugees constitute for national imaginations, it is necessary to first scrutinize what such imaginations are made of. Consequentially, a critical analysis of taxonomies and categorizations of refugees in relation to trans/national processes contesting such dominantly territorial limitations of identities set the framework for this essay. Rights and restrictions connected to the identified status of a refugee will further outline the trans/national conceptualizations of what it means to be *homo politicus.*

Refugee - A Critical Category

Since one of my arguments is based on the abstractions of people or experiential phenomenon into homogenized and dehumanized groups and categories, it is important to alert the reader at any given point in the text of the tools and concepts that are established in order to revise the topic. Therefore, the methodology in approaching refugees in theoretical academic writing and public discourse is as necessary as the body of texts itself discussing such taxonomies. Thus, discourse analysis provides a conclusive strategy in establishing an open category from which formulations about refugees are not reductionist.

Similarly as Brubakr expresses 'Muslim' to be "a category towards which one must take a stance; one cannot simply inhabit it in an unreflective manner" (5) - I argue the same is the case for the category 'refugee'. It is in need of a likewise shift from "a category of practice - a category of self- and other-identification" (Brukbakr, 5) to a category of analysis describing an analytical and differentiated approach. This categorization does not allow homogenised group identification where inner group differences are undisclosed in a singularity construction. Neither does the category of analysis take an outset condition of Self and Other as established or static. Instead it unveils the category of practice as a committed category with intended directionality of counter-positioning.

To further circumvent these obstacles Nail goes even so far as to speak of "the figure of the migrant ... not [as] a class or identity [but] a vector (a position in motion)" (qtd in Rosales). Along these lines, the figure of the refugee in heightened political presence can similarly not be understood in ahistorical relations but is always dependent on its socio- and geopolitical context and can therefore never attain fixed positionality. This is not lastly the reason why definitions of refugees vary as a function of their historical embeddedness, ever so requisite of reconfiguration.

A common yet defeating approach describes the refugee as a supposed marginal figure of society, an anormality to a functioning societal community that sees their apparent homogenous identity and cultural and economic existence threatened by the inclusion of an 'unstable' unit. Indeed upsetting internal conservatism the figure of the refugee challenges national configurations of unified identity politics. Furthermore, refugees constitute a central role as well in national as transnational identity formation. They become not only the "vanguards of their people" (Arendt, 1943: 77) as they contest their own territorially bound identity but that of all humanity (see Agamben) invoking the importance of refugees in the context of human rights.

A very short recalling of the development of theorizing a universal human right will followingly enlighten the close relations and separations to refugee rights. In *Metaphysics of Morals* (1785) Kant infamously aligns to a 'cosmopolitan right' for a world citizen basing morality in reason that then was understood as the defining human characteristic. (This argumentation was however abused in Humanism as a colonial strategy universalising Western morality). Over two centuries later Arendt calls for "A Right to Have Rights" (1949) that formulates the basis for a human life secured in moral and legal space. Only recently Benhabib extended this idea to "The Rights of Others" (2004) by arguing for an argumentative approach of human rights, so that any human must be allowed the right to discursive space where one can argue their rights.

These latter definitions of human rights contextualise and similarly critically assess them within the national framework. National belonging as p/requisite for politics of being a legal human becomes thus an extensively inhumane parameter. Hence, voices become stronger in questioning

legality of personhood that heavily rely on the status of nationality or citizenship. (An infamous exclamations of that kind would be 'No human is illegal').This challenges not lastly the exclusionary function of the state as a national institution that is by its expression primary aimed at the security of its 'own' people, dividing humans into national understanding of belonging and not-belonging where they can either act as political beings or are excluded from this privileged status.

Arendt's understanding of politics as an equal "space of appearances … the space where I appear to others as others appear to me" (1958: 198f) immediately suggests a reading in the context of refugees who lose agency as an invisible figure outside the political arena (see Gavroche). As Tyler notices, a similar application of Butler's argument of political acknowledgment to the refugee context encapsulates the political stance of refugees as mere "instrument[s] for the refusal of recognition" (Butler, 2002: 11) (see 2006: 189). Here, the need for equal access to discursive space must then be expressed in legal, political, social and media form. A few examples in these spaces will show how this notion of the 'outsider' is contested "[i]nasmuch as the refugee, an apparently marginal figure, unhinges the old trinity of state-nation-territory, [and therefore] deserves instead to be regarded as the central figure of our political history." (Agamben, 93).

Therefore, refugees by implication politicize not only own categories of identity formation but also those of their whole environment. They see themselves confronted in large political frameworks and administrative practices while volunteers get involved in humanitarian projects may also asked for the actual underlying reasons for refuge. War, economic distress, environmental catastrophes, racial and sexual persecution are often only symptoms of larger oppressing systems at work. Hence, a refugee is so highly politicised not only by the reasons for his flight but moreover by the practices that await him in refuge in the host country. Yet the refugee is not only a politicized figure for itself but moreover a factor for politicising the human being on transnational scope. A short elaboration on national and transnational identity will illuminate this claim.
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Nationalism – Ideological Figments of Imagination

Communities that define and extol themselves by and large over a national identity are very vague and illusive in their respective nationalist arguments. It is therefore no wonder that Anderson infamously describes nations as 'imagined communities'. He argues that "the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion" (1991: 6f). A face-to-face interaction between all of its members is thus not requisite for the constitution of a nation. Instead national members trust their fellow associates to be in the same imagined space as they are.

Hence, nation communities construct the relations they have to other members of their community in metaphysical realm. How is it then that these relational constructions are overtly expressed over familial or territorial ties? Eventually these physical and secular parameters set the legal framework for citizenship that is either based on ius sanguinis, descent right or ius soli, territoiral right. While the former is generally referred to as an 'ethnic nation' the latter is defined as a 'civic nation'. Although these arguments of belonging have actual physical relevance their territorial and familial relation are still imagined in so far as they are, by thorough consideration arbitrary in the fact of birth.

Etymologically the nation deprives from Latin 'natus' and describes "that which has been born" (onlineetymology). The fact of birth then determines already one's implication into a nation. "The fiction that is implicit here is that birth [nascita] comes into being immediately as nation, so that there may not be any difference between the two moments" (Agamben, 93). Hence, the definite physical tie between parent and child breaks at the moment of birth. Yet the moment of birth then becomes the instance of societal, communal, and as Agamben explains also national invocation.

Does national belonging then imply definite physical relations in exchange for metaphysical ones? Indeed, in national agenda by losing physical relation to what nurtures, protects and gives one identity, imagined parameters take their place. Thus, building on Anderson's argument nations are imagined not only in that every member does not have direct contact to any other member. Moreover, nations are imagined in their relation to territorial and familial determinators. This is of course already implied by defining nations as communities hold together by such communal ties. Yet the imagined relation exceeds social relations of both "inter-individual and...trans-individual structure" (Grosby, 29) and is extended to territorial and temporal parameters. In other words, what is imagined are not only the social conformism but moreover the relationship to territory, kinship and history.

To be clear that is not to say that there is no meaningful relationship towards the place and the family or extensive community one is born into but the relation to it is established not given or inherent - at least in legal terms. Similarly, the active and continuous process of relation formation throughout life is distinguished from Heiddeger's infamous *Geworfenheit* already implicating a passivity into the involuntary process of birth. But nation-belonging is not passive nor arbitrary but constructed to the extend that its 'naturalness' is politicised.

This "politicization of birth" or as Nyer extensively calls it "politicization of life" (16) helps to think the nation as a category of analysis. The concept of the nation tries to construct the moment of birth as a moment of inherent belonging - the nation-state does so in terms of ascribing il/legality to a person by creating it as a non/citizen. Such a political process of ontologising identity is the

basis for an ideology of a nation.

This national ontology and "the ideological work" of the nation that is rendered "invisible" (see Briggs 644) in the quotidian enactment of it is what Billig calls "banal nationalism" (1995). Thus, Briggs pushes us to to be "sensible" about national ideologies (see 645) that are banal because they are inscribed in daily lives but, at the same time they are in the Althusserian sense "the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence" (109). In this Marxist understanding the power constellation of the individual in the community governed by ideology is enacted through discrepancy of imagination and reality of one's state of being.

In other words the sovereign of such a national community overall regulates the ideological notions of these imagined formations and the members often unconsciously enact these imaginations in daily life. Bhabha specifically notes this imagined order as constitutive of a sense of community both formed from and beyond intersubjective processes in life (see 2). This means that although quotidian subjective interaction lies the lived foundation of a communal life it is the metaphysical idea that one is already part of a larger body that defines the imagined order of a nation. This practical and imaginative realm of the sovereign and the imagined character of the people then is what holds the community together, in nationalist agenda constructing itself against other nations by means of inclusionary and exclusionary practices, eventually to establish privilege through assumed superiority.

In this sense, Self and Other construction is essential to nation building because "[n]o nation imagines itself coterminous with mankind" (Anderson, 7). Hence, nations delimit themselves territorially and ideologically from others according to a concept of internal stability. This restriction and demarcation utlimatively is necessary to construct a homogenous concept of the Self opposing a unified notion of the Other. Furthermore, nation building is dependent on acts of exclusion to define and decide what should or can i.e. will be included into the national realm.

On a theoretical level this already hints strongly at identity politics that are structurally at work in the imagined order of a nation. National identity is then culturally, linguistically, politically, and historically constructed and taken as a factor for demarcation from others. This oppositional identity construction in fact emerges from the belief of an inherent and fixed state of being bound to the nation. Nationalism thus is the evoking of the belief that nation-belonging is what overall defines both individual and group identity.

This assumption need not fall short of the power structures that are at stake in constructing this belief. Such power constellations find expression in from of institutions and governmental regulators as well as media representations through which daily life is determined. Again, this is what Briggs and Billig direct our attention to when they speak of the 'banal' or 'invisible' operations

of nationalism. It is therefore necessary to re-consider the notion of nation(-states) and their role in forming individual and non/citizen identities of a postmodern and transcultural world also in a historical and political context.

The Turkish Republic formed in 1923 consitutes a prime example in that it already during the fall of the Ottoman Empire enforced genocidal practices on Armenians and subsequentily extended them on Kurds in order to secure religious, cultural and linguistic uniformity within national borders. These measures already displaced if not killed millions of peoples who then in large part proactively reformed as diasporic communities either in other nation-states that could provide them to some extend quotidian security or at the brink of the new millennium in the digital space - still within the nation but outside its territorial centricity.

Yet, displacing Armenians and Kurds and rendering their national identity not legitimate on Turkish national grounds is a harrowing example for transnational expulsion of lives that seek to be secured and given rights. This specific case study certainly reflects on questions of what belonging to a nation means and how this 'imagined' and lived belonging is politicized, il/legalised and persecuted. This certainly furthers interrogating considerations of rights towards the individual with a certain national group belonging that is forced to leave its 'natural' national space.

In respect to refugees, territorial identity limitation is transgressed often under life-threatening outset and condition. Thus, the restricting function of borders in form of walls and fences that seeks to stress the limitation of ones life and identity to that territory fail and fall. Such an ossature can never limit fluidity i.e. migration but only divert it as currently observable with the refugee flow circumventing border fences in Bulgaria by taking their routes over Croatia. It becomes thus evident to read refugees and displaced people in the context of national and transnational formations that define or challenge their identities through the physical act of movement across nations.

Transnationalism – Beyond Ideological Imagination?

Similar to Appadurai's definition of deterritorialisation which "not only applies to obvious examples such as transnational cooperations and money markets but also ethinc groups, sectarian movements, and political formations which increasingly operate in ways that transcend specific territorial boundaries and identities" (49). In other words, "[t]ransnationalism may be defined as the flow of people, ideas, goods, and capital across national territories in a way that undermines nationality and nationalism as discrete categories of identification, economic organization, and political constitution" (Braziel, 8). Indeed transnational movements tend to challenge national formations,

yet they are not understood to annihilate national borders in a postnational or global fashion. Such circulations of concrete and abstract bodies more often reformulate what it means to belong to a nation to the extent that nation-belonging is critically reassessed in its significance and implications. Hence, this definition's incipient stage already suggests a reworking of individual and group identification which surpasses national limitations.

In a more historical line of argumentation, "nationalism and imperialism [as well as colonialism must be considered] as above all transnational processes" (Briggs, 626). This implies not only the historicity of these processes but their ideological binarisms of centricity and marginality, of exclusion and inclusion. Transnationalism is then inherent in the understanding of nationalism, as the nation - even if it was the 'nation of all humanity' - cannot ever exists solely in and for itself. What lies outside its borders and what relationship is established towards these bounds and externalities is as formative as what stays within.

Transnationalism can then be seen as a tool to uncover these social, economic and political relations to help understand the nation as another "primary way of signifying relationships of power" (Briggs 637). This encourages to consciously step outside one's own signifying framework of the nation and recognize larger more fluid contexts by in which one can build transnational relations. In this way, Briggs summons to "participat[e] in renaturalizing the nation" (644) not by rendering it obsolete but refiguring its productive local strength in global, transnational or diasporic processes.

Along those lines, the current humanitarian crisis *for* refugee puts nation states in the conflict with transnational operations and nationalist agenda. In his article "Refugees, Transnationalism and the State" Khoser asks in which ways refugees by their transnational nature reinforce or renegotiate national structures, institutions or more generally state power. He observes two opposing phenomena. For once, "in most cases transnationalism has reinforced state control rather than empowered refugees" (Khoser, 233). Tighter regulations for asylum applications, stricter border controlling, heightened building of border fences or even walls pose only a few examples of national security agendas that are transnationally executed. Similarly, with transnational deportation operations "states are effectively turning transnationalism against asylum-seekers" (Khoser, 243) basing the argument for seclusion and exclusionary practices on internal security and protection.

On the other side, "'transnationalism' [has also] been associated with a reduction or at least reconfiguration of state power" to the extent that supranational or non-governmental organizations and cooperations such as the European Union, World Trade Organisation delegate immigration control away from state policy (qtd, see Khoser 236), to an extent even subverting these national structures. Interestingly however, by jointly stating that "*We*... strongly urge European leaders to put

human life, rights, and dignity first today when agreeing upon a common response to the humanitarian crisis" (*sic*) (Banco) the UN and the International Organization for Migration actually call for agency on both national and continental basis. This means such organizations in fact morally encourage politicians to join forces in taking transnational agency within localised context. The consequences of such suggestions and following regulations are dependent on transnational cooperations that transcend national imaginations of communal life and foreground human identity as a maxim for biopolitics.

As illustrated in Khoser, a similar debate weighs refugees' capacity of "compounding identities, ignoring borders and overruling orders" (Vertovec, 642) against the "continuing significance of borders, state policies and national identities even as these are often transgressed by transnational communication circuits and social practices" (Smith 2001: 18). Notwithstanding their directionality both camps stream from the same basic argument that the persistent power of the nation-states "define, discipline, control and regulate all kinds of populations, whether in movement or in residence' (Ong,15). This claim holds truth in so far, as even the recognition of a refugee status in the host country is tributary to national administrative regulations, no matter their international obligations. To illuminate the opposing arguments Khoser differentiates among three kinds of transnationalisms (see 238), the first being "transnationalism from above" which privileges national interests over for example transnational human rights enforcements. The meso-level of transnationalism is exemplified with smuggling networks subverting state control yet not providing true liberation and security for refugees. "Transnationalism from below" poses the active alternative to refugees that "contribute to post-conflict reconstruction in their home countries from overseas" often in the from of diasporic organisation.

The formation of transnational activities and consequential creation of transnational identities thus lies not only at the hands of the migrants themselves but also in the support by local (non-)governmental organisations. Governments that restrict such transnational engagements limit their own scope of global cultural, socio-political and even economic involvement and significance. In an unfounded fear of losing what was never there, namely national homogeneity, nationalists will rather miss what is in sight: a transnational communion. Yet, this is no loss of but a substitution of restricted identity imaginations.

Refugee Rights Imagined?

As O'Neill notices, by relating "transnational communities" to "circuits of migration" Marfleet formulates three major aspects to the development of transnationalism. Neglecting considerations of

political and economic factors that lie at the heart of such 'migrational circulations' he foregrounds transportation and communication that are obvious technological factors. Indeed, such technological innovations facilitate and accelerate and to some extend even enable transnational practices in the first place and thus, have been summarized as such in Appadurai's notion of 'technoscape' (see 1996). Yet, they do not directly appoint to the political level that is a driving force in transnational processes.

More informing is his argument on "the generalization worldwide of ideas about human entitlement" (Marfleet, 216). Here, transnationalism is directly linked to a unified moral understanding of human rights that transcends national borders. Yet, institutional laws and rights are still overall territorially bound and exercised on national ground. They are inscribed, enforced and enacted on a territory that is nationally governed by laws. The unifying category of the human seeks to transcend such territorial limitations in order to validate universal human rights. Such a lofty approach is yet still of aspiring nature and finds no real implementation.

Instead, Agamben's reading of Arendt unveils the paradox that refugees see themselves confronted with. They are "people who have really lost every quality and every specific relation except for the pure fact of being human" (Agamben, 16) and are yet not granted these basic human rights. This is then when the introductory quote by Arendt must be reiterated in such that human rights contradictory to what they describe are in fact a matter of privilege. Accordingly, rights and laws are established dependent of one's local and often ethnic and economic situatedness instead of one's status as a human being.

Alongside, Briggs rightfully notes, "[t]he work of the "nation concept" far exceeds the bounds of problems of the state or diplomacy. It produces endlessly proliferating related terms, such as homeland, security, traitors, minorities, family, culture, home, immigrants, and so on" (638). Only alluding to the interconnectedness between one of these terms and the respective one of the refugee, it is interesting to see how national politics collide with transnational rights proclamations. A very recent debate in the German cabinet was tentatively finalised by the Christian Democratic Party in the resolution that refugee minors are not allowed to request family reunion as a general claim (see Gathmann). Interestingly this determination violates the United Nations principle of 'unity of the family'. Here, "the natural and fundamental group unit of society, is [proclaimed as] an essential right of the refugee" which obligates "governments to take the necessary measures for the protection of the refugee's family especially with a view to ensuring that the unity of refugee's family is maintained" (UNHCR, IV. B (1), p.11). This example of transnational and national policy of confrontation highlights once again the exceptional legal space of refugees. Yet, this does not merely reflect on refugees themselves but also the community that denies them such rights. There,

rights of familial belonging are privileged. This extended alienation of refugees from, on the one side legal and on the other side familial ties suggests a furthered denaturalisation of their human status.

Contesting the ontological understanding of the nation, its beliefs are uncovered as establishing an imbalance of power between different nations and ultimately between peoples and individuals. Since these hierarchical beliefs, however, are of metaphysical or imagined substance they reflect only on the reality of these people as they are expressed and exercised in language and action. This leads to the analytical part of the essay in which media representations and artistic expressions of and by refugees are exemplary taken as challenging national processes of inclusion and exclusion.

Two examples in the 'Imagined World'

If nations are imagined they are only imaginary to the extend as they are discursively constructed. Yet the pressing question then becomes 'who takes part in this discourse?' Discourse exclusion can function on two levels. Firstly, it is a blatant fact that "the circulation in politics and the media of a set of negative images and vocabularies relating to [in this case] refugees and asylum seekers has become part of a new exclusionary process" (Bromley, 1 qtd in O'Neill). Such "xenophobic discourses that depict the asylum-seeker as a dehumanized, undifferentiated foreign mass, hoard, influx," (Tyler, 196) have been numerously examined and will thus be not further elaborated on in this essay. Yet secondly, refugees are generated as a passive category of practice by which self- and other-identification is produced (see Brubakr, 2). In other words, "[t]he figure of the asylum seeker as abject 'other' helps to reconfirm a sense of national identity" (Tyler, 186). Conclusively, methods of exclusion either negatively connote the refugee voice so that its arguments can be easily devalued or it is non-present at all.

To oppose these exclusionary strategies the monthly newspaper *Abwab*, as the name suggests and BR repoter Fücker reports, opens 'doors' for refugees to be informed on national and international politics as well as questions of asylum and general issues of daily life in Germany. Although New German Media has already been publishing newspapers for migrants for over 15 years, it is only now that *Abwab* is in nationwide circulation also in Germany. 45 000 cost-free

copies distributed in refugee housings reach first and foremost the refugee community. Additionally, being written in Arabic with some main information also in German, *Abwab* addresses also a linguistic community that is often excluded in general mass media.

Ramy Al-Ashed, the editor of the newspaper and "self-declared feminist, atheist and Assad-opponent" (Fücker), expresses his concerns on the integrity of refugees in public political spaces when he explains that for example in refugee housing it is not a matter of course that the residents have the possibility to access the internet. Certainly, this limits their integration in a media space that does not only allow information gathering but also active participation in political discourses online. This discursive exclusion reflects the overall discussion of refugees in mass media. Refugees become a national or transnational topic that is overtly depicted as a crises for EU countries and thus only elaborated on out of the perspective of the host countries. Voices that express self-representation of the refugee condition within these states are still overall tenuous or even non-existent.

Therefore, *Abwab* seeks to fill this 'discursive inequality' by at least transitionally providing a hard copy information space where diverse and trans/national topics as Merkel's political agenda towards the Assad regime or a discussion of female rights in the context of the infamous 'sex attacks' at New Year's Eve in Cologne are critically presented. Following such examples the voluntary writers are engaged to culturally contextualise such politics and events also from a background of Islamic Studies. Furthermore, imperative headlines like "10 steps to integration" - no matter its deliberate poignancy- already implicate the Arabic (refugee) reader into the host community and advocate future prospects of national diversity in communal life.

To then further extend the reach of *Abwad*, the paper is held out in prospect to go digital where further possibilities for online engagement in form of comments and reviews allow greater inclusion of Arabic voices in the discourse around the refugee condition but also topics that do not merely limit them to this one-dimensional, experiential identity. Similarly, acknowledging the transnational reach of online activity that promotes inclusionary and liberating forces, Google announced donating $5.3 million to enable refugees in Germany to freely access chromebooks (see Fuller), therewith supporting the general right for education. Yet, again accessibility to ebooks is only ensured by internet availability. This can either show the limitations of the project or spark further transnational collaboration as in prospect with companies such as DeutscheTelekom. It even prompts state assistance in formulating tools for (online) access to education as a fundamental human right, not lastly in search to overcome a nationwide 'digital divide'.

As hinted on above the media provides a digital space for contesting information as well as identity formation. If access is denied or linguistic barriers enforced refugee identities are not only

deliberately excluded from discourses that revolve around themselves, they are also disqualified as being participially relevant to them. Thus, national identity politics are often unjustifiably expressed to be only legitimate when they come from within. This one-directional understanding of national identity construction of representative individuals or the whole body of a nation in its abstractions equally extracts a coherent and reciprocal awareness of identity politics. In this way "[a]lternative media thus, have an important role in mediating the asylum seekers' life stories and in contesting their systematic exclusion from the public sphere and their relegation into 'zones of silence'. (Bailey,1-2 qtd in O'Neill 2010).

The Syrian refugee Berlin based film director Firas Alshater sets another telling example in what Appadurai calles the "imagined world" of the mediascape (1996: 35). In a parodic manner of 'explaining the Germans' he humorously reverses the power-laden perspective of knower and knowable, presenter and presented. By asking the question "Who are those Germans?" (Alshater, 2016) he inverts these subject-object roles and shifts the condition of being identified as refugee to an agency of becoming an identifier oneself. Thus, it becomes clear that other-identification is always relational and reciporcal in that such a question always implicates the inquirer him*herself. Yet, Alshater goes beyond this role inversion. In fact he subverts these rigid categories of practice by ridiculing an 'us' – 'them' binary in identity constructions. He does so by deliberately failing to construct a German national identity that goes beyond a timid generalisation of claiming that "Germans take their time but once they get started they are unstoppable" (Alsather, 2016: 2.50). This vague ascription alludes rather to the fact that he cannot or does not seek to define a definite national identification for 'the Germans'.

Alshater then further explains on his part that although he has already been labelled 'first-refugee youtuber', his main goal is to express his and other refugee identity in its diversity. "I am one of the humans and one of the refugees and one of the people who live in Germany" (Alsather, 0.50). Therewith he limits his identity not only to his refugee condition but instead extends it to his current residency, and his overall state of being human. This enforcement of a hybrid refugee identity reflects the outlines of Hall's identity politics II in "Old and New Identities, Old and New Ehnicities" (1991). By this argumentation, homogeneity of identity is given up in favour of a differentiated subjectivity.

Furthermore, Alsather stresses that refugees are not to be economically victimised by alluding to them as constantly dependent on material goods and thereby reducing them to an economic status often unrelated to their pre-flight condition. Instead they seek spaces for communal echange which are necessary for refugees to become an actively part in this newly imagined society where they can freely participate in and contribute. Laws that prohibit refugees from working not

only economically illegalise them but also restrain them from becoming a concurring part of society. As they have been, in the case of the Syrian film maker, forced to leave the territory where they were expelled to exert their imaginations about a community elsewhere. This appeal to social recognition is then certainly also dependent on proactive acts of inclusion by the host society in which refugees are enabled to overcome their temporary imposed identity.

Arguing this case online, the Youtube channel poses a transnational platform for both German and non-German audience creating a virtual space of exchange on national identities and identification. "This massive shift in public representations has profoundly altered the discursive and institutional landscape in which populations of immigrant origin formulate their own self-understandings and identifications. Some self-identifications [such as Alshater's] react directly to hegemonic other-identifications" (Brubakr, 3). Thus, representations of refugees in media space can challenge unified notions of national imaginations of identity by showing their diversified and hybrid character. Even "[t]he symbolic presence and real availability of different media open up new possibilties for expression and representation and thus of imagining the self and belonging within and across space" (Bailey, 2 qtd in O'Neill, 2010).

Conclusion

Spaces that either allow national or transnational identities to be performed are not only territorially informed by nation states but also by those who transgress their rigid boundaries. Therefore, refugees further politicise spaces where such fixed national identities are naturalised. Summarizing refugees in their transnational force as a threat to nationalism is indeed just. This is in itself a fact as much as the recognition that nationalism is a threat to humanity since it evokes the idea that nation-belonging overall defines identity and legality of person and eventually the justification for his or her existence. Thus, refugees are threatening nationalists only in their national identity which is solely *imagined*, as established alongside Anderson's notion of nations. Refugees in return are facing real threats as war, political, racial and sexual persecution, environmental disasters and economic impairment.

The analysis of refugees thus has taken us to an ultimate consideration between what is real and imagined and how these two influence each other in national and transnational space. While Lacan might intersect the two with the symbolic, inviting further theorization of subjectivity, what remains is a consideration of the construction of reality by what we imagine ourselves to be.

Are we spiked with *fearism* (Subba) against refugees as for example seen in transnational yet continentalist civic political formations such as PEGIDA (Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamisation of the West in Germany) that often goes hand in hand with another imagination, that of religion? Or are we embracing the political stance of the refugee in its transnational identity opening floors for finally acknowledging human rights to every human, no matter their national, religious, gendered, racialised or other imaginatively constructed group ascription? A democratisation of national space that must be itself recognised as transnational, pushing its national imagination into an abstractum that was and never will be coherent, can be achieved through hybrid narratives that are expressed not lastly in transnational spaces such as the worldwideweb.

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