

THE DYNAMICS OF OTHERING IN ACTIVISM AS PART OF GERMANY'S POST-2015 "WILLKOMMENSKULTUR"

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COBISS 1.02

ABSTRACT

The Dynamics of Othering in Activism as Part of Germany's Post-2015 "Willkommenskultur"

The article critically evaluates the involvement of activists in the country's often praised *Willkommenskultur* (culture of welcome). Using humanitarianism as a starting point, it investigates the ways activists otherise refugees in spite or because of seemingly good intentions. The analysis of interviews conducted with activists in Northern Germany showed that Othering among activists takes different forms, depending on their form of involvement and individual characteristics, such as their (lack of a) personal flight history. Exclusionary Othering is predominantly used by activists who are not sensitised to power hierarchies, while other activists often employ inclusive Othering when attempting to connect on an equal level.

KEY WORDS: Othering, *Willkommenskultur*, activism, humanitarianism, refugees

IZVLEČEK

Dinamika drugačenja v aktivizmu kot del nemške »Willkommenskultur« po letu 2015

Članek kritično obravnava sodelovanje aktivistov v močno hvaljeni nemški *Willkommenskultur* ('kulturi dobrodošlice'). Z izhodiščem v humanitarnem delu proučuje različne načine drugačenja beguncev s strani aktivistov kljub na videz dobrim namenom ali prav zaradi njih. Analiza intervjujev z aktivisti iz severne Nemčije je pokazala, da so različne oblike drugačenja odvisne od njihove angažiranosti in osebnostnih lastnosti, kot je na primer odsotnost njihove osebne begunske izkušnje. Izključevalno drugačenje večinoma uporabljajo aktivisti, ki se ne zavedajo hierarhične moči, medtem ko vključevalno drugačenje uporabljajo predvsem aktivisti, ki se poskušajo z begunci bolj enakopravno povezovati.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: drugačenje, *Willkommenskultur*, aktivizem, humanitarizem, begunci

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INTRODUCTION¹

Following the *summer of refugees*, in which 441,899 first time applications for asylum were submitted in Germany (BAMF 2016: 20) and in which the country's *Willkommenskultur* (culture of welcome),² which was symbolised by German chancellor Angela Merkel's statement of 4 September 2015 enabling asylum seekers from Hungary to come to Germany but which was mainly supported through the involvement of civil society, received international and national praise (e.g. Joffe 2015), numerous activists continue to be involved with refugees. In this context, this article critically reflects on the nature and the effects of activism. While various scholars have addressed the negative consequences of international humanitarianism (e.g. Barnett 2013), the effects of humanitarianism at an individual and local level are under-researched.

Although activists who partake in *Willkommenskultur* may be driven by the seemingly good intention to help, their involvement risks reinforcing a perception of the recipients of their aid not as individuals, but as mere representatives of a vulnerable group. Hence, this article aims to evaluate to what extent and in what ways activists in humanitarianism otherise refugees. In particular, it examines how the former perceive themselves and the beneficiaries of their activities. While the results of the research primarily reflect tendencies of Othering by the interviewees and cannot strictly be generalised, they can offer some initial indications of tendencies which can be analysed in further research.

This article is by no means intended to be a wholesale condemnation of activism with refugees, but rather to critically evaluate its impacts. Due to the involvement of many researchers in activism with refugees, this research also places a value on self-awareness. In the first section, the concept of *Willkommenskultur* is introduced and related to the concepts of humanitarianism and Othering. Subsequently, the methodology is described and the main findings derived from the interviews with eight activists are presented.

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- 1 This article resulted from a larger research project, which also included a visual analysis, and was conducted with the contributions of Jasmin Remlinger and Silke Adams in autumn 2016. We would like to thank Jan Kühnemund for his valuable supervision and the two anonymous reviewers for their comments to an earlier version of this article.
 - 2 Since the term *Willkommenskultur* has taken on a specific importance in the German context, it is used from here on in its German original.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Willkommenskultur

The term *Willkommenskultur* first arose in connection with skills shortages in Germany and other countries in the 1970s, and was therefore mainly used as a technical term referring to the first step in the desired integration of qualified migrants (Bertelsmann Stiftung 2012). However, the usage of the term has shifted in subsequent years, and is now mostly employed with regard to the reception of refugees in 2015 (e.g. Joffe 2015: 1; Fischhaber 2015: 1). In this context, *Willkommenskultur* refers to the welcoming of refugees regardless of their background. This can take various forms and has been accompanied by the large-scale involvement of civil society from 2015 onwards. Heckmann conceptualises *Willkommenskultur* as follows:

The culture of welcome can, generally speaking, be understood as a certain attitude of openness and acceptance towards migrants – and of course towards other people – but further also as a designation for practices in different organisations and institutional contexts, in which barriers to integration are dismantled and ways of inclusion are found; these include regulations from a formal point of view, but also go beyond them. (Heckmann 2014: 1)

This article most notably uses Heckmann's analytical differentiation of the term *Willkommenskultur* into four layers: individual, interpersonal, organisational and macrosocial (ibid.: 2f.). Analysing the personal commitment of activists, the focus of this research lies on the individual and the interpersonal layer. The individual layer of *Willkommenskultur*, according to Heckmann, is characterised by open-mindedness and prejudice-free action towards different people (ibid.: 2). On the level of interpersonal relations, it includes openness and the willingness to approach each other on an equal level (ibid.).

This article applies a broad definition of activism, combining three authors' definitions of the concept and embracing a multitude of people and actions, and therefore various forms of commitment in the context of *Willkommenskultur*. In this way, activists are understood as persons who have "a variety of different orientations and use a wide range of strategies and tactics in their practices" (Harrebye 2016: 6). Acting individually or collectively, activists "are involved in inculcating change that favors their world view" (Fuad Luke 2009: 5f.). If activists successfully reach their goal, it "can yield substantial improvements to existing systems and even result in a new equilibrium" (Martin, Osberg 2007: 37f.). In this broad understanding, activism in the context of *Willkommenskultur* is not only limited to political engagement, but also encompasses volunteers or people working with refugees.

Humanitarianism

Based on our observations that people active in the context of *Willkommenskultur* frequently adopt a humanitarian discourse, we used the concept of humanitarianism as a starting point for examining the effects of activism with refugees in the context of *Willkommenskultur*. Although some activists openly reject humanitarianism and its effects, the interest of this research was to analyse if and how humanitarianism was of an omnipresent character.

While a comprehensive body of literature on international humanitarianism and its pitfalls exists, the corpus on the nature and consequences of humanitarianism at an individual and interpersonal level is less developed. The interactions between providers of humanitarian aid and refugees at the micro-level are thought of as being able to serve as a “microcosm for the ill-starred relations between (western) humanitarian ‘charity’ and its target populations. What goes wrong at this level both reflects and affects (infects) what is wrong at the macro level” (Garling, cited by Harrel Bond 2002: 53). In this article, the existing literature, mainly on the “macrocosm” of humanitarianism, is conversely applied to the individual and interpersonal level.

Barnett distinguishes between narrow and broad definitions of humanitarianism. While the former constitute a charity-driven approach, which is concerned with alleviating the symptoms of victims suffering from conflict and natural disasters (Calhoun 2010: 37), the latter encompass addressing the causes of suffering and thus also political action (Barnett 2013: 382).

While traditionally the positive impact of humanitarian governance has been stressed in the literature (ibid.: 380), humanitarianism has become increasingly contested in recent years. Barnett calls for a shift away from the literature focusing on the efficiency of humanitarianism towards a focus on the effects, which might be both “intended and desirable” and “unintended and harmful” (ibid.: 382). In the same line of argument, Agier states that “humanitarian action is always deeply ambiguous” (Agier 2011: 5). Furthermore, it has been increasingly acknowledged that humanitarianism is always embedded in unequal power relations (e.g. Pallister Wilkins 2015: 59). Not only are power differences between the provider and the recipient of humanitarian aid the starting point of the relationship, but the initial power differences might even be reinforced by humanitarianism, partially due to the creation of clear subject positions. These power inequalities correspond to a variety of phenomena: control and paternalism, a focus on the suffering and the vulnerability of the recipients of humanitarian aid, as well as infantilisation. Although these phenomena are deeply entangled, they shall, for analytical purposes, be described separately below.

Agier’s statement that “[t]here is no care without control” (Agier 2011: 5) has been frequently cited in scholarship on humanitarianism. Although this statement was initially linked to his studies of refugee camps, it remains valid for humanitarianism in other contexts since similar mechanisms might be at play in

the contexts of the control exercised in refugee camps and activism with refugees in Germany's *Willkommenskultur*. Control might, for example, take the form of paternalism, which Dworkin defines as the "interference with a person's liberty of action justified by reasons referring exclusively to the welfare, good, happiness, needs, interests or values of the person being coerced" (Dworkin 1972: 65).

Many authors argue that the recipients of humanitarian aid have, in order to become eligible to receive it, to "fit within a frame of vulnerability" (Mead 2015: 20). Therefore the latter are not "recognized as bearers of rights, but as victims in need of compassionate assistance" (ibid.). Barnett argues that humanitarianism contributes to creating "a world of saviors and victims, with the assumption that anyone who is ensnared by a humanitarian emergency must be helpless, indigent, powerless, and unable to exercise genuine agency" (Barnett 2013: 384). This focus on the suffering may not only deprive the latter of the capacity to also have joyful experiences in the eyes of the providers of humanitarian aid, but may equally reduce them to a homogeneous group on the common grounds of the suffering.

In a similar line of thought, Harrel Bond argues that help is commonly provided in an "infantilizing mode" (Harrel Bond 2002: 60). This is illustrated in the introduction of Mamdani's book *From Citizen to Refugee* (1973):

Contrary to what I believed in Uganda [before being expelled], a refugee is not just a person who has been displaced and has lost all or most of his possessions. A refugee is in fact more akin to a child: helpless, devoid of initiative, somebody on whom any kind of charity can be practised, in short a totally malleable creature. (Mamdani 1973, cited by Harrel Bond 2002: 60)

It was shown in this section that humanitarianism needs to be scrutinized since it can reinforce power inequalities. Nevertheless, humanitarian commitment is, as Agier stated, not always "naive and poorly informed about its own effects and issues" (Agier 2011: 207). However, according to Foucault, it is "the real political task in a society such as ours [...] to criticize the working of institutions which appear to be both neutral and independent; to criticize them in such a manner that the political violence which has always exercised itself obscurely through them will be unmasked, so that one can fight them" (Foucault, cited by Harrel Bond 2002: 53).

Othering

All of the above tendencies are closely linked to Othering. The categorisation of human beings into in- and out-groups, i.e. into the Self and the Other, is part of human nature (Krumer Nevo, Sidi 2012: 300). Humans simplify their complex surroundings by grouping others according to certain characteristics. These categories are then used to decide on how to react to seemingly (dis)similar people (Aronson et al. 2014: 495f.).

This psychological dimension of Othering has to be linked to sociological definitions, which place Othering in the frame of constructed and unequal power relations. According to Hall, people or groups who are different from the perceived Self are often represented through binary extremes which are linked to certain meanings (Hall 2013: 229). Based on the assumption that power relations are part of this kind of binary representation, Othering could be described as a

discursive process by which powerful groups, who may or may not make up a numerical majority, define subordinate groups into existence in a reductionist way which ascribe problematic and/or inferior characteristics to these subordinate groups. Such discursive processes affirm the legitimacy and superiority of the powerful and condition identity formation among the subordinate (Jensen 2011: 65).

The ascription of problematic and inferior characteristics might, however, also occur in a less evident way. This takes on particular importance in the context of humanitarianism, in which the intention to help is often the driving force. This explicitly or implicitly includes the attribution of a certain helplessness to the recipients of the aid. Howe argues that Othering can be a “damaging” process, since the creation and especially the representation of the Other might be a way to silence people or groups and therefore also a means of exerting dominance (Howe 2015: 20).

Nevertheless, Othering does not always have to take these extreme forms. Canales thus distinguishes between exclusionary and inclusionary Othering. Exclusionary Othering is a process of stigmatisation, i.e. the labelling of persons perceived as different from the social norm, which constructs the Otherness. It can therefore be closely linked to Jensen’s definition of Othering and results in the reinforcement of initial power inequalities. Inclusionary Othering, in contrast, is defined as an “attempt to use power to create transformative relationships in which the consequences are consciousness raising, sense of community, shared power and inclusion” (Canales 2000: 25). The main difference between exclusionary and inclusionary Othering is therefore the usage of power by the agents. Possible strategies that could be applied as part of the latter process, in which the actors strive to connect through difference, are role-taking or connecting as allies (ibid.: 25f.). Role-taking is closely linked to empathy and is described as the process of seeing the world from the Other’s point of view. When people are connecting as allies, difference is not seen as a reason to move away from each other but as a means to connect. To summarise, Canales describes inclusionary Othering as a process of constructing Others as valuable and contributing members of a society rather than along the lines of their needs and levels of vulnerability (ibid.: 28).

Othering in humanitarianism

Disregarding whether it takes exclusionary or inclusionary forms, the involvement of Othering in the aforementioned dynamics within humanitarianism is irrefutable. This applies both to the level of states or international organisations and to individuals: states often justify their alleged altruistic humanitarianism in form of support for refugees by constructing *the refugee* as someone vulnerable, helpless, and lacking individual agency. This kind of Othering, namely the ascription of the group status *refugee* to a large number of people, further isolates a very diverse group (Olsen et al. 2016: 61). In the same way as on the macro-level, the Othering of *the refugee* might equally be at play in order to justify one's individual work as an activist.

One certainly also has to acknowledge that the line between exclusionary and inclusionary Othering is not clear-cut: Canales lists empathy and attempts to adopt the perspective of the Other as prerequisites for inclusionary Othering. However, these can also be harmful, as they are also embedded in unequal power relations. In that sense, empathy might in some instances lead to a focus on the suffering of the recipients of humanitarian assistance. In the same way, attempts to take the perspective of the Other can result in patronising tendencies, since the provider of the aid might, by trying to take the perspective of the recipient of the help, assume that he or she knows what is best for the recipient.

METHODOLOGY

Semi-structured interviews and qualitative content analysis

In order to analyse to what extent and in what ways the interviewed activists otherise refugees in the context of German *Willkommenskultur*, qualitative semi-structured interviews were conducted and analysed using Philipp Mayring's method of qualitative content analysis, which is a set of processes to analyse textual or verbal data in a systematic way that follows transparent rules (Mayring 2015). The analysis can be conducted in a combination of deductive and inductive working modes. The above-described dynamics of humanitarianism were used as deductive categories,³ while further tendencies encountered during the analysis are introduced in the chapter on results.

Although, according to Flick, semi-structured interviews are not suitable to find out about research participants' unconsciousness (Flick 2009: 161), we argue that a detailed analysis of the wording of interviewees when, for instance, talking about their motivations and their perceptions, can be very telling with regard to implicit and partly hidden attitudes and processes of Othering. This argument can

3 Infantilisation, paternalism, victimisation in the case of exclusionary Othering; connecting as allies and role-taking in the case of inclusionary Othering.

be supported by Hadley's account of Othering, as done in an intentional or unconscious way and as being very present in the language and the wording itself (Hadley 2013).

The interviews were divided into three parts, comprising the collection of personal data, questions regarding the participant's definition and view of *Willkommenskultur* and his or her personal involvement and perceptions. They were conducted in German, although not all respondents were native speakers, which may have caused some shortcomings in the communication process. The transcripts and translations were done without changes to any linguistic mistakes.

Access to the field and sampling

As the research project was conducted in the context of the city of Oldenburg in Northern Germany, contact with the research participants was established through various local organisations, in an attempt to access as diverse a range of research participants as possible. Due to Germany's *Willkommenskultur* being the context of the analysis of the dynamics of Othering in humanitarianism, one decisive prerequisite for the participation of the informants in the research was their self-perception as being part of the post-2015 German *Willkommenskultur*, leaving the term itself however relatively open.

The group of respondents was composed of eight male and female research participants ranging from age 23 to 67, with varying educational and professional profiles and both with and without migratory background and flight experience.⁴ They were all active with refugees in different ways at the time of the study, ranging from the organisation of free time activities to political and professional activities.

RESULTS

The following section presents the main results of this research: first the extent to which the respondents understood themselves to be part of *Willkommenskultur*, second how much they used Othering, and third which form the Othering took.

“Willkommenskultur” and humanitarianism

The variety of understandings of the term *Willkommenskultur* was reflected in the different definitions given by the respondents, who however all considered themselves to be part of it with respect to their own understanding of the term. A major distinction could be observed concerning the question of towards whom the

4 The details concerning the research participants have been anonymised in order to protect their identity.

Willkommenskultur is directed: Some referred explicitly to refugees and employed a notion of *Willkommenskultur* as mediated in 2015: "I would say that a culture of welcome is something that we experienced last year, just to give the people the feeling that they are welcome here and to help them to find their way in our society" (Klaus, on the summer of 2015). Others criticised the mediated image of *Willkommenskultur* and embraced a broader understanding directed at humans in general: "It means good thinking, good talking and good acting towards other people who you don't know" (Max).

Although activists were also driven by self-interest and patriotic motives, the primary motivation to engage in activism in Germany's *Willkommenskultur* appears to be twofold. Some respondents focused on the symptoms of the "suffering" and followed a charity-driven approach, while others based their actions on a desire to improve the world system which they perceived as unequal, thus corresponding to the broad definition of humanitarianism. The latter group called for the work with refugees to necessarily be connected to political actions: "And therefore, I find that it is partly our task, to do a bit of redistribution, so to say. And that is not only a commitment, but also something like a responsibility that we have" (Jill).

This illustrates that although some of the respondents did not fit into the narrow definition of humanitarianism, sometimes even openly criticising it, they can still be classified as humanitarians in the broad understanding of the term. The results of this project might consequently be applied to the broader context of humanitarianism, extending beyond *Willkommenskultur* as the specific context of this research.

Othering in "Willkommenskultur"

All respondents otherised in one form or the other. However, the created Other was not necessarily embodied by the refugees. Instead, the respondents sometimes constructed a different Other, such as political opponents or the group of Germans. Since this article's focus lies on the creation of the refugee Other, those forms of Othering are not analysed in further detail.

The omnipresent character of Othering can partly be linked to the nature of language, which relies on categories based on difference and thereby prevents one from grasping and expressing the complexity of the social world, as has been noted elsewhere (Harrel Bond 2002: 60). This can also explain why respondents who showed a high degree of self-awareness relied equally on binaries in their speech, even though this differed in extent and explicitness: "that natives are also in contact with refugees, that they are not only *refugees*, but that they see they are individual humans, like you and me" (Kim).

In this example, the respondent first creates a clear binary between natives and refugees before stressing that all people have to be seen as individuals. This shows that despite her attempt to circumvent generalisations she relies on binaries.

All respondents used both inclusionary and exclusionary Othering, often simultaneously. The interviewees frequently stressed, for instance, the importance of communicating on an equal level, while at the same time using exclusionary Othering: “No, for me it’s a human. Doesn’t matter where come from, which skin colour. Is a human, who now in this time they were somebody once, but are nobody anymore. And they need help” (Amina). Although in this example the respondent first acknowledges that all people belong to a common humanity, she then differentiates between those who need help and those who do not.⁵

The form of Othering predominantly used partly depended on certain characteristics of the research participants. Those who had been made aware of topics such as anti-racism or power relations at their workplace, during their engagement or elsewhere, were more aware of their own situation and privileges and applied exclusionary Othering less extensively. Some of the respondents also referred to a collective Self. Whether they used Othering in relation to refugees or identified with them via the creation of a collective Self also depended on certain criteria, such as flight experience and the formation of political collectives. Research participants with personal experiences of displacement tended to identify themselves in a collective Self with the refugees targeted by their actions: “So many Germans, they are afraid of us refugees” (Mohammed).

When non-refugee respondents formed a political collective in which refugees took part on equal terms, a common identity was created on the basis of the group’s political goals: “When I thought ‘wow, now we can make it’. That was, sitting with 80 people at the [community centre] and translating into 10 languages, those were great experiences. So for me, but I think also mutually” (Jill). Evidently other forms of connecting through commonalities might exist. The crucial criteria seem to be having a common ground, e.g. in the form of a common aim, as well as a common Other.

Exclusionary Othering

The most frequently used means of exclusionary Othering was related to victimisation and a focus on the suffering of the people targeted by the activists’ commitment. This was mainly achieved by perceiving or portraying the Other as being in need, sometimes even in need of the Self, which corresponds to the narrow definition of humanitarianism: “There I can see that they need my help” (Amina).

Respondents who adopted the broad definition of humanitarianism focused on the suffering to a lesser extent than other participants. Some also explicitly made reference to the circumstances of flight as creating the suffering, and therefore *the*

5 This example also shows that exclusionary and inclusionary Othering present a continuum rather than a binary. In this example the assumption that some people need help is firstly mitigated by the explanations made before, which seem to make the need of help a situation rather than an innate quality, and secondly shows the difficulty in circumventing certain forms of Othering when justifying one’s actions in humanitarianism.

being in need, of the Other. Thus, these respondents acknowledged that there is no general condition of suffering surrounding the Other, but a very specific situation creating the situation of being in need. Furthermore, processes of infantilisation were identified, specifically linked to the fast learning process of the Other: "Yes, I perceive them as being very committed and also eager to learn and especially open minded, if they are here" (Klaus).

Those processes can be closely linked to paternalistic tendencies, which were also very present in the research participants' speech patterns. German society was frequently portrayed as taking care of and seemingly knowing what is best for refugees: "Therefore freedom of religion, and what it means and democracy, say, press freedom and so on, they can only learn that from us" (Klaus). Since the majority of the deductive categories concerning exclusionary Othering were confirmed, it can be concluded that dynamics identified at a macro level in the literature review are also visible on a more individual and interpersonal level in the context of *Willkommenskultur* and presumably in humanitarianism in general.

Additionally, further ways of exclusionary Othering could be identified, namely culturalisation, a distinction between allegedly *good* and *bad* refugees, and objectification. All research participants ascribed major importance to culture and clearly differentiated between German culture and the cultures of refugees. The explanation of the Other's difference through his or her ethnicity or culture is referred to in the academic literature as culturalisation (Brossard Børhaug 2016: 2), which Tezcan defines as a supposed causal connection between a social group constructed as coherent and the social behaviour of its members. On the basis of their presumed culture, difference is ascribed to these members and serves as justification for special treatment (Tezcan 2011: 357). This process neglects or even denies differences at the intra-group and inter-individual level and over-emphasises inter-group differences (Brossard Børhaug 2016: 2). All participants referred to cultural differences between the Self and the Other, commenting on the assumed characteristics of the Other's culture in a mostly stereotyped and/or pejorative way.

The refugee Other was often perceived as Muslim, who Attia describes as being subject to essentialisation and as being constructed as the ultimate Other (Attia 2015). In line with this, Islam was sometimes linked to intolerance and patriarchal attitudes by the respondents: "Therefore I don't know how for example a younger woman would be taken in, right, or somebody like you, how seriously somebody or the person, the woman would then be taken by the refugees, by Muslims or so" (Greta). Some emphasised the regional differences of culture in a stereotypical way, especially through ascribing a certain culture to North Africans. Others referred to a supposed *culture of taking* of the refugees:

people are normally very, very thankful. Most of them I would say. There are really, really a lot who constantly show their thankfulness. You only need to get there once and drink a cup of tea and they are super thankful and happy and invite again. But

there are also some who, and that's something which gets on my nerves, since it is a totally different culture, then it is simply the culture to say "yes, I'll be in touch if I need something". This is natural for them and they do only call if they want something. This is their culture. (Klaus)

Culturalisation was not only directed towards the Other but also towards the Self, partly through extreme binaries: "of *us* Germans to be so hospitable and to also react to *foreigners*, the *Others* so positively first" (Kim). Furthermore, the respondents frequently juxtaposed whom they perceived to be *good* and *bad* refugees⁶ and attributed them specific characteristics: *good* refugees were perceived as willing to integrate and as seeking asylum for a justified reason: "So generally speaking, there are reasons for flight which I understand well" (Klaus). *Bad* refugees, on the other hand, were portrayed as unwilling to integrate, patriarchal, criminals, abusers of the system and a potential threat: "I think that if we do not somehow try to give these people a secure home, there is a danger that they radicalise themselves and will, at some point, lay a bomb under the pillow of my children themselves. And that is something that I would like to prevent" (Klaus). The distinction between *good* and *bad* refugees has already been noted by Harrel Bond:

While images of the "good" refugee who is starving and helpless may motivate people to become helpers, there is an alternative stereotype of "bad" refugees as thankless, ungrateful, cheating, conniving, aggressive, demanding, manipulative, and even dangerous persons who are out to subvert the aid system. (Harrel Bond 2002: 58)

A further observation was that refugees targeted by the aid system were frequently objectified. In that sense, they were often described as being of "use" to society: "That they let themselves be educated, then also can better help this country" (Amina). Although the concept of objectification is mainly linked to its usage introduced by Dworkin and MacKinnon in the context of sexual objectification (Nussbaum 1995: 249), the literature on this phenomenon is also partly applicable to the Othering of refugees in humanitarianism. Nussbaum describes objectification in a general way as "the seeing and/or treating of someone as an object" (ibid.: 251) and links it to certain characteristics such as the instrumentalising of the "object", the denial of the "object's" autonomy and self-determination, the denial of the "object's" subjectivity and the assumption of the interchangeability of the "object" (ibid.: 257). All of these are tendencies that were present in some of the activists' talking about refugees.

6 Although this parallels to a certain extent occasions in which the research participants emphasised that the group of refugees was composed of individuals like any other group, the specificity here was that a clear binary was created.

Inclusionary Othering

One of the research participants' statements corresponds very closely to the definition of inclusionary Othering as a means of "connecting through difference" (Canales 2000: 26): "But the question is, how do you deal with this superiority? Do you transform it into dominance? Or do you transform it into support" (Max)? The strategies of inclusionary Othering as highlighted by Canales could be confirmed. Role-taking was a strategy applied by a number of the interviewees: "When somebody did such a thing, we say why they did such a thing. But I think why he did so. I try to understand him. Maybe he has a problem. Maybe he has an exhausting or stressful time. I try to approach him calmly and [incomprehensible]. That is the way to do it" (Mohammed).

The respondents also frequently connected as allies with the refugees they worked with. This was recurrently linked to their own experiences of being foreign in another context, be it due to flight, travel or other. Further forms of inclusionary Othering could be identified, namely a consciousness of the position of the Self and the Other, a rejection of exclusionary Othering, and the attempt to communicate on equal terms. Some of the respondents were very conscious of the power inequalities between themselves and the refugees with whom they worked. They perceived the Self as privileged, White,⁷ and a bearer of stereotypes, and acknowledged that the Other was in a less privileged situation. They frequently rejected exclusionary Othering, be it the homogenisation of the Other, paternalism, culturalisation, the distinction of *good* and *bad* refugees or the expectation of gratitude:

So I think everything with which, I would say, one would want to make our guests to do something. That one talks them, what do I know, into going to the church service or to say there is a mosque, just go there. (Greta on the question of which kind of actions in the context of *Willkommenskultur* she would not approve of.)

The rejection of paternalism was often linked to an emphasis on wanting to communicate and connect on equal terms with the recipients of the aid. Communication on an equal level was frequently stated as the ideal. Important elements of this were private and close relationships between the recipient and the provider of the aid, friendship being an attempt to overcome power hierarchies. Equally linked to this was a value-based approach of equal relationships, referring to the common humanity through which equality should be achieved. The following quotation illustrates the transition from a relationship marked by unequal power relations to a more equal relationship in the form of a friendship:

⁷ In this context, White is not regarded as a skin colour, but as part of socio-historically developed power relations.

Of course, I perceive myself as dominant, but I very clearly try to transform this into support. And try to use the privileges I have to maybe help the people to arrive there, somehow. But, in addition to this, I perceive myself, once this level is passed, simply as totally equal partner. (Max)

This desire to transform unequal power relations into support as part of inclusionary Othering can be closely connected to the will of fighting against prejudices and therefore according to Heckmann be seen as a way to promote *Willkommenskultur*. To summarise, it can be noted that Othering towards refugees is very present in the context of *Willkommenskultur* and takes both exclusionary and inclusionary forms. Although most respondents stressed the need to encounter each other on an equal level, they all otherised in exclusionary ways, which confirms the omnipresent character of Othering. However, it has to be acknowledged that, in some instances, a collective Self was created between the people active in the context of *Willkommenskultur* and refugees. Clearly this does not imply that Othering does not take place: rather than being constructed as *a refugee*, the Other is incorporated, in the case of the respondents, as *a German* or a political opponent. A further tendency was that people adopting a broad definition of humanitarianism used exclusionary Othering to a lesser extent than those using a narrow definition. It certainly needs to be acknowledged that the list of dynamics of inclusionary and exclusionary Othering is not complete and that further forms of Othering are conceivable.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, it has to be stated that Othering is omnipresent as a human activity and therefore equally existent in various forms in the context of activism in Germany's and more specifically Oldenburg's *Willkommenskultur*. Similar dynamics to those described in the literature for humanitarianism at a macro-level were identified at the micro-level of attitudes and interactions between activists in Oldenburg and refugees. This corresponds to the individual and interpersonal layer of *Willkommenskultur* as defined by Heckmann.

Exclusionary and inclusionary Othering as well as the creation of a collective Self could be identified. The theory-driven dynamics of Othering, such as paternalism, infantilisation, a focus on suffering and control in the case of exclusionary Othering as well as role-taking and connecting as allies in the case of inclusionary Othering could be confirmed. Moreover, further dynamics could be identified: culturalisation, objectification and the creation of a distinction between *good* and *bad* refugees in the case of exclusionary Othering and the consciousness of one's own position, the rejection of exclusionary Othering and communication on equal terms in the case of inclusionary Othering.

Here, the distinction between inclusionary and exclusionary Othering provides a valuable tool: aiming not at stigmatising the Other but rather at connecting with the Other through difference, it can be assumed that by adopting strategies of inclusionary Othering the power inequalities at the basis of the relationship between recipients and providers of humanitarian aid can be reduced instead of being cemented or increased. This assumption, linked to the fact that inclusionary Othering was predominantly applied by people who had a broad conception of humanitarianism and showed a high level of self-awareness and/or people who either had a personal flight experience or made reference to the experience of having been welcomed somewhere, results in two recommendations:

Firstly, in self-awareness training for activists might increase their awareness of their own privileges. Secondly, it would be of advantage to create more opportunities for refugees to become involved in activism. This would not only decrease power inequalities and Othering between refugees and non-refugee activists, but also provide an intermediate stage between activists and aid recipients. Moreover, it would allow for the binary which is often created around refugees and non-refugees to become more fluid.

A constant effort towards self-awareness has to be made, which applies not only to activists, but also to researchers and all other actors in the field. In this sense, more literature on *Willkommenskultur* as well as studies critically reflecting on the Self, be they in the form of activism, state regulations or other, are needed. This approach may represent a step towards reducing the amount of exclusionary Othering in the social sciences themselves.

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POVZETEK

DINAMIKA DRUGAČENJA V AKTIVIZMU KOT DEL NEMŠKE »WILLKOMMENSKULTUR« PO LETU 2015

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Članek v kontekstu nemške *Willkommenskultur* ('kulture dobrodošlice') in posledic velikodušnega sprejemanja beguncev v Nemčijo kritično ocenjuje delo aktivistov z begunci in se še zlasti osredotoča na obseg in načine njihovega drugačenja beguncev, za katere so odgovorni.

S temi nameni članek humanitarizem in drugačenje obravnava kot konceptualizacijo dobronamerne pomoči. Izhajajoč iz Canalesa razlikuje med izključevalnim in vključevalnim drugačenjem, pri čemer prvo pomeni proces stigmatizacije drugačnosti, drugo pa poskus povezovanja z drugačnostjo skozi razliko. Analiza osmih polstrukturiranih intervjujev s heterogeno skupino begunskih in nebegunskih aktivistov, vpletenih v nemško *Willkommenskultur*, je pokazala, da je bilo drugačenje splošna značilnost govornega vzorca aktivistov in da so ti uporabljali tako izključevalno kot vključevalno drugačenje. Izključevalno drugačenje se je kazalo v obliki infantilizacije, viktimizacije, paternalizma, razlikovanja med dobrimi in slabimi begunci, objektivizacije in kulturalizacije. Aktivisti, ki so sami doživeli begunsko izkušnjo in so bili ozaveščeni o hierarhiji moči, so se bolj nagibali k vključevalnemu drugačenju, kar pomeni, da so se do beguncev vedli kot zavezniki in jih obravnavali na enakovredni ravni, da so privzemali njihove vloge, se zavedali njihovega položaja in odklanjali izključevalno drugačenje. Poleg tega je bilo mogoče zaznati oblikovanje dvojnega jaza kot sredstva za prelom z razlikovanjem med begunci in nebegunci.

Navedene ugotovitve vodijo k zaključku, da bi trening ozaveščanja aktivistov in intenzivnejše vključevanje aktivistov z begunsko izkušnjo lahko pripomogla tako k ukinitvi razlikovanja kot zmanjšanju izključevalnega drugačenja in njegovega vpliva na neenakopravne odnose moči. Ne le aktivisti, katerih dela članek ne želi kritizirati, tudi raziskovalna skupnost mora stremeti k večji ozaveščenosti o begunski problematiki.