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PUBLIC SPACE AND REFUGEE STUDIES: PERFORMING EMANCIPATION, RESISTANCE AND OPPOSITION AT TRAIN STATIONS IN BUDAPEST AND VIENNA IN 2015

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Abstract

Public space in and around train stations in Vienna have become repurposed by refugees, activists and by different institutions offering emergency humanitarian support in September 2015. Yet they have also, as in the case of Budapest's *Keleti* station, been controlled by the police preventing refugees from continuing their journey. As the cases show, train stations and their platforms can be appropriated and used in quite different ways: (a) as an institutionalized sphere of oppositional politics within the wider field of managerial governance's regimes of care (through recognized NGOs such as the Caritas), as (b) relational counter space where political resistance is enacted through embodied performance and the staging of dissent (through the formation of an insurgent movement, that is, Train of Hope), and (c) as a place where state power is exerted and where public authorities organize the management of a population through biopolitics and the installment of police order, towards which the excluded subjects take a position of explicit disavowal resulting in liberating action to change their own condition. This act of liberation, the March of Hope by over a thousand refugees, has marked a key moment of transformation in politics around the world, particularly but not exclusively in Europe. This chapter sheds a light on the role of local train stations' appropriation in quite different ways by, for and against refugees. Train stations have witnessed this moment of transformation on the local ground of everyday space, and thus deserve new attention in empirical and conceptual research at the interface of public space and refugee studies. Train stations therefore play an important role as public space in times of increasing international mobility, particularly amongst displaced populations. They offer the opportunity to stage dissent against hegemonic national(ist) politics and weak European governmental regimes under post-political conditions.

Δημόσιος χώρος και πρόσφυγες: Επιτελώντας χειραφέτηση, αντίσταση και αντίθεση σε σιδηροδρομικούς σταθμούς της Βουδαπέστης και της Βιέννης το 2015

Περίληψη

Ο δημόσιος χώρος μέσα και γύρω από σιδηροδρομικούς σταθμούς στη Βιέννη τροποποιήθηκαν από πρόσφυγες, ακτιβιστές και διαφορετικούς θεσμούς/οργανισμούς που πρόσφεραν ανθρωπιστική βοήθεια τον Σεπτέμβριο του 2015. Ωστόσο, όπως συνέβη στην περίπτωση του σταθμού Keleti της Βουδαπέστης, βρέθηκαν επίσης υπο τον έλεγχο της αστυνομίας που εμπόδιζε τους πρόσφυγες από το να συνεχίσουν το ταξίδι τους. Όπως δείχνουν οι διαφορετικές περιπτώσεις, οι σιδηροδρομικοί σταθμοί και οι πλατφόρμες τους μπορούν να χρησιμοποιηθούν με αρκετά διαφορετικούς τρόπους: α) ως μια θεσμοθετημένη σφαίρα αντιθετικής πολιτικής μέσα στο ευρύτερο πεδίο καθεστώτων φροντίδας της διαχειριστικής διακυβέρνησης (μέσα από αναγνωρισμένες ΜΚΟ όπως η Caritas, β) ως σχεσιακοί αντι-χώροι, όπου η πολιτική αντίσταση γίνεται πράξη μέσα από σωματοποιημένη επιτέλεση και την σκηνοθεσία της διαφωνίας (μέσα από τη δημιουργία ενός κινήματος με τη μορφή εξέγερσης, όπως το Τρένο της Ελπίδας) και γ) ως τόπος όπου η κρατική εξουσία ασκείται και όπου οι δημόσιοι φορείς οργανώνουν τη διαχείριση των πληθυσμών μέσα από την βιοπολιτική και την εγκαθίδρυση της αστυνομικής τάξης, απέναντι στην οποία τα αποκλεισμένα υποκείμενα στέκονται με σαφή άρνηση, που οδηγεί στην απελευθερωτική πράξη αλλαγής της κατάστασής τους. Αυτή η πράξη της απελευθέρωσης, η Πορεία της Ελπίδας από περισσότερους από χίλιους πρόσφυγες, σηματοδότησε

1. Head of the Interdisciplinary Centre for Urban Culture and Public Space, Associate Professor for Urban Culture and Public Space TU Wien, Faculty of Architecture and Planning Department for Spatial Planning, knierbein@skuor.tuwien.ac.at

μια στιγμή κλειδί στον μετασχηματισμό της πολιτικής στον κόσμο, και συγκεκριμένα στην Ευρώπη, αλλά όχι μόνο σε αυτήν. Το άρθρο αυτό φωτίζει τον ρόλο της οικειοποίησης των τοπικών σιδηροδρομικών σταθμών με διαφορετικούς τρόπους, για τους πρόσφυγες, από τους πρόσφυγες, και εναντίον τους. Οι σιδηροδρομικοί σταθμοί υλοποίησαν αυτήν τη στιγμή του μετασχηματισμού στο τοπικό επίπεδο του χώρου της καθημερινότητας και γι αυτό αξίζει να τους μελετήσουμε με προσοχή μέσα από εννοιολογική και εμπειρική έρευνα, που αναπτύσσεται στην τομή των σπουδών για τον δημόσιο χώρο και για τους πρόσφυγες. Έτσι, οι σιδηροδρομικοί σταθμοί παίζουν σημαντικό ρόλο ως δημόσιοι χώροι σε εποχής αυξανόμενης παγκόσμιας κινητικότητας, κυρίως εκτοπισμένων πληθυσμών. Προσφέρουν την ευκαιρία οργάνωσης έμπρακτης διαφωνίας ενάντια στην ηγεμονική εθνι(κιστι)κή πολιτική και τα αδύναμα Ευρωπαϊκά κυβερνητικά καθεστώτα σε μετα-πολιτικές συνθήκες.

Local Public Space and Geopolitical Transitions in 2015

This paper establishes a bridge between public space research and refugee studies to contextualize the emancipatory actions of hundreds of refugees who became part of the "March of Hope" between Hungary and Austria in 2015. Activities at train stations in Budapest and Vienna will be empirically analyzed, as both served as hubs for displaced people's journeys from southern and eastern states of Europe to northern regions at a time when the Western Balkan Route was still accessible (see fig. 1).[2] By the end of October 2015, approximately 700.000 people – from Syria, Pakistan, Afghanistan and other countries – had travelled along the Western Balkan Route from Greece to Central Europe (cf. European Commission Online 2015, 1). Just within a couple of weeks, 300,000 refugees passed through Vienna, with 21,600 refugees registering in Vienna for welfare support (Henley 2016).[3]

In this article, different approaches to emancipatory action, humanitarian aid and refugee support in and around train stations will be analyzed to demonstrate very different political roles of ephemeral public spaces emerging around mobility hubs. The article features (1) a conceptual part, followed by (2) an introduction to Austria's post-political humanitarian governance context. Afterwards, attention is shifted to (3) the spatial, social and political conditions which set the scene for

Fig. 1: Western Balkan Route particularly frequented by refugees in 2015. Source: A. Gabauer

the *March of Hope* (case study Budapest *Keleti pályaudva*r [Eastern Train Station]), before presenting (4) further empirical research on two train stations in Vienna, followed by (5) an investigation of the political dimension of different patterns of appropriation in these stations, (6) concluding with an assessment of different forms of opposition, resistance and emancipation in humanitarian politics in public space.

The empirical cases presented draw upon qualitative social research that was carried out between June 2015 and February 2016 in Vienna, consisting of a qualitative content analysis of social media postings, daily and weekly newspapers, and online journals, as well as interviews and ethnographic observation. Focus is on train stations as these are key infrastructural hubs of refugee mobility and thus of refugee agency and support. The goal is to investigate the extent to which train stations can be considered public spaces for (a) emancipatory spatial praxis, (b) oppositional politics and (c) acts of radical urban resistance pertaining to the field of alter politics in times of enhanced (forced) migration.

Refugee Agency and Post-Political Humanitarian Governance

1. Conceptual crossovers between public space research and refugee studies

Researchers have observed the reduction of institutionalized politics to broad superficial consensus among actors in power who, regardless of social status seek to reify the capitalist free market and the liberal

state as social foundations (Wilson and Swyngedouw 2015). Swyngedouw (2007) has coined this consensual type of governance as *post-political condition*, whose patterns of depoliticalization diminish political action; erode democracy; weaken the public sphere and propel a politics of violent disavowal . These post-political "spaces of depoliticization" are contrasted with places that foster "specters of radical politics". These places offer an agonistic sphere where contemporary post-political governance can be challenged and contested (ibid.).

Debates about emerging spaces of solidarity with a potential to contest and alter the post-political condition have raised issues of emancipatory action in public space. García-Lamarca (2017, 42) sees insurgent public-space related practices as "not only reactive and resistance-based, but also active and propositional". Affective practices, processes, and places of solidarity-making are one viable alternative to the dominant order of production and power (Arampatzi, 2016). This finding has qualified the empirically informed debate on acts of urban resistance as active dissent, capable of altering prevailing neoliberal politics and post-political governance (Hou and Knierbein, 2017).

Yet public space researchers have also surpassed the overemphasis on public space as discursive public sphere in favor of a performative conception of public space as place of embodied formation of counter publics and meaningful change (Bridge and Watson, 2011). A gap between public space and public sphere literatures has been identified, while conceptually reactivating public space as the integral "geography of the public sphere" (Low and Smith 2006, 6) meaning that "an understanding of public space is an imperative for understanding the public sphere". In these debates, public space has been analyzed as a (potential) place of insurgence, dissent, and the staging of an egalitarian politics of difference (Watson, 2006; Hou, 2010; Kaika and Karaliotas, 2014), where *the political* can be reclaimed through embodied action and acts of spatially exposing (vulnerable) bodies as a part of face-to-face politics. Positions in radical anthropology, in this respect, have distinguished the role of the body in protest from rather discursive claims (Moore, 2013): Moore states that "politics" (including oppositional politics) allows for contention within certain given parameters (of the institutionalized state), whereas "the political" challenges the very foundations of these parameters (ibid.: 12). Rather than understanding insurgent acts of dissent as "anti"politics, Moore suggests unraveling the embodied action of space occupations by grasping its full mobilizing potential as "alter"politics (ibid.: 12, referring to Hage, 2012). These debates on public space, however, have rarely been linked to a public staging of civic dissent, aimed at enacting, protecting and supporting refugee rights against post-political conditions, which have been shaped by national states failing to guarantee basic living conditions.

In the field of refugee studies, self-organization and emerging resistance of displaced people is given a similar weight as a mobilizing agent for change: A post-colonial reading depicts western humanitarian agencies and public authorities represent refugees "in terms of helplessness and loss" (Rajaram, 2002: 247). Refugee subjectivities are consequently reduced "to a mute and faceless physical mass … Narration of refugee experiences becomes the prerogative of Western "experts": the lives of refugees become a site where Western ways of knowing are reproduced" (ibid.). Other accounts have discussed refuge in the context of urbanity, and cities (Sanyal, 2014), while emphasizing the growing relevance of urban practices of refugees that are no longer exceptions, but become the norm (ibid.: 568). While refugee camps have been seen as a denial of the right of mobility (ibid.: 560), Sanyal states that "refugees have often preferred to go to cities: work is more readily available, plus cities afford a degree of anonymity allowing them to escape the apparatus of humanitarian assistance and the stigma of refugeeness, and also promise easier assimilation into the host population." The movement of refugees into urban areas further complicates the mission of humanitarian agencies attempting to "care" for them (Sanyal, 2014: 560-1, referring to Malkki 1995).

Research on refuge is often focusing on the relations between those who flee (their country, city, or region), and those who "offer" support. Referring to Holston and Appadurai (1996: 195-6), Malkki (2002: 356) argues that "refugee-ness is negotiated" (by persons who are framed as 'refugees' and the institutions whose mandate they are) "in a world in which migration and the complexities of immigrant status are ever more acutely politicized and economically consequential". Migration can thus be understood as a "central link be-

tween classical issues of citizenship – imaged as a right-bearing form of membership in the territorial nation-state – and the city as this dense and heterogeneous lived space" (ibid., referring to Holston and Appadurai, 1996: 195–6). It is exactly the ethnography of urban lived spaces that public space research has traditionally been concerned with, while (post)structural perspectives have been introduced only recently (Tornaghi and Knierbein, 2015).

In 2015, train stations were increasingly converted into make-shift temporary shelters for refugees. The following empirical analysis sheds light on the multiple roles of train stations as lived space, a potential counter space to renew (urban) democracy. For refugees, being able to access central mobility hubs is a key factor to take on decisions and decide not only their own mobility but also their emancipation. Increasing privatization of public train stations and shifting domestic authority to private maintenance companies, demonstrates the importance of understanding the multiple roles of train stations beyond mobility, as key sites of emancipatory spatial action and humanitarian support of refugees.

2. Austria's Post-Political Context and Public Space Mobilization

In Austria, broad public recognition of the emerging needs of an increasing number of arriving refugees did not begin until June 2015, when the news reports covered the unbearable circumstances in the nation's largest refugee shelter camp in *Traiskirchen*.[4] A media-based critique had been triggered by *Traiskirchen*'s mayor in 2015 who criticized the conditions created by the Austrian Ministry of the Interior: Instead of organizing more first-aid refugee camps all over the country to prepare for the predicted increase in refugee flows, Austria's then Minister of the Interior ordered that more tents be erected on the already overcrowded camp grounds, thus increasing stress factors and tightening the precarious living conditions that many of the camp's inhabitants were already facing.

The surge of negative media regarding *Traiskirchen* steadily increased as 4,500 refugees had been placed in a facility originally meant for a maximum of 1,500, by the end of July 2015. This triggered public awareness of new migratory flows of displaced people within Austria: Press reports detected not just state failure concerning the *Traiskirchen* camp, but particularly the weaknesses and pitfalls of commodifying humanitarian aid governance, since the management of the camp had been privatized in 2003: The site is now run by the Austrian branch of a Swiss company, ORS Service AG (ORF Online, 2015a, Profil.at Online 2015). In critical theory, these shifts are reflected through thoughts concerning the concept of the "camp" (Diken, 2004) and the privatization of humanitarian camp facility management to private corporations (Webber, 2012: 43). Malkki (2002: 355) also offers a wider perspective on the biopolitics of camps when stating that

> "…refugee camps are not 'test beds' of global segregations yet to come, but, rather, part and parcel of well-established international technologies of power for the control of space and movement. In those technologies, the refugee camp is 'standard equipment', along with transit centers, reception centers, holding cells, prisons, labor compounds, ghettoes, and other familiar features of the modern sociopolitical landscape."

In late July 2015, Amnesty International, Médecines san Frontiers, Red Cross, and Caritas, joined forces to denounce the inhumane conditions in the refugee camp. They also pointed out the paradox of this situation occurring in the wealthy countries of Europe, just a couple of minutes car-drive away from Vienna, a city promoted as "the World's Most Livable City" in Mercer's commercial city ranking and known for its socially friendly welfare culture (Forbes Online, 2015; Presse Online, 2016).[5]

The situation in *Traiskirchen*, however, was mobilizing individuals and groups in Vienna's civil society. They wanted to explicitly welcome the refugees and to protect their rights. Most were ashamed that the national state was failing on so many fronts at its humanitarian, social, and democratic affairs, and many of them followed the call "*Mensch sein in Österreich*" [being human in Austria] by a single private person: Nadia Rida. She was a young Viennese youth worker, who filed a request with the municipality to organize a public demonstration.

Yet preparations for the protest march were deeply overshadowed by the tragic death of 71 refugee children, women and men who suffocated during their hid-

den transfer to Austria, where their dead bodies were found on a motorway closeby the Hungarian border on 27 August (Aljazeera Online, 2015a), just four days before the march for solidarity took place. Shaken and deeply impacted by this tragedy and the catastrophic conditions in *Traiskirchen*, the last week of August was characterized by a seemingly growing critical climate in Vienna: More and more people started to position themselves explicitly for the protection of asylum and human rights.

3. Budapest: Keleti Train Station and Refugee's March of Hope

Media attention would now shift to the many refugees daily making their way on foot from Greece to Hungary, where they likely arrived at Budapest Keleti station (*Keleti*) to buy tickets for trains to Austria and Germany (BBC Online, 2015). International and local NGOs increasingly stressed that Hungary was facing a humanitarian crisis, because of little state support. Many refugees were stranded at *Keleti* not allowed to board trains to Austria. Frustration among the refugees grew, as many had spent their last savings on tickets for trains that never arrived, temperatures were high, hygienic conditions were precarious, and they had already undergone physical and psychological stress and trauma during their journey. In one first action, hundreds of refugees poured into two trains bound for Austria. Afterwards the station was shut down again on 1 September, as a state attempt to stop those waiting to board the next trains. Police law was reinstated and the train station was declared a legal transit zone, from where refugees were not allowed to leave. In this case, "the governmental order of the police determine[d] the 'distribution of the sensible' – the systematic organization and naturalization of inequality as common sense" (Wilson and Swyngedouw 2015, 12, referring to Rancière 1999).

Finally, some thousand refugees were stranded in limbo on the square outside *Keleti* station, as train services towards Austria and Germany remained cancelled (Aljazeera Online, 2015c). The situation in the underpass alleys of *Keleti* was getting increasingly tense again, when far-right-wing football hooligan groups attacked a group of refugees prior to an EU soccer qualification match (BBC Online, 2015). This situation set the scene for the emancipatory moment when the refugees stuck at *Keleti* started to self-organize more systematically: On Friday, 4 September, a small group decided to mobilize their fellows, and to continue their journey on foot, literally by appropriating the central motorways between Budapest and Vienna with their bodies. This was the initial spark for the so-called "March of Hope", in which approximately 1,000 refugees participated, freeing themselves from the inhumane conditions in the controlled and policed public spaces of *Keleti* by squatting a European motorway and turning it into a space of protest and emancipation. While moving their battered bodies through the Pannonian landscape on that Friday afternoon, Austrian and German governments successfully negotiated and opened their borders the following night, hoping to prevent a humanitarian crisis. Upon receipt of the Austro-German decision, Hungary sent buses to collect the protestors on the motorway at night and let them off close to the Austrian border near *Nickelsdorf* (located in the Austrian Federal State of *Burgenland*). In light of these incidents, the media focus then shifted towards those publics that welcomed the refugees and towards their gestures of solidarity (Aljazeera Online 2015b). At Vienna's train stations, emergency aid unfolded in two quite different ways in terms of mobilization and political approach.

4. Vienna: Train Stations as Emerging Public Spaces for Humanitarian Aid

While recognizing Vienna as just one of the places where many inhabitants show embodied solidarity towards refugees, this article argues that Vienna could be seen as a particular geopolitical interface, within a Europe of different regions and resources. Solidarity for refugees and their rights has been initially expressed via the traditional form of political demonstration, starting on one of Vienna's main shopping streets, *Mariahilfer Straße,* and ending in front of the Austrian parliament on 31st August 2015, when the first large groups of refugees simultaneously started to arrive at Vienna's two main train stations. The stations became appropriated quite differently in the successive days and weeks: While a station that was about to lose its core relevance (*Westbahnhof*) was chosen as the place for official humanitarian governance, Vienna's New

Main Station *(Hauptbahnhof)* was seeing self-organized and independent humanitarian aid emerging. The main station was still under construction at the time when more and more refugees started to arrive (see fig. 2). The following sections will offer insights into how humanitarian aid was organized at both stations.

Fig. 2: Vienna's two stations where support for refugees was organized in 2015. Source: A. Gabauer

4.1. Humanitarian Aid at Wien Westbahnhof

Following Nadia Rida's call, on 31 August, finally 20,000 people took to the streets around *Westbahnhof*. They marched to demand a radical change in (national) politics to guarantee basic human rights and a global welcoming culture (#refugeeswelcome, Guardian Online, 2015), and an immediate improvement of the living conditions in the Traiskirchen camp. The protest eventually also became a realm where people expressed their grief for the refugees who had died during on the Austrian motorway.

In the evening of that same day, a unique coalition of demonstrators, police staff, railway employees, and third sector workers at *Westbahnhof* finally welcomed the arriving refugees coming from Hungary with applause. Protestors allocated a banner stating : "Say it loud and say it clear, refugees are welcome here!" (Vice Online, 2015a,b). The City of Vienna distributed a friendly welcoming letter stating that everyone was welcome and that – among others – Vienna Paramedics and Interpreters would support them.

Caritas, a confederation of Roman Catholic relief, development, and social service organizations, started to install their emergency aid point directly at one of the stations' train platforms to provide those in need with water, food, and clothes. Caritas received further support by staff from the Austrian Federal Railways (OEBB) and the Vienna police, who had each been instructed to follow a friendly policy and help those in need. Some of the refugees interviewed upon arrival reported they had spent days in risky boats, slept in woodlands, faced police, and other violence on their

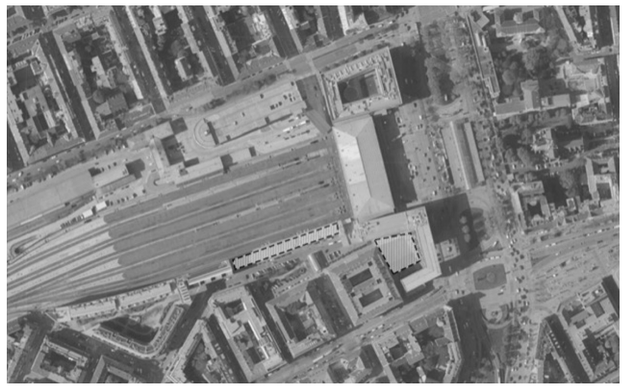

Fig. 3: *Wien Westbahnhof* in the wake of the March of Hope and its aftermath. Source: A. Gabauer

route through the Balkans and had not slept for days. That same night, the *Westbahnhof* became overcrowded, as many Viennese spontaneously poured into the station to bring donations and offer support.

The built space used at *Westbahnhof* (see fig. 3) included the main platforms of the rail head, stretching through the building towards the front part of the *Europaplatz* eastward, and towards the rear part of the *Europaplatz* and the *Langauergasse* southward where Caritas and their volunteers were serving food, organizing medical care, donations, or shelter. The rear plaza became the main gathering point where refugees and supporters – in a somewhat hidden manner – would 'rub along' in public space (Watson 2006).

In the following weeks, the main humanitarian player at *Westbahnhof* remained Caritas. The Christian Alliance has decades of experience in international development work and emergency aid, its organization is institutionalized, and its work is realized in cooperation with other humanitarian aid alliances. Caritas' President Michael Landau was one of the public actors trying to shape a refugee-friendly argument against a mainstream public discourse that increasingly adopted populist right-wing rhetoric. Landau repeatedly called

for a politics of welcoming in Europe, thus rendering Caritas a key player in local as well as transnational asylum politics. *Westbahnhof* in this sense became one of the reference points in that debate. Whereas here, humanitarian support was thus operated by institutional hands, the situation at *Hauptbahnhof* resulted quite differently.

4.2. Egalitarian Support at Wien Hauptbahnhof

On 1 September, a core group of eight loosely related initial volunteers (all in their 20s) met at the *Hauptbahnhof* to begin a relief effort for refugees in a corridor of the train terminal's east wing (New York Times Online, 2015). Once they realized that there was no aid organization in charge of supporting the refugees at the *Hauptbahnhof*, they decided to remain and *do* the humanitarian support themselves. While the number of arriving refugees skyrocketed during the first week of September 2015, the group grew in number, organized themselves into an ad-hoc collective which started to offer help more systematically through 'learning by doing'. By 5 September, when the protestors of the March of Hope arrived at Vienna's train stations, a new insurgent movement had emerged: Train of Hope Vienna (#hbfvie, Train of Hope Online 2015, 2018). In the first days, they took donations and provided people with food, supplies, clothing, electricity, and with necessary information about further steps as well as legal advice regarding asylum possibilities in Austria. Some days later, they started to establish a professional medical treatment and a childcare area (including professional therapists for traumatized children). Part of the movement later formed a new subgroup, which searched for people and family members who went missing during the traumatic refuge, and tried to offer help to reunify families and friends throughout the wider region. What was initially considered as an informal action by young people, dedicating their vacation time for political engagement, developed into a horizontal and networked group of approximately 1,000 residents, citizens, former refugees, migrants, tourists and all those willing to offer a helping hand, financial support, a shower or a shelter just within two weeks:

> "There is a lot of hustle and bustle at Vienna *Hauptbahnhof*... What is really happening here is … civil society.... organizing the care of thousands of refugees ... Yet the astounding thing is that none of this is the product of an institution or state organization, but a network that has virtually formed itself... A wild bunch, …, and maybe that's what it first was, with the most important things being personal commitment and idealism ... But an organized division of labor has been established for a while now. Volunteers are asked what they can do to help — and will then be given a suitable task ... hierarchies are flat. Admission is possible for everyone." (Presse Online, 2015)

The self-organized collective behind the solidary movement considers itself as "a cross-bench association of volunteers that works independently from organizations and coordinates the emergency support for refugees at the *Hauptbahnhof* on a horizontal base" (Train of Hope Online, 2015). Their main goal is to provide refugee travelers with food, goods, and information until further provisions are secured or they proceed with their journey, regardless of whether people decide to stay in Austria or seek to apply for asylum abroad. The horizontal network "wishes to make the travelers feel welcome and to facilitate a moment of tranquility for them" (Train of Hope Online, 2015). The movement's core action is locally embedded and affectively embodied action: "It does not matter what language you speak, I tell volunteers", an activist emphasized: "You have to be kind and loving to these people who have been through so much" (Ibid., 2015).

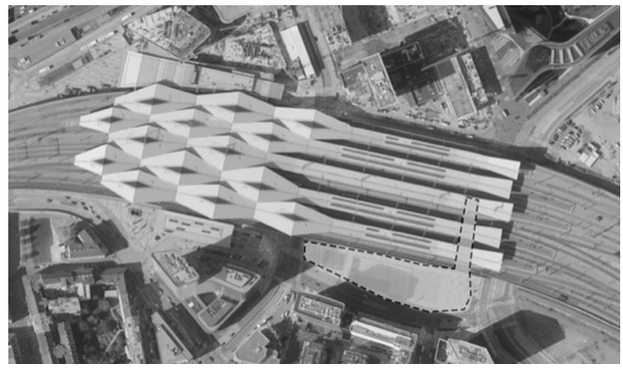

Fig. 4: *Wien Hauptbahnhof* where a self-organized movement emerged to support refugees. Source: A. Gabauer

Regarding the spatial dimensions of Train of Hope's appropriation of the train station, the self-organized movement mobilized by first setting up a wallpaper table in the station's main hall where they initially supported 1000 refugees daily. The movement then spread within the premises of Vienna's new main station building which was still under construction (see fig. 4). Activists occupied an underpass in the Eastern rear part of the station with a growing infrastructure of self-organized humanitarian aid (Train Of Hope Online 2018). A bike garage and further rooms were used to provide sheltered space. Other emergency shelters throughout Vienna were mainly organized by the City of Vienna Authority, in collaboration with different institutionalized humanitarian aid institutions (Caritas, Red Cross, Arbeiter-Samariter-Bund, among others, in collaboration with universities and other public and private entities). Numbers of incoming refugees skyrocketed to over 5,000 a day by 12th September 2015. Further storage space for donations was erected at the South-Eastern entrance of the station where Train of Hope used some rooms to set up the digital infrastructure and the NGOs headquarter. The rear entrance of the station became the canteen where cooks and activists offered their services, providing a range of halal food. The rising numbers of incoming refugees also caused echoes in the new urban district under construction nearby: In the new central business district *Quartier Belvedere*, the *Erste Bank* offered to turn their new future headquarter building , still under construction, into an emergency shelter to host up to 250 people/night. Bank employees, workers of the *Arbeitersamariter-Bund* and volunteers of Train of Hope jointly organized the shelter. In cooperation with Train of Hope, TU Wien's architecture student union turned their drawing studios into sleeping shelters as well. Yet Train of Hope's base at *Hauptbahnhof* also reacted to emergency calls from the nearby region: They sent medicines and remedies to the Croatian-Slovenian border (*Bregana, Rigonce),* prepared thousands of sandwiches needed at the Austrian-Hungarian border (*Hegyeshalom/Nickelsdorf),* organized five thousand blankets for refugees at the Austrian-Slovenian *(Spielfeld)* and became a main contact point in the wider region to coordinate the search for missing refugees (Train of Hope Online 2018).

In December 2015, after the arrival flows at the *Hauptbahnhof* had decreased, Train of Hope withdrew from the station while announcing that they would use the time to reorganize and reinvent themselves for the (political and humanitarian aid) challenges to come.

Understanding the Political Dimension of Use Value

5.1. Resistance – Train of Hope Activists as Human Rights Performers

The volunteers at *Hauptbahnhof* did not have any public recognition beforehand. Being observed as just a bunch of loosely connected people in the first days of its emergence, the group established new and different ways of promoting refugees' rights and egalitarian solidarity. Besides achieving operational standards in refugee support within few days, the movement is held together by an overarching critique:

> "The team that helps here is very well connected, but the question is whether it should actually be the State's responsibility to cope and to deal with refugees in a useful and humanitarian way," emphasized one helper. Since this is "obviously not happening," doing nothing is not a solution. "That's why this was initiated" (ORF Online, 2015b).

Here, the train station first serves as the 'geography of the public sphere' (Low and Smith 2006) as it has the material arrangements of emerging lived spaces to mobilize counter publics. Train of Hope's open access organization brought in new types of diversity and horizontality fostering grassroots innovation. Its networked form of self-organization allowed the exploration of niches that humanitarian aid actors, such as the Caritas, often cannot do, because the latter are deeply involved in institutional politics and partly rely on fixed contracts, to procure food from supermarket chains or the military sector. In this sense, the activists identified the refugees' new and changing needs quite quickly, which in turn resulted in direct action.

The approach by which Train of Hope's participants enacted egalitarian action was also mirrored in how they treated the incoming refugees, in which the body and face-to-face encounters and affective politics played a key role (Viderman and Knierbein 2018). Train of Hope thereby introduced a 'worlded version of pro-refugee activism' in which Vienna's multicul-

tural society is seen as a key resource (Knierbein and Gabauer 2017). This is illustrated by an interview with Ragad al-Rachid, a 19-year-old Train of Hope volunteer and Syrian Muslim student in psychology. She states she is also benefiting from supporting the incoming refugees at Wien *Hauptbahnhof*, because for the first time since coming to Vienna she has found herself among Austrians who "look like me and think like me" (New York Times Online, 2015). Through the emergence of Train of Hope, a "worlded" view of the current living conditions of refugees, their demands, needs, and voices was introduced.

Train of Hope, in summary, needs to be understood by studying its own dynamics of self-organization, insurgence, and emergence, as Moore (2013) has suggested, as it offered much space for those, who wanted to work beyond institutionalized frames as *human rights performers.* Through their embodied practice, members of Train of Hope have (re)politicized the activities around humanitarian aid for refugees and have thus transformed the *Hauptbahnhof* into a relational public space, where counter publics have emerged. *Human rights performers*, in this sense, can be understood as activists pertaining to a political movement, which reinstates human and refugee rights through embodied action in public space, to achieve a truly lived democracy on the premises of egalitarian difference and inclusive spatial practice. Members of the movement have repeatedly criticized the national government's failing to guarantee decent living conditions and to secure human and refugee rights. As Rancière stated, "egalitarian effects occur only through a forcing, that is, the instituting of a quarrel that challenges the incorporated, perceptible evidence of inegalitarian logic" (Rancière, 2004: 5). Through altering action (alter politics), Train of Hope activists have transformed the *Hauptbahnhof* into an insurgent geography of resistance and critique.

5.2 Opposition – Caritas at Westbahnhof as Humanitarian Aid Managers

While new voluntary workers at *Hauptbahnhof* reportedly did not find any obstacles when offering their help, resources and expertise within Train of Hope's open structure, some people wishing to volunteer at *Westbahnhof* criticized Caritas for patronizing voluntary efforts that were made there under its auspices. Particularly in Vienna, Caritas' actions are characterized by a sequence of social innovations throughout the last decade. Such innovations, however, usually stem from managerial reflection within its institutional structures, and may fail to smoothly adapt to changing needs and demands of refugee-subjects or to ideas of external volunteers. The role of Caritas also needs to be understood as *humanitarian aid manager* with a continuous tradition of deploying themselves quickly in humanitarian governance contexts and at new sites. Their ability to perform quickly in times of crisis has been indispensable: they were able to provide humanitarian aid to more than 10,000 of refugees arriving at the *Westbahnhof* in only a couple of days and have worked as a central interface between those who provide short-term shelters and those creating long-term homes for refugees. They can be considered a local, but also a global player with (technical, managerial and social) expertise in organizing shelter and humanitarian aid, and as such are indispensable in situations of paradigmatic transitions affected by forced migration, crisis and conflict. Caritas works in cooperation with a variety of volunteers and institutional players and receives individual donations as well as state and church subsidies for their humanitarian work in the third sector. While some of the Caritas workers at the *Westbahnhof* are paid, the confederation relies on voluntary workers who help to realize work on the ground. As this is how many of humanitarian aid NGOs work, their employed staff are highly trained to quickly and pragmatically instruct voluntary workers and to channel the NGOs respective expertise via these instructors' practices. Therefore, Caritas can be understood as a *humanitarian aid manager* with a strong ethical stand regarding the support of refugee rights and Christian solidarity. As such, they are fully institutionalized in the urban, regional, and national politics of humanitarian governance. However, their own firm positioning is in liaison with the Christian church, which partly goes in line with national politics or stands in opposition to it, once humanitarian aspects remain insufficiently dealt with at the national political level. Thus, they took the position of fierce oppositional player denouncing the lack of responsibility and response of the Austrian Ministry of the Interior e.g. in

the case of Traiskirchen. The institution is an integral part of "politics" as a recognized player in humanitarian governance and, for this particular situation, engages – in Moore's terms – as part of oppositional politics, allowing for contention within the given parameters.

The set practices and knowledge used by Caritas dictates more or less the same rational organizing principle that is applied to any location, and can thus be considered as less place-specific then Train of Hope's engagement. Also, the organization is different in how they conceive of subjects in the situation of refuge: Caritas firstly approaches refugees as people who need emergency aid or those who are taken care of. Conversely, Train of Hope's social structure is characterized by heterogeneity and horizontal negotiations, and this inherent attitude is precisely where egalitarian diversity is emphatically produced and displayed. This is also reflected in Train of Hope's approach to understand refugees as subjects with agency.

Emerging urban publics in Vienna's two train stations need to be understood according to Sennett (1970) who states "that the importance of the public in the city is performative rather than rational. This is the idea that differences can be overcome through style of public address and bodily behavior that cut across or disrupt social and cultural divisions" (Bridge and Watson, 2011: 380). Caritas has established a different use value within the premises of the *Westbahnhof*. The political dimension of this use value lies in Caritas' role within institutionalized politics of the organization. This politics led to the fact that an agency of activists with profound claims for political change was tamed and the agency of refugees was not considered by the organization as being of crucial importance, as refugees were rendered passive subjects in need of being cared for by Caritas. Following Rajaram's earlier argument, their role as a humanitarian aid manager, might bear the risk of contributing to further victimizing and stigmatizing refugees. Humanitarian aid managers may thus fail to provide refugees with a means to speak for themselves. Rather, they tend to contribute to a de politicized and de-historicized image of refugees (ibid., 2002, 247). At the same time, such post-colonial critique might help these organizations improve their positionality towards the subjects they frequently deal with. Despite this criticism, affective interaction does not depend so much on institutions, but on the way individuals and groups interact with one another, thus allowing further research distinctions between institutional and subjective positionality, between refugee-subjects and supporter-subjects. Public space research facilitates different types of social and societal interrelations: between subjects and other subjects, but also between subjects (micro-scale), institutions (meso-scale) and the state and market relations of urban political economy (macro-scale).

5.3. Emancipation – Overcoming Biopolitics, Control and Regulation

Refugees' actions at *Keleti* went far beyond a mere discursive claim on the individual level, as they performed spatial geopolitics through the occupation of central motorways. They took action because *Keleti* had been used as a space of policing, regulation and control, a regulatory regime of biopolitical contention through police force. In this sense, public spaces in *Keleti* both were transformed into a hegemonic space (by the Hungarian state and its police), but also into "a specter of radical politics" (Wilson and Swyngedouw 2015) from which insurgent action emerged, as dissent against a political regime that fails to deliver human and refugee rights and thus democratic conditions have been triggered by the affected group itself (by the refugees). Routinized regulatory and economic practices tend to approach urban space as a financial product devoid of affect and solidarity. With far-right parties, authoritarian discourses and attempts to impose control on public space on the rise around the globe, space that is increasingly produced foregrounding exchange value and favouring the "we" against the fearsome "other". Spaces of nurturing a critical public response to this utilize an astonishing knowledge of self-organization, rational management and technical proficiency while endorsing affect and bodily encounters as empowering acts for the under(re)presented, silent and absent, thus making a meaningful contribution to endeavours of reinventing the use value of train stations, regardless of their ownership status (cf. Viderman and Knierbein 2018).

While ownership models can vary, different actors and institutions position themselves towards an under-

standing of train stations as lived space, enhancing its socio-political meaning. While *Keleti* station has seen the activation of state hegemony (and thus its character as public infrastructure has been co-opted by a non-democratic state power), Vienna's *Hauptbahnhof* was appropriated both because national and city-wide authorities and the Austrian Railways Company (OEBB) were supporting the reception of refugees in 2015. However, Austria's political climate has turned in the aftermath of the fall of 2015, and a conservative-far right national government has now replaced the former centre-left coalition, with anti-refugee and anti-migration laws on the horizon.

The momentum of constituting both political resistance (*Hauptbahnhof*) as well as a spectre of radical politics (*Keleti*) in train stations has been provoked by the March of Hope (refugees). This momentum has been perpetuated by the Train of Hope Movement (human rights performers) in an embodied way and acknowledged by Caritas as incentive to take institutional action (*Westbahnhof*) in a more discursive way. Claiming, enacting and embodying egalitarian politics in public spaces needs to be understood on all analytical scales: in the micro-spaces of face-to-face encounter, the meso-scales of institutional politics and humanitarian governance, and on the macro-scale of geopolitical causes of refuge. Connecting empirical research in three train stations in two countries on the former Western Balkan Route, therefore, is a scholarly attempt to show how public spaces can be understood at the same time as local, regional and global socio-political space, not just as an urban morphology with clear borders in the built environment. Where each station provides a unique set of different patterns of appropriation, use values and mobilization dynamics, considering the public spaces across the three train stations as one public space of international (forced) migration, mobility and refuge helps position lived space as a key element to analyse the social impacts of wider global transitions.

Train Stations as Spheres of Opposition, Resistance and Emancipation

I have argued in this article that a certain geopolitical momentum – the March of Hope –, and particular events that mark this turning point, can be understood as a catalyst for new and embodied counter publics to spark and mobilize. By using three case studies of analyzing refugees' actions and humanitarian aid at Budapest's *Keleti pályaudva*r and Vienna's *Hauptbahnhof* and *Westbahnhof*, this research has shown that political action towards welcoming refugees can emerge in three quite distinct forms: (a) Opposition: an institutionalized political praxis that allows for contention within the given political parameters; (b) Resistance: a political enactment indicating how egalitarian difference can be embodied as acts of dissent against the prevailing post-political condition; and (c) Emancipation: from state power and the biopolitical management of policed train stations from which refugees' liberating act to occupy central motorways emerged.

While acknowledging for the case of Vienna's stations that these forms of humanitarian aid have been indispensable during the early weeks of September 2015, when many refugees traveled to and through Vienna, the ways of supporting them in train stations carried very distinct political meanings. Also, Vienna's sociocultural history as an urban society expressing solidarity towards refugees has been a key aspect for construing empirical findings, as its inhabitants have been very accustomed to receiving refugees throughout the last decades, and this historical career facilitated a worlded view on refugee-ness.

This view, however, stands in stark opposition to how the Austrian and other neighboring national states currently define their politics, and increasingly disrespect established international standards of human and refugee rights, declared in the aftermath of Second World War. The March of Hope and the emergence of a related urban political movement – the Train of Hope – has highly influenced and re-politicized the current post-political stage of national politics. Nevertheless, the limitations of such a movement are also quite clear, and although Austria has voted for a pro-European president, the main government is now in the hands of conservative and (far) right-wing political parties who continuously restrict the rights for refugees, and their relatives. Vienna's last municipal elections, however, have shown that the urban society is much more open towards accepting a pro-refugee policy to deal with these new geopolitical challenge on the local scale of action, everyday life and resistance, as it is in urban public space where tolerance and affect between peo-

ple from different religions, nations and cultures can be experienced through shared encounters.

As far as the "urban" practices are concerned, the case of Vienna can be used to exemplify Sanyal's (2014) findings that a shift from the refugees' routes in (peripheral) regions towards the social centralities of cities might be an emancipatory act. It is in cities where social and political life, debate and action intensively take place. This is not just relevant to train stations, but as well to the interstitial and temporary places of mobility, for instance trains, buses and ferries. An ethnographic understanding of a refugee's lifeworld thus requires more translocal and transnational mobility research to be undertaken. First insights from Budapest and Vienna have shown that train stations serve as an important analytical entry window, as a translocal geography of a transnational public sphere, because they are precisely the interconnected sites where the receiving and the arriving population might share common everyday life experiences as they rub along (Watson 2006).

In this essay, which examines this transformative geopolitical moment in the larger region, it seems pertinent to not dismiss the affective significance of the days and weeks of August and September 2015: Among Vienna's inhabitants, a collective feeling was growing from witnessing and becoming part of a potential paradigmatic shift, both in national politics and on the level of geopolitical decision making and humanitarian aid governance. The March of Hope and the successive emergence of Train of Hope indeed marked "Weeks of Hope," where a new promise for an alternative political approach to democracy could be already sensed, practiced and experienced. This *felt* historical momentum of institutional opposition and urban resistance, combined with a growing civic discontent regarding national politics under post-political conditions, has been an essential catalyst for "alter"politics: for mobilizing, embodying, and enacting the political through an emancipatory praxis that was active, affective and propositional.

Yet, it was not Train of Hope that initially triggered this optimism. It was the emancipatory power of the refugee's embodied enactment of dissent against global and intercontinental politics of discrimination in a Europe of failing national states, which had been the key catalyst of this hope. Thus, we need to expand our reading of relational counter space from the protected realms of Vienna's train stations to Budapest's contested *Keleti* station. In an era of globalized humanitarian governance regimes, where national states fence their blurring borders, where the EU Dublin III Regulation[6] has been again reinforced as the exclusive mechanism to encapsulate shrinking national cultures and prides, the appropriate answer and real political dissent is to 'world' the spheres and spaces of resistance. Thus, the true liberators are the refugees who exposed their bodies to march for their rights and needs. Secondly, their supporters acknowledged this emancipatory and courageous act as an incentive to take solidary action, inspired by the hope which was transmitted by the long line of humans marching for their rights, embodying their own claims.

Endnotes

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2. The Western Balkan Route was a trail that refugees took to arrive e.g. in Vienna after crossing the inner Balkans: Greece, Macedonia and Serbia (towards Austria via Croatia/Slovenia or via Hungary). The route became "a popular passageway into the EU in 2012 when Schengen visa restrictions were relaxed for five Balkan countries (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia and the Republic of Macedonia). It was closed down in March 2016 when a couple of countries, among them Austria and Macedonia, harshly limited the number of refugees they would take in per year and closed their borders respectively for certain migrant and refugee groups.

3. The reference to Vienna is made here in relation to its role as capital of the nation. In contrast to the Austrian National Government, the City of Vienna Authority has openly embraced a socially oriented politics of difference accepting and welcoming refugees from the first moment on.

4. The site is 25 km south of Vienna in the federal land of Lower Austria (*Niederösterreich*).

5. At that time, Austria was governed by a center-left political coalition, however Vienna was facing municipal elections in which a coalition between socialist and green parties were eventually reelected.

6. "Dublin III Regulation" refers to a European Union Law (No 604/2013) that determines the EU member state responsible to examine an application for asylum seekers asking for international protection under the Geneva Convention and the EU Qualification

Directive. Under the Dublin Regulation, asylum seekers have to apply for asylum in the first EU country they entered. If they cross borders to another country after being fingerprinted, they can be sent back to the former by any other European state. This regulation puts a strong pressure on those countries at the outer borders of the European Union, especially in the South.

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