

***One only needs an island/Alone in a vast sea:* “We refugees” – the waves of refugees of 2015/16**

Schinagl, Rosa Coco
Humboldt University, Berlin, Germany
Stellenbosch University, Stellenbosch, South Africa
rosaschinagl@gmail.com

Abstract

The article will demonstrate by a close reading of Hannah Arendt’s article “We Refugees” published 1943 in New York City that Germany in particular has a responsibility towards refugees seeking to reach Europe by boat. By listening to the voice of a female refugee, the article will formulate four categories clarifying Arendt’s request to welcome newcomers. Furthermore, this article highlights how Arendt’s testimony can be transformed to act accordingly for today’s so-called refugee crisis and it challenges the concepts of “volk”, nations, and the efficiency of human rights.

Key words

Refugees; human rights; Religion and Migration

Background

Masha Kaléko (1907–1975), born as Golda Malka Aufe, is one of the most well-known female German Jewish poets of the early twentieth century. There is only one decent translation of her work into English: *Mascha Kaléko: No matter where I travel, I come to Nowhereland – The Poetry of Mascha Kaléko*, translated and introduced by Andreas Nolte (Burlington: The University of Vermont, 2010). She was born in Galicia and later lived in Berlin, New York, and Jerusalem. In Germany she is one of the most quoted female poets.

The title of this article was inspired by the performance of RebellComedy’s *Hinter uns mein Land*, text and performance by Babak Usama and Elyas Ghassim. RebellComedy on WDR, (a public German channel) is the first comedy group composed predominately by second and third generation

immigrants addressing the social and political issues of their everyday lives. The performance is based on two stories of refugees – fleeing from Syria in 2016 and Germany in 1938. The text is composed of narratives and phrases from Masha Kaléko’s poems. This performance was among the most important reminders of German history and its current relevance. It was performed in 2015. [Online]. Available: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bW1XcEg3r_4 [Accessed: 17 January 2017]. The show was broadcasted on 26th February 2016, episode 6, with an introduction and conclusion by Khalid Bounouar, former member of RebellComedy. The performance points a finger at Germans who distance themselves from German history by turning their backs on the incoming refugees. Usama and Ghassim show by relating German history of the 1930s to current events in modern Syria that “they” (the German-Arab community) fit into crucial German history that has not been influenced by their ancestors. They end the performance with the words: “100,000 people fled into Germany in the last years. 100,000 people fled from Germany 80 years ago. (...) You only heard two voices, but it could have been: I am Willy Brandt and I am a refugee, I am Thomas Mann and I am a refugee, I am Albert Einstein. (...) And this is the reason why we Germans have a specific relation towards refugees. Not only because we always say, yes, one day we will be in the same situation someone may help us. No: we have been in this situation and we got help in order to build up a better life and a better future. And therefore, we say: Refugees welcome. يرحبون اللاجئين. Wir sagen: Herzlich Willkommen.” Minutes: 28:26–29:16.

Another stance was taken by Dr Myriam Miedzian in her article “It’s Time to Convene an International Conference about Refugees” published in *The Huffington Post*, 20th September 2015: [Online]. Available: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/myriam-miedzian/what-the-world-needs-now-_4_b_8148354.html [Accessed: 18th January 2017]. She goes back to the conference in Evian, France 1938, in the presence of Roosevelt, where the need to welcome German and Austrian Jews was discussed and rejected. Reviewing Europe’s, and mainly Germany’s, welcoming of the refugees positively, she calls the US to take responsibility for stabilizing those countries from which refugees are fleeing and, in the meantime, to welcome them. Furthermore, she includes the six Gulf countries into her critic for closing borders.

The article is based on my presentation at the conference *Religion and Migration* at the Theological Faculty of the Humboldt-University of Berlin in June 2016, and it is dedicated to Dr Daniel Moshe Knebel with whom I discussed this theme and other aspects of German history.

1. Introduction

In light of recent developments regarding the uprooting of millions of people, Hannah Arendt's approach "to have the right to have rights" (EU 614) has been frequently applied in various viewpoints. Her first approach to the topic was her article "We Refugees" in 1943, which Hannah Arendt wrote as a stateless refugee at the age of 34 in NYC after she learned about the systematic killing of Jews and dissidents.¹ It describes her experiences with the loss of *Heimat* (home),² the reaction of the Jews when they fled into new countries, and the need to raise awareness and political consciousness for the right to have rights as refugees. Those important issues in times of crisis directly lead to questions regarding the concepts of nations, borders and consequently the concept of "Volk".³

Hannah Arendt is known for questioning the status quo in a Socratic way: she starts with ordinary concepts of political life, reframes and questions their conventional understandings, and allows her readers to

1 Hannah Arendt's biography (1906–1975) reflects the major events and changes of the twentieth century. She was Jewish but secular, born to the first generation who accessed higher education and pursued an academic career. She had to flee from Nazi Germany, and eventually obtained worldwide recognition after immigrating to the US and publishing her books, articles, and interviews in the US and Germany. Hannah Arendt is mainly known for her political philosophy developed after the Second World War. Today, her concepts of natality, plurality, the question of having the right to have rights, and her interpretation of Aristotle, Nietzsche, and Kant are well known and discussed worldwide. Less known, however, is her background as a theologian.

Her oeuvre is bilingual as her English publications are mostly translated by herself into German, but with various modifications. Therefore, where I found appropriate, I translated some of the quotations.

2 "Zuerst einmal haben die Rechtlosen die *Heimat* verloren, und das heißt die gesamte soziale Umwelt, in die sie hineingeboren wurden und innerhalb derer sie sich ihren Platz in der Welt geschaffen hatten," in H. Arendt, *Es gibt nur ein einziges Menschenrecht: Die Wandlung 4* (December 1949): 754–770; 756.

3 An important concept in Arendt's thought. It depicts national dominance within the German history and German identity. In current times of globalisation, in which new political structures like *The European Union* are formed, and upraise of global migration caused by climate change, economic reasons and political instability, the concept of "Volk" unavoidably will need to be updated.

rethink differently about them and even reshape their understanding of these concepts.⁴ In my opinion, the so-called refugee “crisis” requires us to rethink the concept of borders and nationality as we welcomed 1.2 million new people into our “Heimat”. Our “Heimat” will and has to change, and we have to determine together how we would like it to be shaped.

The article starts with a close reading of Arendt’s article “We refugees”.⁵ The author is convinced that Arendt’s article leads into a fruitful discussion later, as she will treat Arendt’s opinion as the testimony of a refugee, rather than a political thinker, and draw out how society, as hosts for new generations of refugees, should and shouldn’t act – in the best interest of the uprooted people. The author has chosen certain passages to read, and has divided them into four categories that she found to be essential for understanding Arendt’s claims:

1. Refugees as individuals destroyed by the circumstances they have to live in;
2. Assimilation and its possible requirements or dangers;
3. The loss of identity by being a refugee to be part of the society;
4. This category is further developed into her formulation:

“To have the right to have rights.”

4 H. Arendt, *Sokrates. Apologie der Pluralität* (Berlin: Matthes & Seitz, 2016), 9–10; Arendt, *Über das Böse. Eine Vorlesung zu Fragen der Ethik* (München: Piper, 2010), 87; A. Gündogdu, *Rightlessness in an Age of Rights. Hannah Arendt and the Contemporary Struggles of Migrants* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 29–37; 63.

This book presents a rethinking of Arendt’s political theory in the light of the time after the Human Rights Declaration in the aftermath of WWII and the International Court of Justice establishment. It calls for a new critical inquiry of human rights and to include stateless people.

“To strike roots, and claim our own place in the world, into which we all arrive, as foreigners.” Translated from: “Wurzeln zu schlagen, den eigenen Platz in der Welt, in der wir alle als Fremde ankommen, einzunehmen.“ Arendt, *Über das Böse. Eine Vorlesung zu Fragen der Ethik* (München: Piper, 2010), 85.

5 First published in German: H. Arendt, “Wir Flüchtlinge”, in *Zur Zeit. Politische Essays* (Berlin: Rotbuch, 1986), 7–21. In light of the last events it was republished as one book with an essay of Thomas Meyer. Arendt, *Wir Flüchtlinge* (Ditzingen: Reclam, 2016).

The categories form a full circle as the question of assimilation leads to the question of the right to have rights. Therefore, the four categories are complementary and interrelated.

In this article, neither statistics nor solutions will be given but rather the voice of a woman who experienced life as refugee in exile because she had to flee Nazi Germany 1933 at the age of 26.⁶ Since the question of dealing with refugees arose, one could realize that too often white, well-established men, mostly belonging to the majority and mostly not refugees, express their thoughts about this topic and make the crucial decisions regarding it. Therefore, the author decided to listen to the voice of a minority woman who was stateless for more than 18 years: The voice of Professor Hannah Arendt.

2. “We refugees”

The article “We refugees” was published in 1943 in *The Menorah Journal* and was Arendt’s first published article in the USA. The article’s language depicts Arendt’s personal and emotional situation, but one can find basic elements of ideas which will be fully developed later in her most famous book *The Origins of Totalitarianism* published in 1952 (the English edition).⁷ The article can be seen as a bridge between her early work about Rahel Varnhagen that dealt with the questions of acceptance and assimilation of Jews in German society and her later political analysis of totalitarian regimes, in which she demands the “right to have rights”.⁸ Throughout

6 Arendt was imprisoned for collecting anti-Semitic material in newspapers after 1933. Interview by Günter Gaus. [Online]. Available: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dsolmQfVs04>. Minutes: Minutes: 11:07–12: 38. “I was arrested and had to leave illegally (...) I was released after 8 days. I made friends with the officer who arrested me. A charming person. He’d been promoted from the criminal police to a political division. He had no idea what to do with me (...). Unfortunately, I had to lie to him. I had to protect the organisation [she was working for, Rosa Coco Schinagl]. I told him tall stories.”

7 The self-translated German publication was released in 1955. *Elemente und Ursprünge totaler Herrschaft*. Not only did Arendt translate her books, she also reshaped and reformulated them for the German reader. Therefore, the English versions may differ from the German to a high extent. Therefore, quoting from her oeuvre can open theoretical gaps.

8 H. Arendt, *Rahel Varnhagen. The Life of a Jewess* (London: East and West Library, 1957). The German Edition was published in 1959. *Rahel Varnhagen: Lebensgeschichte*

her work she deals with the worldliness⁹ of people – that they lose their bounding to the world – and its consequences for societies and the world.

3. 1st Category: Refugees as being individuals destroyed by the circumstances they have to live in

The first category of “destroyed individuals” captures the situation of the refugees after they lost their world. They left everything behind in order to save their lives. Arendt describes how the refugees desperately try to be optimistic to survive the “rupture of their private life”:¹⁰

Our optimism, indeed, is admirable, even if we say so ourselves. The story of our struggle has finally become known. We lost our home, which means the familiarity of daily life. We lost our occupation, which means the confidence that we are of some use in this world. We lost our language, which means the naturalness of reactions, the simplicity of gestures, the unaffected expression of feelings. We left our relatives in the Polish ghettos and our best friends have been killed in concentration camps, and that means the rupture of our private lives.¹¹

Later in her article, she writes, “No, there is something wrong with our optimism. There are those odd optimists among us, (...), [who] go home and turn on the gas (...)”¹² and refers to the increasing numbers of suicides among Jewish refugees regardless of whether or not they arrived in a safe exile which she claims has been a new phenomenon.¹³ She describes the situation of the refugees after leaving their private life behind:

einer deutschen Jüdin aus der Romantik (München: Piper). The book was her Post-Doc thesis that was interrupted, although nearly finished, by the election 1933 and her need to immigrate to France. It was finally completed in 1938 in Paris. Hannah Arendt fought in Germany over 30 years for recognition of her career in the process of *Wiedergutmachung* (reconciliation) and won in 1971 and received compensation. In the US the book was published only in 1974.

9 The concept of worldliness can be traced throughout her oeuvre.

10 H. Arendt, “*We Refugees*”. *Menorah Journal* (1943): 69.

11 *Ibid.*, 69.

12 *Ibid.*, 71.

13 There are no statistics, but it is a constant narrative in Jewish German communities that suicide increased before the deportation of 1941-43 in Germany, within 1936-1945

I don't know which memories and which thoughts nightly dwell in our dreams. I dare not ask for information, since I, too, had rather be an optimist. But sometimes I imagine that at least nightly we think of our dead or we remember the poems we once loved.¹⁴

4. 2nd Category: Assimilation and its possible requirements or dangers

The second category “assimilation” starts from the situation of those refugees, who experience the “rupture of their daily life”¹⁵ and find themselves mostly ripped of their family structure.

Hannah Arendt already dealt with the phenomena of assimilation before 1933 during her postdoc in Berlin and her research about Rahel Varnhagen - a famous Berlin saloniere with Jewish background. She studied the nature of Jewish assimilation in Germany after the Emancipation and worked on developing an appropriate definition. Therefore, her approach and critique have been shaped by academic studies and her personal experiences. Her critique was especially informed by her friendship with Kurt Blumenfeld¹⁶

or even among those who had been in exile. Among the Jews who committed suicide are Walter Benjamin, Ernst Toller, Susan Taubes, Stefan Zweig. Arendt, ‘*We Refugees*,’ 71–73. Also, C. Goeschel, *Selbstmord im Dritten Reich* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2011), 201.

14 Arendt, ‘*We Refugees*,’ 70–71. See interview with Günter Gaus. [Online]. Available: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dsolmQfV504>. Minutes: 25:18–21: “I always loved Greek poetry. Poetry has always played a great role in my life. Minutes: 37:13–38:56. Gaus: What has remained?” – Arendt: “The language.” Gaus: “That means a lot to you?” – Arendt: “A great deal. I refused to lose my mother tongue. I have always maintained a certain distance from French, which I spoke quite well and English which I write today (...). Your mother tongue and another language are so different (...). I know a lot of German poetry by heart. The poems are always *in the back of my mind* (in the German interview Arendt said this in English). I could achieve that in a second language (...) The German language is the essential thing that has remained. (...) The German language did not go crazy. There is no substitute for the mother tongue. People can forget their mother tongue. I have seen that.” Also: “So bleiben Gedichte, unter den Gedankendingen der Kunst, dem Denken als solchem am engsten verhaftet; sie sind gleichsam die wenigst dinglichen unter den Weltdingen. Aber wenn auch >Dichterworte/Um des Paradieses Pforte/ Immer leise klopfen schwebend/ Sich erbitternd ewigs Leben<[...],” H. Arendt, *Vita Activa oder Vom tätigen Leben* (München: Piper, 2007), 205.

15 Arendt, ‘*We Refugees*,’ 69.

16 Kurt Blumenfeld (1884-1963) and Hannah Arendt met in 1926. He became her closest friend next to Hans Jonas. The relationship terminated with the publication of her

and her work for a Zionistic organization in Paris.¹⁷ Living in Paris in the late 1930s, she formulated her categories of *pariah* and *parvenu*. In “We Refugees”, the reader can find nearly autobiographical remarks about assimilation:

We had scholars write philosophical dissertations on the predestined harmony between Jews and Frenchmen, Jews and Germans, Jews and Hungarians, Jews and ... Our so frequently suspected loyalty of today has a long history. It is the history of a hundred and fifty years of assimilated Jewry who performed an unprecedented feat: though proving all the time their non-Jewishness, they succeeded in remaining Jews all the same.¹⁸

Furthermore, she talks about a friend of hers, showing the great absurdity of the refugee’s attempt to assimilate:

Having just arrived in France, he founded one of these societies of adjustment in which German Jews asserted to each other that they were already Frenchmen. In his first speech he said: “We have been good Germans in Germany and therefore we shall be good Frenchmen in France.” The public applauded enthusiastically, and nobody laughed; we were happy to have learnt how to prove our loyalty. (...) He is that ideal immigrant who always, and in every country into which a terrible fate has driven him, promptly sees and loves the native mountains. But since patriotism is not yet believed to be a matter of practice, it is hard to convince people of the sincerity of our repeated transformations.¹⁹

To be able to assimilate 150% – as she says²⁰ – into the new society they did not only try to be good French or Americans by acting loyally, but also by denying their past dramatically and wiping out what they had previously experienced. She writes:

articles about the Eichmann Trial, and Blumenfeld refused reconciliation even when Arendt travelled to Jerusalem upon hearing that he had cancer.

17 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dsolmQfVg04> , minutes: 27.47.

18 Arendt, “*We Refugees*,” 76.

19 *Ibid.*, 75-76.

20 *Ibid.*, 75.

We were told to forget; and we forgot quicker than anybody ever could imagine. In a friendly way we were reminded that the new country would become a new home; and after four weeks in France or six weeks in America, we pretended to be Frenchmen or Americans. The most optimistic among us would even add that their whole former life had been passed in a kind of unconscious exile and only their new country now taught them what a home really looks like.²¹

Finally, Hannah Arendt concludes:

A man who wants to lose his self discovers, indeed, the possibilities of human existence, which are infinite, as infinite as is creation. But the recovering of a new personality is as difficult – and as hopeless – as a new creation for the world. Whatever we do, whatever we pretend to be, we reveal nothing but our insane desire to be changed, not to be Jews. (...) we don't call ourselves stateless, since the majority of stateless people in the world are Jews; we are willing to become loyal Hottentots, only to hide the fact that we are Jews. We don't succeed and we can't succeed; under the cover of our "optimism" you can easily detect the hopeless sadness of assimilationists.²²

5. 3rd Category: The loss of identity by being a refugee

Arendt's tone towards the Jewish refugees has a harsh tendency when she argues that the Jewish people deny or even hide their identity by trying to be as optimistic as possible in order to handle the loss of their home and assimilate into the new society. During her exile, she demanded a Jewish army to fight for their interest against Germany. Arendt defines the importance of an identity but does not claim that there is "one" right Jewish identity.²³ Nevertheless, she argues for a strong awareness of the concept of

21 Ibid., 69-70.

22 Ibid., 75.

23 H. Arendt, *Ich will verstehen* (München: Piper, 1998), 50. The question of her identity as (only) Jewish and therefore Pro-Israeli was discussed with Gerschon Scholem by letters and shaped the popular view on Arendt as a denier of the need of the existence of the State of Israel. "Hannah Arendt wird in Israel gehasst" (transl.: Hannah Arendt

identity. Identity is not unchangeable, but it is only when refugees have the right to act freely in their surroundings that their identity reshapes and develops into something new.

Additionally, to the demand of recognizing their identity, she adds that refugees have limited freedom to act given the various restrictions imposed on them. They are more likely to react in ways that avoid conflicts, which could lead into another displacement or homelessness.

We have become a little hysterical since newspapermen started detecting us and telling us publicly to stop being disagreeable when shopping for milk and bread. We wonder how it can be done; we already are so damnably careful in every moment of our daily lives to avoid anybody guessing who we are, what kind of passport we have, where our birth certificates were filled out—and that Hitler didn't like us. (...)²⁴

The less we are free to decide who we are or to live as we like, the more we try to put up a front, to hide the facts, and to play roles. We were expelled from Germany because we were Jews. But having hardly crossed the French borderline, we were changed into "boches." (...). We were the first "prisonniers volontaires" history has ever seen.²⁵

The article summarizes it with the conclusion that: "Our identity is changed so frequently that nobody can find out who we actually are."²⁶

is hated in Israel) by Idith Zertal 14.10.2006. [Online]. Available: <http://www.taz.de/!365212/> [Accessed: 20 January 2017]. Moshe Zuckermann judges her role differently and points out that beside her historically wrong facts, which she could not have known better at the time, her research and analyses are not precise. Nevertheless, as a voice of the time she stays important.

24 Arendt, "We Refugees," 73.

25 Ibid., 74. She was imprisoned in Gurs when France was occupied by Germany. She and her mother fled from the camp and successfully reunited with Heinrich Blücher, her second husband. Together they managed to pass over the borders into Lisbon where they boarded a ship to the US. Walter Benjamin tried to escape but could not cross the border and committed suicide.

26 Ibid., 74.

6. 4th Category: To be part of the society

This category is further developed into her formulation “to have the right to have rights“

The last category frames the later developed and well-known concept: “The right to have rights”. Arendt’s article starts with the strong sentence: “In the first place, we don’t like to be called “refugees.” We ourselves call each other “newcomers” or “immigrants.”²⁷

Arendt starts by differentiating three terms: “refugees” as opposed to “newcomers” and “immigrants”. For people who never had to flee, it is possible that we have never paid much attention to the difference between them. Although the concept of a refugee has changed in the last decades, Arendt explains that refugees had to flee usually because of their deeds. Arendt and her ‘Volk’ had to flee because of being Jews. Furthermore, a refugee is a person whose status is temporal; she/he is not part of where she/he is. Arendt wants to be called an immigrant – a person who came to settle and build her life.

Newcomers or immigrants also have certain rights while refugees usually do not have rights. Newcomers and immigrants have been invited to the country based on the belief that they can contribute to the society that they immigrated to. The appearance of refugees emphasizes the failing of the others, of the world community.

To start her article with this self-description strongly implies that the refugees want to resettle regardless of the place they came from. From this concept, everyone has to be allowed to call her-/himself a newcomer. The definition leads automatically to the demand of gaining rights.

Refugees mirror the need of change:

Apparently nobody wants to know that contemporary history has created a new kind of human beings—the kind that are put in concentration camps by their foes and in internment camps by their friends.²⁸

27 Ibid., 69.

28 Ibid., 70.

Arendt claims that awareness of their identity and situation allows them to act as minority in the society:

This struggle makes our own society so intolerant; we demand full affirmation without our own group because we are not in the position to obtain it from the natives. The natives, confronted with such strange beings as we are, become suspicious; from their point of view, as a rule, only a loyalty to our old countries is understandable.²⁹

Furthermore, she adds:

There is no longer any need of bewitching the past; it is spellbound enough in reality. Thus, in spite of our outspoken optimism, we use all sorts of magical tricks to conjure up the spirits of the future.³⁰

She finishes by concluding her article:

If we should start telling the truth that we are nothing but Jews, it would mean that we expose ourselves to the fate of human beings who, unprotected by any specific law or political convention, are nothing but human beings. I can hardly imagine an attitude more dangerous, since we actually live in a world in which human beings as such have ceased to exist for quite a while, since society has discovered discrimination as the great social weapon by which one may kill men without any bloodshed; since passports or birth certificates, and sometimes even income tax receipts, are no longer formal papers but matters of social distinction. It is true that most of us depend entirely upon social standards, we lose confidence in ourselves if society does not approve us; we are—and always were—ready to pay any price in order to be accepted by society. But it is equally true that the very few among us who have tried to get along without all these tricks and jokes of adjustment and assimilation have paid a much higher price than they could afford: they jeopardized the few chances even our laws are given in a topsy-turvy world.³¹

29 *Ibid.*, 76.

30 *Ibid.*, 70.

31 *Ibid.*, 76–77.

7. Discussion

One reads the testimony of one refugee who experienced exile in Paris and New York. Hannah Arendt's article captured her personal experience of the collective of Jews who lost their *Heimat* because of the Nazi regime in the 30s of the last century.

During the following discussion, this article aims to explore how this information can be transformed in order to guarantee that one can act morally when faced with humans in need. The discussion will cover welcoming of refugees from a German perspective. Therefore, the perspective of the article will now shift after listening to the testimony of Hannah Arendt.

For newcomers, their *Heimat* has been dramatically changed. Oftentimes, their *Heimat* has been completely eradicated.

The article will focus on three points during the following discussion:

1. The first conclusion from Arendt's testimony is that no assimilation or integration should be required

Arendt described very intensively that assimilation does not serve inclusion as the refugees deny their identity in order to adapt to the others. Denying their past by demolishing it does not allow them to construct a new home and even leads to suicide. Assimilation restricts the exchange of our different respective worlds that now meet. As we cannot forget our past in Germany and Europe, so cannot they.

Furthermore, Hannah Arendt asks refugees to organize themselves into groups to act according to their own needs, to be empowered, to be able to stand up for their rights, and to claim them.

2. This leads to the second point: open the society to let the refugees be part of their new home, their new society, by being equal by law

Arendt claims that refugees encounter that they have lost their sense of belonging to a nation and the right to have rights while in exile. The most fundamental rights are human rights – but they can often be difficult to obtain. Human rights, as Arendt clarifies, are hard to demand in a world that is organized by artificial constructions of nations and states, especially

in cases of problems related to international laws.³² She stresses in her article and in her later political theories that individuals are entitled by virtue of being born as human beings to be included in any society wherever.³³ The body, the person, counts, as we are not born into a nation but into one world with one body that is only ours and nobody else can claim it. This body guarantees the person the right to have rights regardless of borders or nations. We as humans are only equal when our bodies, as symbol of our existence, are valued equally worldwide.

The Western World lost the concept of the untouchable, the most sacred and most physically significant in the world: the sacred body of man. In the last decades, the Western society materialized their body the most when it is defined by its value of production, by bounding it to nations and the ideology of blood – as it is still done in Germany.³⁴ History has taught that

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- 32 Hannah Arendt's critique of Human Rights and the well-known sentence "Right, to have rights" has been commented on by international scholars and it inspired them to develop her ideas further: Seyla Benhabib, Claude Lefort, John Rawls, Michael Ignatieff, Jürgen Habermas, Giorgio Agamben and Étienne Balibar. Arendt claims that the concept of Human Rights contradicts its aim of catholicity by binding to national states and concepts of citizenships as its structure is similar and, therefore, a Human Right nothing more than an ordinary national right. See: Hannah Arendt's essay, "Es gibt nur ein einziges Menschenrecht". *Die Wandlung* 4 (December 1949): 754–770.
- 33 The concept of natality is rooted in Augustine's understanding of creation as can be seen in Arendt's book *The Human Condition*, where she writes: "Because they are initium, newcomers and beginners by virtue of birth, men take initiative, are promoted into action. (Initium) ergo ut esset, creatus est homo, ante quem nullus fuit ("that there be a beginning, man was created before whom there was nobody"), said Augustine in his political philosophy. This beginning is not the same as the beginning of the world; it is not the beginning of something but of somebody, who is a beginner himself. With the creation of man, the principle of beginning came into the world itself. In other words, the principle of freedom was created when man was created, but not before." H. Arendt, *The Human Condition* (United States: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 177.
- 34 German laws (§116 of the Basic Law for the Federal Republic of Germany) of receiving citizenship is based on the concept of *Jus sanguinis*, and not *Jus soli*. The concept of a right of blood entitles the children of German parents to gain a German citizenship independently of their birthplace, and country of residence. The most spread concept of national states is the concept of the right of the soil, by which the child receives the nationality by birth independently of her/his parents. Many states are mixing both concepts; Germany only recently changed its law from an exclusive *Jus sanguinis*, but only for "Aussiedler" (Former USSR), and Polish and Israeli people, who were affected by the blood laws of Nazi Germany and consequently lost their nationality. See G. Agamben, *Homer Sacer. Die souveräne Macht und das nackte Leben* (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 2015), 81–124; 127–198, in particular: 140–144. In his book *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, Giorgio Agamben deals with the question of the refugee, and is directly inspired by Arendt's Article "We Refugees". Also cf. R. Jaeggi, *Welt und*

this structure is fatal. Moreover, it contradicts any Judeo-Christian-Islamic tradition.³⁵

Equality regardless to borders requires more than being open towards strangers. The article claims that the “welcomers” cannot ask for a one-sided openness – the side of the newcomer. The author is not even sure about the efficiency of a so-called dialogue. At least any dialogue is not appropriate when one does not listen to the voice of the others, which most of the time speak a different language. Before one starts a dialogue, one should meet each other eye-to-eye. By welcoming and listening to the refugees the society changes, which symbolizes the third and last point in this conclusion:

3. Openness towards others induces changes

The welcomers, in this case the Europeans, are required to open themselves towards the newcomers. Based on Hannah Arendt’s concept of identity, being truly open towards the newcomer can only be formed, represented and developed by guarantying free action to the individuals, giving them equal rights to change their environment. But refugees as paperless minority have been – and still are – never included in the host state; they cannot influence decisions in politics, because they are still seen as strangers – as the other – of this ‘Volk’. This status denies them their right to political action and excludes them from stressing their individual needs. A status that is always needed for reshaping the society and to let the others – the “not-refugees” – participate in their experiences and their realities.

Person, Zum anthropologischen Hintergrund der Gesellschaftskritik Hannah Arendts (Berlin: Lukas, 1997), 49–106. In those 3 chapters Rahel Jaeggi discusses the role of the world and Arendt’s specific concept, in which the question of an isolation of the world is included. She defines the aspect of the self in opposition of the world instead of the person. By constructing an understanding of one world in which everybody is included as human being, nations are obsolete.

35 Hannah Arendt’s thoughts about the connection between creation and its consequences for different concepts like work (Marx), murder, world, plurality and action are consistently related to the Jewish Christian tradition of creation. See H. Arendt, *Denktagebuch. Erster Band 1950–1973*. München/Zürich: Piper, 2002), 16–17; 105, 340, 359, 429; Schinagl, R. 2017. “Das Denken schöpft aus dem Sichtbaren seine Begriffe, um das Unsichtbare zu bezeichnen.” Hannah Arendt und die Theologie, in Linke, D., Priesemuth, F., Schinagl, R. (eds.) *Sprachen des Unsagbaren. Zum Verhältnis von Theologie und Gegenwartstheologie*. Wiesbaden: Springer. 93–112.

When this society asks refugees to integrate into her reality, to be Germans as Germans are, the people of Germany recognize the refugees as inferior to them. But Germans are not the others. Being a refugee, to experience this, is a mass phenomenon and nothing specific. The Europeans are the minority in this world and should have been more responsible to integrate themselves into the global village.³⁶ The refugees even have something they do not have and can participate: For example, the knowledge of exile and the experience of the concept of home cannot be bound to nation, ground, or blood anymore. The roots of globalization are ramified. Goods are traveling, intellectuals are discussing, factories and banks are working without national borders, European intellectuals talk at least three languages fluently. The European Union and its inhabitants are acting globally.

Altogether, the phenomenon of refugees demonstrates that ideas like nations and states are not contemporary anymore – Hannah Arendt realized this already in the 40s and worked on those themes in 50s of last century.³⁷ The globalization has bound everyone to one world more than ever before. Europe has to learn that every-body has a free choice where to stay in this world.³⁸

36 UNHCR (The UN Refugee Agency) published that 65.3 million people were displaced from their home by conflicts and persecution in 2015, and the number is expected to rise in the following years. “Differently said means that that one of 113 person has the experience of being displaced, or any minute, 24 people are displaced. (...) It is the first time in the organization’s history that the threshold of 60 million has been crossed. (...) The study found that three countries produce half the world’s refugees. Syria at 4.9 million, Afghanistan at 2.7 million and Somalia at 1.1 million together accounted for more than half the refugees under UNHCR’s mandate worldwide. Colombia at 6.9 million, Syria at 6.6 million and Iraq at 4.4 million had the largest numbers of internally displaced people. (...) Distressingly, children made up an astonishing 51 percent of the world’s refugees in 2015, according to the data UNHCR was able to gather. Many were separated from their parents or travelling alone.” Full report. [Online]. Available: <http://www.unhcr.org/576408cd7> Published: 20 June 2016. [Accessed: 18 January 2017].

37 H. Arendt, *The Origin of Totalitarianism* (New York: Schocken Books, 1951). FOLK

38 “Over your Mediterranean Sea would I come if I were a sneaker. Or as a flat screen – shit – I would have at least a price.” “If I Were A Sneaker”, song of Die Goldenen Zitronen. The album *Lenin* was released 2006; it is the fourth song of the album. [Online]. Available: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nWlnKqFsoD4> (English Version). [Accessed: 20 January 2017]. Original German Lyrics: “(...) Ja für eine Fahrt ans Mittelmeer, Mittelmeer, Mittelmeer geb’ ich meine letzten Mittel her, Mittel her, Mittel her und es zieht mich weil ich dringend muss, dringend muss, dringend muss immer über den Bosporus, Bosporus, Bosporus. Über euer schieß Mittelmeer käm’ ich, wenn ich ein

Furthermore, the article asserts that openness towards others does not mean to share when it does not include the “last coat”. The refugees have their traditions, their beliefs, their stories, their dreams and their wishes to have a better future. The refugees have the right to be part of the wealth as much as any other person born to so-called Bio-Germans³⁹ and maybe it is time for Europeans to share resources equally after milking the earth for centuries. In 2015, the people of Germany – the ‘Volk’ – got a chance to create a German new narrative!

8. A short flash back of what have been happening since 2015

In early September 2015 in Hungary, hundreds of Syrian refugees were told they would get to Western Europe when they boarded a train – it ended in a camp in Hungary.⁴⁰ In the Czech Republic the politicians had the idea of writing identification numbers in indelible ink on the forearms of the refugees.⁴¹ We saw pictures of drowning people, of dead bodies on the coast lines of Greece and Italy, people looking into trains, many in military uniforms supervising people, and children with scared faces being passed over fences. In late September, *Bundeskanzlerin* Dr Angela Merkel let people pass into Germany. And despite the prior European decisions to close up the European borders, the German people welcomed hundreds of

Turnschuh wär. Oder als Flachbild-Scheiß – ich hätte wenigstens ein Preis. Es gäb‘ für uns kein Halten mehr, wir kämen immer nur schneller her. Ich seh die Waren zieh‘n, ohne zu flieh‘n gehen sie an Land (...) gehen sie an Land – als Verheißungslieferant, Meinungspraktikant, Rückweisungsversand, Abwicklungsgarant. (...).“

39 Bio-Germans is a new invented slang that stands for Germans with exclusive routes in Germany and no other background like of Turkey in self irony. Among youngsters the word potatoes are used to point kids out with no immigration background.

“Naturally an influx on this scale causes anxiety among some Bio-Deutsche, as Germans of ethnically ‘pure’ stock are today called in ironic slang, with a pun on the German term for organic food. Many worries especially about Muslims: will they accept social norms such as sexual equality, secular values and Germany’s historic responsibility towards Israel?” The New Germans. Time to redefine what it means to be Deutsch. [Online]. Available: <http://www.theworldin.com/article/10466/new-germans> Published: 2015. [Accessed: 20 January 2017].

40 “Migrants protest at Hungary train station as entry is barred.” [Online]. Available: <http://edition.cnn.com/2015/09/01/europe/europe-migrant-crisis/>, Published: 1 September 2015. [Accessed: 20 January 2017].

41 “Migrants crisis: Unease as Czech police ink numbers on skin.” [Online]. Available: <http://www.bbc.com/news/blogs-eu-34128087> Published: 2 September 2015. [Accessed: 20 January 2017].

thousands of people. At first, everyone in Germany was astonished about themselves, about Germany; they were happy, emotional and touched – for sure all for the right reasons. And although the new-fascism movement has been increasing dramatically all over Europe, the people of Germany started writing a different story of Germany in this September 2015 and for the following months.⁴²

They welcomed approximately 1.2 million refugees in Germany by “opening”⁴³ the borders and letting people pass and arrive in Germany. Since 2015 Europe has changed, and the refugees have changed German society in particular. For a moment Germany wrote world-wide a positive history. In this moment, Germans acted by welcoming destroyed individuals after months of debates and discussions about the disaster in Syria and the dead corpses in the new mass grave of the Mediterranean Sea. Before, NGOs were active all over Germany to shape awareness.⁴⁴ In this particular moment, Germany acted out of responsibility when it opened the borders and welcomed the newcomers in Germany. One can still remember the faces of the refugees welcomed by hundreds of singing people: Exhausted. Crying. Floating in between the past and the present, between memories and hope for a peaceful and better life.

If it was said before that one should open oneself to the newcomers, it has already happened by opening up the geo-political borders. Germans changed when they let the people in.

Germany in particular has a responsibility after the systematically killing of millions of people; after demolishing millions of lives: their futures, their dreams, and their potential to create a borderless world. But unfortunately,

42 “How Far Is Europe Swinging to the Right?” [Online]. Available: <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2016/05/22/world/europe/europe-right-wing-austria-hungary.html> With statistics. Published: 5 December 2016. [Accessed: 20 January 2017].

43 The borders were not closed up as in Europe there should be no border controls since the Schengen Agreement of 1985.

44 Before September 2015, The Political Beauty (in German: Zentrum für Politische Schönheit. [Online]. Available: <http://www.politicalbeauty.com/> Organized several actions like “First Fall of the European Wall” and “The dead are coming”. Their aim was to raise awareness to the changes in the border control of Europe by artistic action and performances. The last performance after the borders were closed was named “Eating Refugees”.

it did not take long for the old and ugly face of Germany to remind us that a real change would take time.

Since 2016, the borders are closed again. More people died the first six months of 2016 compared to the first six months of the year before. The route over the Balkan has been blocked again and the only opportunity to reach Europe is by those inappropriate and unsafe boats across the sea. Europe made new restrictive contracts with countries like Turkey to avoid arrival of more refugees.⁴⁵ Pictures appear again, such as that of a dead baby in the arms of a volunteer on the sea, who acted where the European community stopped to act and to guarantee that those refugees have the right to live.

9. Conclusion

The article concludes by quoting the last sentences of Hannah Arendt's article "We Refugees":

45 Mass arrests by the military followed. At least 40,000 have been detained ("Turkey to Release Tens of Thousands of Prisoners to Make Room for Coup Suspects"). [Online]. Available: https://www.nytimes.com/2016/08/18/world/europe/turkey-prisoners-erdogan.html?_r=0 Published: 17 August 2016. [Accessed: 20 January 2017]. 10,000 soldiers and 2,745 judges have been imprisoned, together with leading critical journalists ("Turkey: Mass arrests after coup bid quashed, says PM") [Online]. Available: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-36813924> Published: 16 July 2016. [Accessed: 20 January 2017]. Moreover, Erdoğan changes the country from a parliamentary representative democracy to a presidential one, with an authoritarian system ("Can Turkey's Democracy Survive President Erdogan?") *The New York Times*. [Online]. Available: <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/02/opinion/can-turkeys-democracy-survive-president-erdogan.html> Published: 1 November 2016. [Accessed: 10 January 2017]. See: "Turkey quickly sliding into authoritarian rule after move to increase Erdogan's powers." *The Independent*. [Online]. Available: <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/turkey-increase-executive-powers-president-recep-tayyip-erdogan-authoritarian-rule-government-a7501666.html> Published: 30 December 2016. [Accessed: 9 January 2017]. "Turkey's Parliament Starts Debate on Expansion of President's Powers". *The New York Times*. [Online]. Available: <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/09/world/middleeast/turkeys-parliament-starts-debate-on-expansion-of-presidents-powers.html> Published: 9 January 2017. [Accessed: 9 January 2017]. By restricting media, judiciary and education (15,000 education staff were suspended and the licenses of 21,000 teachers working at private institutions were revoked), see: "Turkey coup: Purge widens to education sector" *BBC News*. [Online]. Available: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-36838347> Published: 19 July 2016. [Accessed: 20 July 2016]. President Erdoğan threatened to open the border if the European Union condemned his transformation of the Republic of Turkey and dismissed the contracts assuring no further "waves of refugees" into the EU. [Online]. Available: <http://www.tagesschau.de/ausland/tuerkei-eu-fluechtlingsdeal-101.html> *Tagesschau*. Published: 25 November 2017. [Accessed: 25 November 2016].

History is no longer a closed book to them and politics is no longer the privilege of Gentiles. They know that the outlawing of the Jewish people in Europe has been followed closely by the outlawing of most European nations. Refugees driven from country to country represent the vanguard of their peoples – if they keep their identity. For the first time Jewish history is not separate but tied up with that of all other nations. The comity of European peoples went to pieces when, and because, it allowed its weakest member to be excluded and persecuted.⁴⁶

Her last sentence points out that refusing people to have the right to have a better life, the suppressing or – worst case – demolishing of minorities by not integrating them into the global village, to participate with the vanguard who bring new knowledge by special experience, damages the plurality⁴⁷ of the world and, therefore, all of us are damaged as we just have this one world.

If Europe does not change their immigration policy, Arendt's sentence will echo in despair in the shadow of 2015/2016: The world community, and especially the European Union, went to pieces when and because it allowed its weakest member of the world to be excluded and persecuted instead of offering their home.

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46 Arendt, H. 1943. *We Refugees*. Menorah Journal 77.

47 In *The Human Condition* Arendt writes: “plurality is the condition of human action because we are all the same (...) in such a way, that nobody is ever the same as anyone else (...).” Arendt, H. 1958. *The Human Condition*. United States: University of Chicago Press, 8. By reducing the plurality we damage the world in total. The focus is on the acting of mankind and it needs to guarantee freedom to act.

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